

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	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, Hon.	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, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	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	
<i>Vacant</i>	Thompson	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 17, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill 29—The Mennonite College Federation
Amendment Act**

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 29, The Mennonite College Federation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Fédération des collèges mennonites, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Reyes: I am pleased to introduce Bill 29, The Mennonite College Federation Amendment Act, which includes proposed amendments to The Mennonite College Federation Act and the repeal of The Menno Simons College Incorporation Act.

With the passing of this bill, outdated references to this institution's former member colleges, Concord College, Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Menno Simons College, will be removed from the act.

The roles of the Canadian Mennonite University, CMU, council and board of governors will be outlined in the act, which will also be retitled to reflect the name Canadian Mennonite University.

A second act, The Menno Simons College Incorporation Act and its requirements are no longer required, giving Canadian Mennonite University current operational and governing structure. Our repeal of this act will streamline administrative processes and reflect the current institutional reality.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

**Bill 31—The Minor Amendments
and Corrections Act, 2022**

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 31, The Minor Amendments

and Corrections Act, 2022, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the much-anticipated and long-awaited, long-standing tradition of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act is an annual bill that corrects various typographical, numbering and minor drafting and translation errors identified by the legislative drafters in the Legislative Counsel division.

The bill also contains minor amendments that are brought forward to a variety of acts.

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

**Bill 32—The Victims' Bill of Rights
Amendment Act**

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage, that Bill 32, The Victims' Bill of Rights Amendment Act, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: This bill brings forward amendments to The Victims' Bill of Rights Act that will enhance the discretion to provide support to the families of deceased victims of crime who may otherwise have been ineligible, as well as enshrine the right for free legal counsel for victims in sexual assault criminal cases.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there—is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Committee reports?

**Bill 30—The Police Services Amendment
and Law Enforcement Review Amendment Act**

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), that Bill 30, The Police Services Amendment and Law Enforcement Review Amendment Act, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: The Police Services Amendment Act will foster a culture of excellence and enhance police accountability in Manitoba. It establishes the Manitoba Criminal Intelligence Centre, which will work collaboratively with police agencies and other law enforcement related organizations to promote and co-ordinate the sharing of criminal intelligence and analytics while providing a solid foundation for effective and innovative intelligence-led policing efforts targeting all levels of crime.

The bill also improves police accountability by empowering Manitoba Justice to develop police standards across the province and a uniform code of conduct for police services throughout Manitoba. It also extends the filing deadline under The Law Enforcement Review Act to 180 days.

Finally, it makes the Police Commission responsible for monitoring and reporting on police services' compliance and standards established by Manitoba Justice.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister for—required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with the statement.

Holi Festival of Colours

Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): It is my honour and privilege as the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage, to rise before the House to recognize the Hindu community of Manitoba and to wish everyone a happy Holi to all those celebrating the festival of colours on March 18th this year.

Holi is an ancient spring celebration that recognizes the equality of all people and the triumph of good over evil. On the eve of the festival, bonfires are sometimes lit with rituals that include the addition of wood, dried leaves and twigs to ward off evil.

On the day of Holi, people gather to throw brightly coloured powder and spray water at one another. Friends, family and strangers participate in this playful presentation. This is followed by festive meals and the distribution of sweets to neighbours and friends. I and many of my colleagues have enjoyed attending

Holi celebrations over the years at Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre on St. Anne's Road.

In addition to the community and religious events hosted by the Hindu Temple they were also incredibly helpful this summer when they hosted a vaccine pop-up site during the pandemic. Thank you to them for taking the lead on this important initiative.

In Manitoba, our cultural diversity is a source of great pride. We are privileged to live in a province that welcomes and celebrates so many cultures. We have a great community spirit and we regularly demonstrate it as we join together to help our neighbours through difficult times.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today it is more important than ever to support each other as we work through these challenging times. Holi is an opportunity to focus on the positive forces of community and connection that make our province such a welcoming place.

I invite my colleagues to join us at the Hindu Temple and Dr. Raj Pandey centre tonight at 7 p.m. as Holi will be illuminated at the temple.

Thank you and dhanwad. [*Thank you.*]

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Sat Sri Akal [*Truth is God*] and namaskar [*I bow to you*] to all.

In my childhood in Punjab, Holi and Hola Mohalla marked the end of winter and the beginning of spring. I have fond memories of watching people throw colourful powders on one another and art being drawn on the walls of houses up and down the street.

* (13:40)

Together, the words Hola Mohalla stand for mock fight. This annual festival held at Anandpur Sahib in Punjab and now replicated at other gurdwaras worldwide was started by tenth Sikh guru, city Guru Gobind Singh Ji. It reminds the people of valour and defence, a timely discussion as the world watches the people of Ukraine defend their homeland.

Holi is not only a religious festival for people of East Indian heritage, but it is also a cultural festival. It helps bring together neighbourhoods and villages that can be otherwise divided across socioeconomic lines.

The festival of Holi should remind Manitobans of the sort of egalitarian society that has been absent during the time of the Pallister and Stefanson governments, which has cut social programs for those who need our help the most.

In contrast, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of my colleagues, to reaffirm our commitment to the type of society we want to see during Holi and always; one in which every Manitoban is treated with care and in which everyone can live in communities that work, as is the NDP's motto for all of us.

Shukriya [*Thank you*], Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave for the honourable member for River Heights to respond to the minister's statement? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I join other MLAs in recognizing Holi, the festival of colours. It's a festival celebrated each spring across all of India. It's a festival which features bold, beautiful and vibrant colours.

Where we live, in Winnipeg, our land is still white with snow, the dark brown and black trunks and branches of trees stand stark and alone, without leaves.

We need and we welcome this festival because it is a harbinger of spring, a promise that it won't be long before the colours can break through in the flowers which will grow in our yards and public spaces, including in front of our Legislature, and the blossoms and leaves which will adorn the lilac, oak, elm, maple, ash, hazel and so many other trees.

This year, the winter has been particularly cold and long and, more than ever, we yearn for the colours that are to come and will come during Holi.

It is in part because Manitobans are a people of many backgrounds and many colours that we are fortunate to celebrate occasions like Holi, when we can see by the drips of water coming off our roofs and the beginning of the shrinking of piles of snow that spring and renewal is coming; that we, too, are part of this great festival of Holi and we can join our friends and relatives who have come from India in splashing colours all over our lives, and this year, more than ever, the colours of yellow and blue as we also think of another place in the world which also needs our attention.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Jose Tomas

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Today, I have the great pleasure of delivering a private member's statement honouring Waverley constituent and my good friend, Mr. Jose Tomas.

For the past several years, Jose has been committed to serving his community. As someone who made the journey to immigrate to Canada almost 50 years ago, he understands the hardships that many newcomers face.

Volunteering is in his blood. His impressive resume includes serving on as a board member of the Folklorama council in the past for the Filipino Pavilion, and one of the pioneers of the Philippine Association of Manitoba.

Jose has also served as the first chairman of the Philippine Basketball Association in the 1970s, and spent time volunteering at the Philippine Canadian Centre of Manitoba. He has spent thousands of hours volunteering in the Filipino community and helping new Manitobans from the Philippines start their new journey here in our wonderful province of Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my ongoing conversations with Jose, he was very pleased to hear about Bill 205, The Filipino Heritage Month Act, and he expressed his dissatisfaction with the NDP and the opposition members, especially the honourable member from Notre Dame, for not working collaboratively while stalling and taking a partisan approach to the passing of the bill that will acknowledge and celebrate the proud Filipino culture and celebrate—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes: —the leaders from the Filipino community, including the family members of the honourable member—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes: —for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino).

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honouring Mr. Jose Tomas—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes: —for his positive work in the community and for all of the lives he has touched and continue to touch through the—his love—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Reyes: –for–his love for service.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Lifting of Pesticide Ban

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Wolseley is known for our gardens. Whether growing vegetables or beautiful flowers, prairie grasses or gardens designed to support butterflies, bees and other pollinators, our community makes the most of its small yards and even works to beautify the boulevards. We are a community that values nature and green spaces. We also value clean air, clean water and keeping our planet habitable for our children and grandchildren.

In 2014, under the NDP government, pesticides were restricted from non-essential use, such as on lawns and boulevards where children and pets play. Other provinces have since followed suit. This legislation was applauded by groups such as the Canadian Cancer Society, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the Ontario College of Family Physicians and it was also supported by local groups such as the coalition of concerned mothers of Manitoba, the Green Action Centre, the Manitoba Lung Association, the Social Planning Council and the Humane Society to name a few.

Restrictions on pesticides are required to protect vulnerable populations and community residents from serious health risks associated with exposure to these chemicals. Research shows that those most at risk are pregnant people, infants, children and anyone with chemical sensitivities. The range of potential harmful effects includes adverse reproductive, neurological and respiratory outcomes. Pets and pollinating insects can be harmed through close contact with pesticides.

Many people have already reached out with their concerns about the PC government rolling back legislation that what was once a positive step forward for the environment and the health of Manitobans. Today, I stand on behalf of Wolseley constituents and all Manitobans who are concerned about their children's health and the environment and ask the government to reconsider their proposed changes to The Environment Act that would support a wider use of pesticides.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Elder Dr. Dave Courchene Jr.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to share a few words for Elder Dr. Dave Courchene Jr.

Elder Courchene was born in the Sagkeeng Anishinabe nation. Growing up, his mother taught him by example how we should all live our lives. She taught Dave that when you give something from your heart, it is an act of kindness and is rewarded spiritually by the Creator.

In 1967 while still in high school, Elder Courchene was part of a group of 10 runners, young Indigenous men, asked to run the flame from Minneapolis to Winnipeg to open the Pan American Games.

This group became known as the FrontRunners. The frontrunner in Anishinabe culture has always been a messenger of the people. In Anishinabe understanding, the sacred fire is a doorway to the spirit world. Elder Courchene's journey as a frontrunner began a spiritual journey that would span the rest of his life. He would learn that the fire he was carrying held a message of the Seven Sacred Laws, values long held by the Anishinabe that provide a foundation for all to live by.

In learning about the true power and meaning of the sacred fire, Elder Courchene would eventually travel around the world lighting sacred fires and sharing ancestral teachings and messages. In Anishinabe culture, visions and dreams have always offered guidance in life.

Elder Courchene has always believed in following his vision and his dreams. Fasting many times on the land, Elder Courchene received a vision of a turtle lodge and a village of peace. At the heart of the village was a lodge in the shape of a turtle. Surrounding the turtle lodge were four smaller turtle lodges in each of the four directions.

Through the vision, the elders interpreted that humanity had been given the gift of a lodge of truth, which would bring healing, unity and peace to all nations and a deeper relationship with mother earth. The turtle was seen as a symbol of truth and the central lodge symbolized the urgency for all peoples to come together in the center of Turtle Island. The four smaller lodges represented the balance of life.

In 2002 the work began. The turtle lodge officially opened with a ceremony in the spring of 2003. The turtle lodge is founded upon spiritual land-based

teachings that bring balance to life with the fundamental goal and vision of Mino-Pi-Mati-Si-Win, translated to mean a good, peaceful way of life.

It is about seeing, listening, feeling, speaking and acting from the heart. The guidance and direction of spirit are the pillars of the vision and work of Elder Dr. Dave Courchene Jr. and the turtle lodge

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask for leave for a moment of silence to pay tribute to the life and contributions of Elder Dr. Dave Courchene Jr., traditionally known as Nitamabit Nii Gaani Aki Inini, translated to be the original way and the one who sits in front leading earth man.

Miigwech

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave for a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

A moment of silence was observed.

* (13:50)

Tribute to Health-Care and Social Workers

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the incredible efforts health-care and social workers have made in Manitoba during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health-care aides, nurses, doctors, respiratory therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, laboratory technicians and those in many other allied health professions: we thank you. We know that some of you are feeling exhausted, overworked and tired, in part from often being mandated to work a double shift when you came to work only one.

We know that working conditions in health care in Manitoba are often far from ideal. Dr. Jillian Horton, a Winnipeg physician, described this when she said, and I quote: I work in a place where I can't compensate for chaos; where there are holes in the plaster wall in patient rooms; where people in stretchers are often parked out in front of the nursing desk, the way you might leave an idling car; where monitors beep, alarms sound, call bells ring, patients holler and families line the hallways and sob; where there is no order, only ongoing pandemonium, constant chaos. End of quote.

We know, in spite of this, that you've done everything you could to make life better for those who have come for help. We know much of the difficulties, the mandating and the long hours are the result of the poor way in which the Conservative government has

managed our precious health-care system, and also a reflection of the lack of attention to critical issues dating back to the years under the NDP.

And yet, you have stepped up in spite of this, and you have done outstanding work for all Manitobans.

We thank you, with all our hearts, for the efforts you have made.

Merci. Miigwech.

CFAM Radio 950

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Mr. Speaker, 65 years ago, at 8:01 p.m. on March 13th, 1957, a local radio station in my constituency, CFAM Radio 950, began broadcasting for the first time on the AM dial.

At its start, CFAM was housed in a small studio in Altona and employed a staff of 11 people to serve the community, then numbering 1,800 residents. Over 65 years, what started as a small local radio station in Altona has grown to become the largest independent radio broadcaster in Canada, a company we know as Golden West Broadcasting.

Today, Golden West operates more than 40 radio stations and draws nearly 100 million users to its online local news sites each year, such as Pembina Valley Online, which serves as an online hub for local news and information for residents in my area.

Golden West employs hundreds of people and, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have been one of them. My first job was as a part-time on-air announcer for two of CFAM's sister stations: The Eagle 93.5 and CKMW 1570, now Country 88.9 FM.

I will always have fond memories of my time with Golden West, to work with the personalities we hear on the air today and to be part of a company that cares deeply about the communities it serves.

While much has changed in 65 years, one constant in the company has been its long-time CEO, Elmer Hildebrand, who was with the—with CFAM since the very beginning and helped the company grow to become the success story that is today.

To mark this special occasion, a celebration was held in Altona at Golden West last Friday, and it was a distinct pleasure to join Elmer Hildebrand, our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), my colleague from Morden-Winkler, for a special live broadcast of CFAM 950's morning show.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to Elmer Hildebrand, Golden West and the crew at CFAM 950 on reaching this significant milestone.

Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Company Transferring ICU Patients Equipment and Staff Training Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Krystal Mousseau's life mattered. She is dearly missed by her family, friends and her children.

Now, Manitobans want there to be answers for the events that led to her death. We need an inquiry. That's because there are serious unanswered questions. Questions about the lack of properly trained staff. Questions about the lack of equipment used by the company that transported her. Questions about informal guidelines for moving patients out of ICU to other provinces.

I ask the Premier: When did she first learn of a lack of equipment and training with the company that transported Krystal Mousseau?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Certainly, the floor of the Legislature is not appropriate to discuss individual people's personal health information, but when it comes to this, I've already stated to the member opposite it's doctors that make the decisions with respect to patient transfers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Chief Medical Examiner makes decisions around calling inquests.

And of course, I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to allow those professionals who are in those areas to do their job, and that's certainly—we have tremendous respect for the work that they do. They make difficult decisions on a daily basis. We thank them for what they do, but we need to let the professionals do their jobs.

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

Mr. Kinew: I'll table the letter from Prairie Mountain Health that describes the outcome of the critical incident investigation.

I'll point out that at the top of that letter there is a reference to section 4.1 of The Regional Health Authorities Act. Now, that part of the act states that the Health Minister can do anything to ensure the

functioning of the health-care system, including access—accessing the information within that letter.

To put a fine point on it, the current and former Health ministers, as well as the Premier, have had access to this information the entire time—Premier had access to this information the entire time.

Will the Premier tell Manitobans when she first learned of the concerns around a lack of proper equipment and training in the care for Krystal Mousseau when she was moved from the Brandon intensive-care unit?

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for finally tabling the letter that we have been asking for for days, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What I will say to the Leader of the Opposition, again, these are decisions that are made by doctors, in terms of transferring patients. When it comes to inquests that look into systemic problems, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those decisions are made by the Chief Medical Examiner.

We continue to rely on those professionals to do their job.

Mr. Kinew: The decision to hire a company to move ICU patients out of province was a decision taken by the government. The decision on whether or not to call an inquiry is a decision taken by the Premier.

There are serious unanswered questions about the events that led to the death of Krystal Mousseau. Now, we do not know why the company hired to move her lacked properly trained staff and lacked the proper equipment. The Premier was, however, Health minister at the time.

Now, a reasonable person, most Manitobans looking at the facts would believe that the Health minister would want to know what went wrong in the events leading up to Krystal's death.

So I ask the Premier again: When did she first learn of a lack of equipment and training with the company that transported Krystal Mousseau from Brandon's intensive-care unit?

Mrs. Stefanson: Of course, the choice, or the decision, to outsource various things in the community with respect to health care comes from systems leaders, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They do not come from the Minister of Health's office, they do not come from politicians—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

The honourable First Minister. *[interjection]* Order, please.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just said that the decisions that are made are made by Shared Health, they're made by other systems' leaders, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those are not decisions that are made by politicians.

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

Death of Krystal Mousseau Request to Call Inquiry

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Last May—*[interjection]*—last May our hospitals and intensive-care units were overwhelmed. We did not have the capacity to take care of the sickest people in our province. Government then sent patients out of our ICUs to other jurisdictions.

One of those patients, Krystal Mousseau, died on May 25th, 2021, after a failed attempt to transport her out of province. We have detailed a few of the unanswered questions about the events leading up to her death. Our calls for an inquest have been denied. So, therefore, we are asking for an inquiry, which the Premier has the ability to do today.

* (14:00)

Will the Premier listen to that call? Will she call an inquiry into the death of Krystal Mousseau today?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the purpose of an inquest, which is decided by the Chief Medical Examiner, is to deal with determining the cause of death, but also to identify systemic failings.

The Chief Medical Examiner said that there are no grounds for the calling of an inquest in this case. Of course, that was a letter from the Chief Medical Examiner with respect to this individual case.

Inquiries are also called to determine systemic issues. We have from the Chief Medical Examiner that there is no grounds for calling the inquest because he didn't believe that there were systemic issues involved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just before I recognize the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, I mis-spoke in terms of the question order. This is now the supplementary on the honourable member's second question.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, an inquiry is a separate process from an inquest. It's one that the Premier has the ability to

initiate today, and she should do so based on the serious systemic failures that we have outlined.

Namely, that Krystal Mousseau was transported by a company that didn't have the right equipment or the right training among their staff to take care of her. The systemic failure being, of course, that a government in Manitoba would hire a company without ensuring that those standards have been met.

Accountability in this instance is important, and accountability can be arrived at through calling an inquiry. The outstanding question is: What standards were put in place, what due diligence was conducted and who ought to be held accountable?

Will the Premier answer these questions or, at the very least call an inquiry today so we can have a process to give Manitobans the truth?

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition knows that decisions to transfer patients is—are made by doctors, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not by politicians.

And again, when it comes to inquests, those decisions are made by the Chief Medical Examiner. Those are the professionals who make those decisions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I just indicated that the reason for inquests, part of that is to determine whether or not there are systemic issues. The Chief Medical Examiner didn't believe that there was grounds to call for an inquest based on that.

And, of course, we know that inquiries are also about systemic issues. The Chief Medical Examiner determined that there were no systemic issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and therefore there was no need to call for an inquest into that, which is around systemic issues.

Again, we will take the advice from professionals, not from the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Kinew: Manitobans deserve to know if there will be answers, and they deserve to know if there will be accountability. They deserve to know if an independent investigation and adjudication of the facts will take place.

We have put the facts on the record. A lack of proper training and equipment contributed to Ms. Mousseau's death. This is a systemic failure. That's why we've asked the Chief Medical Examiner to reconsider his decision.

But as we wait for that response, we ask the Premier today to call an inquiry. An inquiry is a separate process which the Premier can initiate right now.

Will she? Will the Premier call an inquiry into the death of Krystal Mousseau today—an inquiry?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition seems to be saying that there are systemic issues.

I would like to see if he—you could table the proof of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because what we do have before us is a letter from the Chief Medical Examiner that indicates very clearly that there was no grounds to call for an inquest based on those issues.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I will take the advice of the Chief Medical Examiner—the professional in this—not the Leader of the Opposition.

WPS Headquarters Scandal Request for Public Inquiry

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The Manitoba court of queen's 'brench' ruled the former Winnipeg CAO accepted a bribe and breached his duty on the police headquarters construction project. That project was \$100 million over budget. The mayor of Winnipeg called it one of the biggest scandals in the city's history.

But just like Brian Pallister, Premier—the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), pardon me, has refused, for no good reason, to get to the bottom of all of this.

Will the Premier stop copying Brian Pallister's playbook and call an inquiry into the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): There's no question that the issue that is raised and the matters that have come to light from the civil litigation are serious matters, and no one would dispute that. There are still several litigants—dozens of litigants, I believe, that are still before the civil procedure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite knows, whether it was the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry or Brian Sinclair inquiry that were called under the NDP, that matters before the courts should not be matters of inquiry. But there's no question that it is a serious issue.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Just like Brian Pallister, the Premier won't call an inquiry into the police headquarters scandal. Their latest excuses are just plain wrong, Deputy Speaker.

An inquiry would help get answers. It can compel individuals, including former elected officials, to testify on the public record. That's accountability. There's nothing stopping the Premier from calling an inquiry except that—her commitment to be like Brian Pallister.

Will she call an inquiry today?

Mr. Goertzen: The member might remember the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry was put on hold because a court case was actually launched, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, of course, the NDP government also saw the importance of not holding inquiries during court cases. There are dozens of litigants who are still before a civil litigation.

I know the members opposite don't want to understand that we need to be careful in terms of how examinations 'happo'—happen.

As there's a court case that is currently underway, it should not be considered for an inquiry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Fontaine: The former Winnipeg CEO—CAO took a \$300,000 bribe on a project that went over \$100 million over its budget.

Manitobans deserve answers. They don't need fake excuses like we're seeing here today. There's nothing stopping the Premier from calling in a 'quiry'. A public inquiry compels individuals, even former elected officials, to testify in public. That's accountability, Deputy Speaker.

The Premier should stop hiding behind fake excuses.

Will the Premier call a public inquiry today?

Mr. Goertzen: Quite apart from the 'precedences' that I've already cited, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that existed under the NDP government, it is also worth noting that under the civil litigation and civil disclosure, there is a full raft of information that is provided through a

civil litigation; it has to be provided through disclosure. So the information is well known. It is public, and citizens, of course, can make decisions on it.

Everyone is concerned about what they've learned regarding the civil litigation, but the information is fully disclosed through the civil litigation process. I'm not sure what the member opposite feels would be learned beyond the civil litigation exposure. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order, please.

Surgical and Diagnostic Services Timeline to Clear Backlog

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, highway medicine hasn't stopped under this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). In fact, it's gotten worse than it was in—under Brian Pallister.

* (14:10)

The only solution we've heard from this government is sending patients down the highway to North Dakota, which failed. And since then, they've done nothing to help the over 160,000 Manitobans who are waiting in pain.

People are wondering how much longer they're going to have to wait.

So, will the minister act today and will she set a deadline to clear the surgical and diagnostic backlog?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I thank the member from Union Station for the question.

The patient transfer protocol, which we have stated many times in this Chamber has been in place for decades now, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and while they were in office. And it's important to remember that decisions that are being made about transfer are being made by clinicians in the system.

And I also want to remind the NDP that, over the period of 1999 to 2022, 213 patients were referred to Grand Forks. And during the period of 2001 to 2003, 13 patients under their management were referred to Thunder Bay.

What do they have against North Dakota now, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

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

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government keeps making empty promises and is full of nothing but excuses. They haven't come out with any

ideas or investments to address the growing surgical backlog here in Manitoba. Their record says it all: their plan for highway medicine, to send spinal patients to North Dakota, failed.

The PCs are still doing fewer surgeries and Manitobans are waiting even longer for those procedures. And now the wait-list has grown to over 160,000 Manitobans waiting for life-saving surgery and diagnostics.

Will the minister tell Manitobans waiting when the backlog will be cleared, and will she do that finally today?

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to thank our health-care workers and all the clinicians in the system that have been working so hard over the fourth wave and the three previous waves to ensure Manitobans receive the surgeries and diagnostic care that they need.

And I'm pleased to share that Health Sciences Centre has increased their surgical slates from seven to 10 to 12 to 13. Concordia Hospital has been running at full capacity for several weeks. All cardiac slates at St. Boniface general hospital have been running since the end of January. Brandon has been restored. Carman has been restored.

And we'll have more updates on the surgical and diagnostic backlog very soon, so stay tuned.

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

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister misleads the House on providing Manitobans with information, and any update we get is just another broken promise.

The wait-list continues to go up and up. Fewer surgeries are being done each month while the wait-list continues to grow. Action is needed now to actually start addressing this backlog.

Manitobans deserve a straight answer. When can they expect to hear a date on when the surgical and diagnostic backlog is going to be cleared in Manitoba?

It's a simple question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I'll repeat it: What date will the surgical backlog finally be cleared?

Ms. Gordon: What the member for Union Station does not know is that Manitobans want to know when they will be receiving their diagnostic tests and their surgeries, and that is why I can report that CT scans have—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: –improved 12 per cent; ultrasounds, 16 per cent; MRIs, 13 per cent.

And I encourage the member from Union Station to take a look at the report that went live on the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force website updating on gynecological surgeries, colon cancer screening, anesthesia, clinical assistance, spinal surgeries and more, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ukrainian Students Support Services

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Mr. Deputy Speaker, many post-secondary students are coming to the end of their studies this month. Students are studying here from Ukraine, and they are facing uncertainty.

Student visas for Ukrainian students will expire.

Manitoba could do more to support them. To do that, this government needs to greatly increase supports to ensure nominees are processed as soon as possible.

There's not enough people to evaluate the current applications.

Will this minister and Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) commit staff dollars so Ukrainian students can stay in Manitoba?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Again, I'd like to thank my department for processing a record number of nominations last year, a record number of 6,300 Manitoba Provincial Nominee applications, a program that we created back in 1998.

Madam Speaker, we'll continue to work closely with the federal government and immigration and refugee and citizenship Canada to implement recently announced special measures for Ukrainian citizens, and we'll work with post-secondary education institutions, as well, to help with students.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I'm just going to repeat my comment this morning that I am not Madam Speaker.

Ukrainian Canadian Congress Funding for Resettlement Services

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Province needs to quickly staff up the nominee program for Ukrainian students.

For those approved, there just aren't enough settlement services. We need help to permanently settle, and—to permanently settle here with the supports they need. They need help getting a job. They need help settling here permanently. We're asking the Stefanson government for a substantial commitment to increase resettlement services.

But will this happen immediately? I ask the minister and Premier, today, to make an announcement for Ukrainian resettlement services through the Ukrainian Canadian Congress today.

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Attracting and retaining new immigrants, international students, refugees, is key to Manitoba's post-pandemic recovery. Early this year, our government launched the new \$2-million newcomer community connections stream application intake to support and deliver—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes: –new community support projects for newcomers to succeed in Manitoba—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes: –and, as well, over \$3 million to Manitoba Start and SEED organizations.

We'll continue to help newcomers to ensure that they have a safe haven here in the province of Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I'd just like to repeat my earlier admonition that I'm not Madam Speaker.

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

Ukrainian Students Support Services

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitoba should do so much more to help Ukrainians who are waiting to come to Manitoba.

For students in Ukraine we can prioritize recognition of their credentials. We could also help these students with their costs. We need to do everything we can to make it easier for Ukrainians and students in Ukraine to come to Manitoba.

Will the minister and will the Premier provide assistance for students in Ukraine today?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister for—*[interjection]*—hang on, I have to recognize you first.

The honourable Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question.

I don't know if he's aware, if he's gone to the immigratemanitoba.com website, where it actually has information there on Ukrainian special measures, because we know that Ukrainian citizens, including students, cannot go to the respective embassies.

As well, I don't know if he's aware of the manitoba4ukraine.ca website. It actually has, how can I help, community organizations, helpful links, for all members of the House to pass on.

I want to thank the departments, in particular the Minister for Transportation and Infrastructure, for putting this together and working together so we—that we can help Ukrainian citizens, including students coming to Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. We've tried.

* (14:20)

Northern Health Care Need for Services

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, health care is falling apart in the North.

Here's how the region describes things: Lynn Lake and Leaf Rapids are very fragile from a staffing perspective. At Gillam, gaps in service plague the site. Nursing and health-care aide gaps are becoming more frequent.

These words are in the region's own report. They confirm that these sites are on the edge of collapse. Northern health care is clearly in crisis.

Will the minister admit there's a crisis and act today?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I thank the member opposite for the question.

We, as a government, are committed to ensuring Manitobans across the province receive equitable access to health-care services, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have had the opportunity to speak many times with the regional health authority, and that is why I've committed to having a health system sustainability meeting with many stakeholders across the North in May,

to have discussions about solutions to ensuring individuals in remote and northern communities receive the care that they need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, with a supplementary question.

MLA Lindsey: Mr. Deputy Speaker, northern health care is falling apart.

Mothers can no longer give birth in Flin Flon, and the sites at Thompson and The Pas are in a very fragile state. And gynecological wait-list in Thompson remains a concern.

These are the region—health region's own words, their words in their own report: very fragile state for all remaining sites for childbirth in northern Manitoba.

Manitoba is in crisis in the North for health care.

Will this minister admit there is a crisis and act immediately?

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I will admit is that this government—members on this side of the House—are committed to ensuring that Manitobans in the northern portion of our province receive the health-care services that they need.

That is why in Budget 2021—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —our government has committed \$812 million, the largest single health-care commitment in Manitoba's history, to improve rural and northern health care, and a significant portion of—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —that—those funds will be used in the creation of a new intermediate health-care hub in northern Manitoba.

And I invite the member opposite to join me in that stakeholder meeting in May to work on solutions.

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

MLA Lindsey: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Gillam, Lynn Lake, Leaf Rapids struggle to remain open. Obstetrics in the North is in a very fragile state, and the North's ability to perform surgeries and procedures is in decline. Wait times for endoscopies in northern Manitoba saw an 88 per cent increase in wait times. This is health care in crisis.

Will this minister admit to the crisis this government has created and give the North the support it needs today to get out of crisis?

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government's commitment of \$812 million will help to build and expand 38 health-care facilities across rural and northern Manitoba, improve access, quality and reliability of care; reduce our wait times; increase our nursing staff; improve diagnostics, emergency medical services, patient transport; create new hospital beds and personal-care-home beds.

I've done so many announcements; I think 15 in total. I didn't see the member—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —opposite at any of those announcements, but I do invite—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —him to join us at the northern health-care sustainability meeting in May, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

WPS Headquarters Scandal Request for Public Inquiry

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The former chief administrative officer of the City of Winnipeg has been found in a civil suit to have accepted a bribe to award a contract worth \$137 million to a company to build our police headquarters.

The mayor of Winnipeg has been asking for a public inquiry into these land deals for five years. We asked—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —for it in 2019. But all we've heard is excuses and foot dragging and the excuse that because the NDP didn't call inquiries either, it's okay for the PCs to.

Either this government believes in law and order or it doesn't. Either it believes in holding people to account or it doesn't. A criminal investigation and civil lawsuits are not legitimate excuses, and we can only get answers that an inquiry will provide.

Why is this government making up excuses for refusing to call an inquiry into a proven case of bribery on a \$200 million—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Quite apart from what would be learned that isn't—already been disclosed through the civil litigation disclosure procedure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd quote Judge Marc Monnin, who, in speaking about the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, said: I recognize that by granting your request for a stated case, the public hearings which have been commenced will have to be adjourned until after a decision. That is regrettable, but in my view necessary.

That is the words of a judge, not the leader of the third or fourth or whatever party he is, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Lamont: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this scandal has been dragging—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —on for a decade. Winnipeg taxpayers got soaked. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: The Canada Post property was never valued. The company that—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Thank you.

Mr. Lamont: As I said, the scandal has been dragging on for a decade. Winnipeg taxpayers got soaked. The Canada property—post property was never valued. The company that won the contract never applied for it. The only way we're going to get to the bottom of this is make sure is—everyone who was responsible is held to account, is if people can be called as witnesses to testify under oath.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) just has to make an indication that an inquiry will be called. We have an obligation to the people who elect us and who have been hurt by this. It's bad for taxpayers and it's a stain on our reputation as a province.

The PCs talk all the time about cleaning up the mess the NDP left them; will the Premier commit to cleaning up this mess, starting with a public inquiry?

Mr. Goertzen: Nobody questions the seriousness of this issue or the findings from the civil litigation. There are several litigants—dozens of litigants, I believe, who are still going through civil litigation.

I quoted the judge previously, and I'll quote it again. This is in relation to the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry: I recognize that by granting the request for a stated case, the public hearings, which have commenced, will have to be adjourned until after a decision. That is regrettable, but in my view necessary.

That is a judge, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The member opposite can raise politics all he wants. We know it's a serious issue. We will follow of the law, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Increase in ER Wait Times Request for Reduction Plan

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, on October 2017, the Conservatives began implementing hospital transformation to reduce patient wait times. Then the longest wait most patients could expect at the Health Sciences Centre emergency room was 3.6 hours.

The plan was to dramatically reduce wait times, but instead it dramatically lengthened them. By January last year, 2021, the wait time had increased to 6.4 hours and this January to 9.5 hours. Similar increases have occurred at Grace and St. Boniface emergency rooms.

Wait times are going in the wrong direction.

What adjustments are the government making to address the dismal failure of its efforts during the last five years?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Deputy Speaker, NDP, members opposite: staffing shortages and the highest wait times in the country is the reason why our government undertook system-wide health-care transformation.

The member for River Heights is forgetting that we have just gone through, as a province, a very difficult time, two years—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Gordon: —of a pandemic. He's forgotten that. Maybe that's a good thing. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans can recover from the pandemic. We will do it in a compassionate and understanding way. We will lead—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —the province into a brighter and more prosperous future, and I invite the member from River Heights to join us in that future.

* (14:30)

Access to French-Language Education Registration Rate Increase

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Le Manitoba a des grands communautés Francophones diversifiés, l'un des plus important de l'ouest Canadien. L'accès à l'éducation dans l'une ou l'autre langue officielle est d'une importance vital.

Pour cette raison, que fait le ministre pour élargir cet accès?

Translation

Manitoba has great and diversified Francophone communities, among the largest in western Canada. Access to education in both official languages is vital.

For this reason, what has the minister done to develop access?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs): Je tiens à remercier mon collègue pour la question.

Je suis fière de partager que les taux d'inscriptions sont en hausse pour les programmes d'immersion française et la Division scolaire franco-manitobaine. Chacun a vu le taux d'inscription augmenter d'environ 15 pour cent au cours des six dernières années. Cette demande des parents nous incite à nous associer récemment à l'Université de Saint-Boniface pour accroître leur capacité d'éduquer les enseignants français et bilingues.

Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Président.

Translation

I'd like to thank my colleague for the question.

I'm proud to share that registration rates are up for French immersion programs and in the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine. They both have seen registration rates increase by approximately 15 per cent during the past six years. This demand from parents has encouraged us to recently associate

with the University of St. Boniface to increase their capacity to educate French and bilingual teachers.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

New RCMP Collective Agreement Provincial Funding for Municipalities

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Deputy Speaker, as municipalities are preparing their budgets for the coming year, they're stretching their resources thin.

They've told us their concerns about this year's upcoming budget. More than half believe it could take years to financially recover from the economic damage brought on by the pandemic. In this environment, a 23 per cent increase to their policing costs is unbearable.

Will the Minister for Municipal Relations come to the table with needed supports to negotiate with municipalities today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): The issue of the negotiated agreement with the RCMP, that was negotiated by the federal government without provincial input, is something that provincial justice ministers across Canada are concerned about. It is something that I have and I know that the previous minister of Justice raised with Minister Lametti federally about those concerns about the contract negotiations that we were not a part of.

We believe, of course, that RCMP should be paid fairly, but we also believe that the costs that are borne by municipalities should be recognized by the federal government, who negotiated the contract.

Mr. Wiebe: Let's be clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker: 19 municipalities pay their bills for policing through the Province, not to the federal government. They're looking for the—this government to show some leadership on this issue.

Back pay for the RCMP is owed to 2017 and costs are going up 23 per cent. I know the Association of Manitoba Municipalities is waiting for this minister of municipal affairs to stand up and answer a question.

So I ask again: Will the minister stand up and come to the table with additional funding for municipalities in this province?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Municipal Relations): I'm happy to take a question from the member opposite. However, it doesn't have to be asked with aggression, because having dealt with municipalities for many, many years, that's not a tone

that I'm typical to hearing on municipal issues, whether it's good, bad or otherwise.

And I really appreciate being back in this role, and I've had several meetings with AMM, with other municipalities, and there's a great number of issues to work with. And the member's issue on policing is being looked at. We're getting it done.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Us—the Association of Manitoba Municipalities is listening and waiting for this minister to come to the table with a solution.

Nineteen municipalities are receiving that bill directly from the Province. It is her role and this government's role to step up. That 23 per cent increase to policing costs has been a shock, but more importantly, it's unaffordable and it risks the programming in those municipalities.

Will the minister commit today to come to the table, to negotiate and to work through this budget shortfall with municipalities today?

Ms. Clarke: I will once again assure the member opposite, AMM members, as well as other municipalities that are dealing with policing costs, are at the table.

We are discussing and we will continue to get the job done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for questions has ended.

PETITIONS

Abortion Services

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary and trans persons deserve to be safe and supported when accessing abortion services.

(2) Limited access to effective and safe abortion services contributes to detrimental outcomes and consequences for those seeking an abortion, as an estimated 25 million unsafe abortions occur worldwide each year.

(3) The provincial government's reckless health-care cuts have created inequity within the health-care system whereby access to the abortion pill, Mifegymiso, and surgical abortions are less accessible for northern and rural individuals than individuals in southern Manitoba, as they face travel barriers to access the handful of non-urban health-care professionals who are trained to provide medical abortions.

(4) For over five years, and over the administration of three failed Health ministers, the provincial government operated under the pretense that reproductive health was not the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Seniors Care and shifted the responsibility to a secretariat with no policy, program or financial authority within the health-care system.

(5) For over four years, the provincial government has refused to support bill 200, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, which will ensure the safety of Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary and trans persons accessing abortion services, and the staff who provide such services, by establishing buffer zones for anti-choice Manitobans around clinics.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately ensure effective and safe access to abortion services for individuals, regardless of where they reside in Manitoba, and to ensure that buffer zones are immediately legislated.

This has been signed by Jenny Opazo, Chantel Machado [*phonetic*] and Michelle Turcotte and many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, the N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-

care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1, 2022.

This petition has been signed by Jeremy Cook, Doris Cook, Lena Henderson and many, many other Manitobans.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately two thousand—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

* (14:40)

If we could just keep the volume of chatter a little quieter than it is, that would help things run more smoothly. Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: I'll start over, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, the N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-

care services to seniors and those living with disabilities until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

And this petition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health centre service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses and restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1, 2022.

And this petition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has been signed by Daisy Amy Linklater, Jonathan J.R. Brightnose, Lanze Cherillard [*phonetic*] and other Manitobans.

Cochlear Implant Program

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy 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 also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

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

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant program began implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implanted about

60 devices since the summer of 2018, as it is only able to implant about 40 to 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. The provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years of age.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

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

Signed by Kayode Otegbude [*phonetic*], Mane Heyward [*phonetic*], Darryl Boychuk and many, many others.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

* (14:50)

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Eating Disorders Awareness Week

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background of this petition is as follows:

An estimated 1 million people suffer from eating disorders in Canada.

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses affecting one's physical, psychological and social function, and have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness.

The development and treatment of eating disorders are influenced by the social determinants of health, including food and income security, access to housing, health care and mental health supports.

It is important to share the diverse experiences of people with eating disorders across all ages, genders and identities, including Indigenous, Black and racialized people; queer and gender-diverse people; people with disabilities; people with chronic illness; and people with co-occurring mental health conditions or addictions.

It is necessary to increase awareness and education about the impact of those living with, or affected by, eating disorders in order to dispel dangerous stereotypes and myths about these illnesses.

Setting aside one week each year to focus attention on eating disorders will heighten public understanding, increase awareness of culturally relevant resources and supports for those impacted by eating disorders and encourage Manitobans to develop healthier relationships with their bodies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support a declaration that the first week in February of each year be known as eating disorder awareness week.

This has been signed by Emily Beaumont-Blais, Danielle Guenette and Sydney MacAlpine, and many other Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continuing—continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot care treatment to the city of Thompson, effective April 1st, 2020.

And this has been signed by Darlene Bradburn, Keecy Ross and Vigor Pupel, and many other Manitobans. Miigwech.

Abortion Services

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary and trans persons deserve to be safe and supported when accessing abortion services.

(2) Limited access to effective and safe abortion services contributes to detrimental outcomes and consequences for those seeking an abortion, as an estimated 25 million unsafe abortions occur worldwide each year.

(3) The provincial government's reckless health-care cuts have created inequity within the health-care system whereby access to the abortion pill,

Mifegymiso, and surgical abortions are less accessible for northern and rural individuals than individuals in southern Manitoba, as they face travel barriers to access the handful of non-urban health-care professionals who are trained to provide medical abortions.

(4) For over five years, and over the administration of three failed Health ministers, the provincial government operated under the pretense that reproductive health was not the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Seniors Care and shifted the responsibility to a secretariat with no policy, program or financial authority within the health-care system.

(5) And for over four years, the provincial government has refused to support bill 200, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, which will ensure the safety of Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary and trans persons accessing abortion services, and the staff who provide such services, by establishing buffer zones for anti-choice Manitobans around clinics.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately ensure effective and safe access to abortion services for individuals, regardless of where they reside in Manitoba, and to ensure that buffer zones are immediately legislated.

Signed by Liam Reid, Brennan [*phonetic*] Wall and Maureen Cooper and many more Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there any other petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for debate this afternoon Bill 16, 15, 8 and 13?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader this afternoon consideration of Bill 16, 15, 8 and 13. We will—for a second reading.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 16—The Financial Administration Amendment Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We will proceed with Bill 16, The Financial Administration Amendment Act.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (Mr. Lagimodiere), that Bill 16, The Financial Administration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la gestion des finances publiques, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

* (15:00)

Motion presented.

Mr. Friesen: I'm pleased to rise and put some comments on the record in respect of Bill 16, The Financial Administration Amendment Act.

We've been in this House a couple of times in the last week debating things like the supplementary appropriation act and the interim appropriation act. And this one, for the afternoon, goes a little more smoothly—well, perhaps more smoothly because we're not going to consider all the parts of a bill in one afternoon.

So, we're in second reading this afternoon.

I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with members of the opposition, the critic for Finance from the NDP party and others, to be able to discuss what this bill entails, why we are bringing it on this time and what we are seeking to do as a government.

In some respects you could say this is the second phase of a two-phase project—a process that was undertaken earlier and advanced under my predecessor. And that was, of course, to bring changes to The Financial Administration Act in Manitoba to reflect process changes and advancements and best practice, as seen as other—in other jurisdictions, to bring Manitoba in line with best practice, in terms of how we approach financial decision-making, accountability, controls.

This Legislature will know full well that we have been placing far more of an emphasis on the consolidated government-reported entity. In other words, the summary picture instead of just core government—and those are words that are well known to us; core government referring to departments of government, but the summary government, of course, being that consolidated picture of everything else and including core government.

That means departments and other reporting entities and special operating agencies, and schools and post-secondary institutions, and regional health authorities and so many other things.

And so, when that is all rolled into one, as it should be, then where should the emphasis be placed? I can recall, you know, in the past, where the NDP government used to play, you know, cute by half by emphasizing the core picture when they wanted to, or emphasizing the summary picture when they wanted to, and be able to basically detract from attention being placed in an area of sensitivity for themselves.

This is, in many ways, a far more transparent way of looking at the total performance of government, being able to analyze what is it that government is seeking in terms of authority, for borrowing, for capital, for operating.

What—and what this set of amendments essentially does is ask the question: What does the government need and how transparently is that presented in an annual request.

So let me begin with a little bit of context about how this bill was developed.

Early on in the pandemic, it was clear that there was going to be great uncertainty around the state of capital markets and stability. We know that banks and lending became quite dysfunctional in the first few months of the pandemic. This is widely known around the world, as people were trying to grapple with what was happening, how significantly were supply chains being put off, what were going to be the challenges with labour.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you'll recall the run on consumer products, including things like toilet paper, where people began to stockpile things. And I can tell you there was that same—not panic, but same urgency in the banking sector.

At the time, in this province, you will recall that there was uncertainty about authority. Would governments—would sovereign and sub-sovereign governments continue to have access to markets to be able to maintain the normal operation of departments and the government during a pandemic.

And members in this Chamber will remember that our government passed a \$5 billion borrowing authority request in Loan Act, 2020. It received royal assent on April the 15th, 2022, not even two years before.

And while we are thankful that we did not have to avail ourselves of that voted authority, nevertheless, they were exceptional circumstances, exigent circumstances, and this government acted appropriately.

Previous loan acts in this province, regardless of who's been in charge, have focused on ensuring

adequate funding for the single annual year in which they're passed—or, I should say, the single fiscal year in which they're passed. Unfortunately, it's not clear, when time passes, how much total authority the Province has available to it.

Because, essentially, you will bring a loan act; you will, hopefully, debate a loan act—and I'll come back to that point in a bit later—and then you'll pass that loan act. But the problem is that that loan act's authority does not expire. And so, the government has available to it the loan act authority from the previous year that it did not utilize, and anything else it seeks. But more than that, the government also has available to it every single loan act before, and the accumulated underutilization of those loan acts.

So how does that reconciliation take place, and how do we know what the total borrowing authority of the Province is? Well, that was complicated, and this bill seeks to uncomplicate the process of knowing what does the government have available to it in terms of borrowing authority, and what is it seeking in this year. So our government has introduced this bill to address that uncertainty and lack of clarity about how much total borrowing authority the Province has.

Because of the annual nature of the loan act, there just was never that reconciliation between debt level and authority to borrow. I can tell you that between the years 2000 and 2021, there were nearly \$14 billion of built-up authority to borrow. And I wouldn't think that many Manitobans would be available—would be aware of that number. They wouldn't automatically know through the budgetary process. They wouldn't automatically know through the annual statement of the public accounts what that total accumulated borrowing authority is.

So, the approach of providing incremental borrowing authority to the Province in loan acts we believe has not served the people of Manitoba well. We don't believe that it has served the members of this Legislature well. We should clearly and transparently state how much authority the Province has.

Given that the debt level at Manitoba Hydro is currently high after the completion of Keeyask, and Bipole III, and the Minnesota-Manitoba tie-in line, and changes and improvements to things like those transmission switching stations, I'm getting that word wrong, but places like the Dorsey station. Conversion stations, that's what they are. Knowing that that level of debt is high, I want to be clear that that is ratepayer-supported debt.

And that is why, in this bill, we would have one authority stated for the Province of Manitoba, the government of Manitoba, and that would be taxpayer-supported debt. And then one authority for Manitoba Hydro, which we, the NDP government and everyone, has always been clear on, is separate, because it is ratepayer-supported.

These proposed reforms will do away with the annual loan act, they—with borrowing authority limits for the Province, the Manitoba Hydro, that will be set in legislation in The Financial Administration Act. And these limits will assist in avoiding the build up of unnecessary borrowing authority.

I want to be clear that it is a good idea to have some wiggle room, if the Finance minister can use that term. It's a good idea to not be right at the ceiling of your requirements. I think we would all understand, we've all followed, with some interest and some apprehension, conversations in the US, for instance, where we would see that all of a sudden you had to have an emergency session in the Capitol, because we would reach what was called that fiscal cliff, they would talk about. That debt ceiling. And there was this imminent need to pass authority, or you would end up in this brinkmanship place where you couldn't pay teachers, and you couldn't pay for, you know, roads, and you couldn't meet your bills, and couldn't send out cheques to those who were receiving government supports.

That is not the intent of anything in this bill. It's a good idea to have at your availability some excess borrowing authority. If there is one thing that the last two years has taught this—well, the world, is that we have to be able to plan for exigent circumstances.

So, our proposed borrowing authority, a limit of \$44.4 billion, provides \$9.2 billion in borrowing authority over the accumulated debt, sufficient to cover the fiscal needs for 2022-23, and also the fiscal 2023-24, with a healthy contingency amount for reasons that I just stated.

* (15:10)

Bill 16 also includes provisions to—that allow for additional borrowing that can be authorized by Cabinet in those circumstances where there is an emergency or exigent circumstances.

Most provinces, I would add, do not have a loan act that provides borrowing authority for a province. And other provinces, I would note as well, do have that ability in emergency circumstances to seek additional authority.

The bill also assists in reforming the way that government reporting entities receive loans from the government. The amendments allow for loans to be issued based on appropriations that are approved by this Assembly. Currently, Manitoba is the only province that provides authority for loans to reporting organizations through a loan act, so with these changes we would join the approach of other provinces.

Like I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the bill proposes a limit of \$44.4 billion. It's a large number. In fact, it's a bit over \$9 billion more than the current debt levels of the Province of Manitoba, but it's less than the nearly \$14 billion, I might add, in borrowing authority built up, like I said, since the year 2000.

So the borrowing authority limit is in respect of what our debt is, plus our needs for this coming fiscal year, plus the needs for the next fiscal year, plus some contingency to be prudent.

I would also mention to my colleagues, as I mentioned it in the bill briefing, that the limit would be adjusted in time. It's not like one size fits all and that becomes the limit over time, because obviously, government has requirements. Government should be seeking to live within its means. That means that there must be a prudent path towards balance.

And right now, of course, the province of Manitoba, after the most significant economic event—but also, of course, principally, health-care event—of our time, had to additionally spend to help Manitobans. And our government was definitely there, helping individuals, helping businesses, helping front-line workers, helping health-care workers in many ways through—of support.

But, obviously, this bill contains provisions for that adjustment to be made over time through subsequent budget implementation legislation and, eventually, to show the path towards balance.

And I would make clear, it would be exactly through what we call the BITSA bill that budget implementation legislation, where those adjustments would be made.

Just a word about Hydro again. Hydro's debt is nearly as large now as the rest of summary government. Sometimes takes a minute just for that to sink in, knowing that just 10 years ago, Hydro's debt was half of what it was today.

Given that reality, we've proposed a limit of—*[interjection]*—oh, I'm hearing criticism from the other side.

I would want to make clear that the reason that Manitoba Hydro's debt is as large as it is, is exactly the mismanagement of the former NDP government. *[interjection]* And now I hear more chirping, so I'll take a little time there to help unpack that for them if they're unclear on the concepts.

The Keeyask dam was originally contemplated at somewhere around \$6 billion, although there were some unofficial estimates of much lower. The eventual final completion cost was \$8.7 billion.

Not only was it the biggest economic scandal of our time that the NDP did this, but they deliberately hid—they deliberately hid—the escalation in known project costs from Manitobans. And that is shocking to Manitobans.

Even in the 2011 budget, the year that I, and the member for Portage La Prairie (Mr. Wishart) and other members in the House were elected to this Legislature, that was a year in which, even for the Bipole project, the NDP government printed an estimate in their budget papers that, later on, experts proved to be \$1 billion short of what they knew at the time to be the true cost.

This was all disclosed in the economic report on Keeyask and Bipole III. And we've accepted the recommendations. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: So as the members this afternoon continue to chirp, I would remind them that the expenditures—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen:—that the overrun in respect of Keeyask and Bipole III, is in the billions of dollars. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$3.7 billion is the modest estimate of the cost overrun.

So let's be clear that borrowing matters and debt matters.

Because even though the biggest deceit of the previous NDP government in respect of Hydro was they said hydro is Manitoba's oil. Don't worry. Manitobans won't have to pay a nickel for the cost of these billions of dollars of assets. We remember that because we were in the House at the time. We were listening to those speeches.

What became clear over time is if there had been a rationale that supported it—and there may have been in 2003 and 2004; there may have been less in 2005—but as the world's needs for energy changed, as the world's ability to extract energy changed, the NDP did nothing to update Manitobans on the actual cost overruns on their record of completing large Hydro projects on task and on budget. But they did more than that. They went around the formal processes that were in place to protect Manitobans. And that's a tragedy.

So now the NDP are wedged because they have to run for re-election in 18 months, and it's a pickle they're in, because here's their challenge: they have to somehow try to convince Manitobans that the \$4 billion of cost overruns are not important and that somehow any amounts that Manitobans now have to pay because the PUB is going to order Hydro to have certain rate increases should somehow be on successive governments.

So that's a challenging place for them to be. But I think we could all agree that debt matters and the path to balance eventually over time matters because we have to be good stewards of our public funds.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to wrap up by saying the following, that we have many laws in this province about how government can—reporting entities can borrow funds for temporary purposes or for working capital. These are tax-supported organizations, and their debt is part of the debt of the government-reporting entity.

So the issue is that not all reporting organizations have legislation that specify how much is authorized for temporary borrowing. This is important. And the question came up during the bill briefing. Bill 16 allows for limits to be set if they are not in legislation. And this includes things like child and family authorities, personal-care homes, other health-care organizations. The provision does not take away from the amounts currently authorized in legislation. I wanted to make that clarification for all members.

In a future bill, we may look to clean up various pieces of legislation across reporting organizations and use a single regulation that specifies those amounts, thereby treating those reporting organizations more consistently. But these amendments are a good first step, and they start by filling in the gaps where there is no legislation or temporary borrowing currently in place.

There's a couple of other things that this bill does—very quickly. It does reflect in the Estimates part C

and part D. We've been doing that already in the last two years in the Legislature. It essentially enshrines this practice in legislation.

Number 2, it also increases the information provided in the supplement to the Estimates of expenditure. I know that this is something that the NDP party and the Liberal Party wanted very much. And so even though we have been providing already that additional detail, this enshrines it in legislation.

Number 3, it allows for a co-ordinated approach on how borrowing organizations—sorry, on how reporting organizations borrow and lend money, which is very important as debts and loans of reporting entities are consolidated in the summary accounts of government. And it streamlines the process for issuing loans for reporting organizations. Currently, after the bill is passed it requires an order-in-council by the Cabinet to issue these loans. That's redundant because Cabinet has, at this stage, already approved the inclusion of these loans and budget. So it makes the process more streamlined as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to put these words on the record. I look forward to the debate this afternoon. Hoping for agreement by all parties to agree to advance this bill after debate to committee stage.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate, subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties, subsequent questions asked by each independent member, remaining questions asked by any opposition members and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

* (15:20)

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Will the minister commit to ensuring that the Estimates books in all budget years are as comprehensive and specific by appropriation and subappropriation as they have been, apart from last year?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): No, I will not, because, in fact, I will meet that and go beyond. Actually, these Estimates expenditure documents will contain more information than previous.

As I said before, we have already returned to providing that additional detail. In some respects, this

enshrines that in legislation, but it also includes other considerations that weren't previously in those books.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I'd like to get on the record clarity as to what are counted as reporting 'endecy'-entities.

So, would this include health care? Would this include education K to 12, education post-secondary? Municipal, Crown corporations? Would it include organizations which might be NGOs or others which receive grants or payments from the government?

Mr. Friesen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that the member for River Heights and I are not strangers to this place, and I know that that individual in this House knows the process very, very well.

I'm always impressed by the depth of the questions that he asks during the Committee of Supply and other things. And, oftentimes, in some respects, I feel there's rules here that he knows, actually, sometimes better than me. So give credit where credit is due.

So—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. Friesen: —I would say to the member, he does know what constitutes government-reporting entities.

But all he would have to do is avail himself of a copy of the—let's say, the Public Accounts, or even the budget and budget papers clearly list what are those entities exactly, many of the ones that he just listed now, you know, post-secondaries and education, and things like personal-care homes or, you know, regional health authorities and others.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Will the minister specify that subappropriations for departmental Estimates be included in the Estimates prepared for this House?

Mr. Friesen: Could the member just repeat the question? I just missed part of the question.

Mr. Sala: Sure. Will the minister specify that subappropriations for departmental Estimates be included in the Estimates prepared for this House?

Mr. Friesen: Yes, exactly as the member has said, the subappropriation—so not just the department, but the same way the books used to present those separate areas of function, including FTEs and costs, in that same matter—in that same manner, not only stipulating the amounts, but the amounts in respect of last year, with comparisons.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I notice in section 33 that the Main Estimates are required to include Estimates of expenses. And the problem the last several years is that we've had half a budget which only includes the Estimates of expenditure but not the Estimates of revenue.

So will there be a requirement that the Estimates of revenue be included for these Estimates, and that that would include the Estimates of revenue from reporting agencies as well?

Mr. Friesen: First of all, to the question that the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) formerly asked, he did mention at the end—I believe he said, and NGOs. But I would be clear that non-government reporting—non-government organizations would not be consolidated.

So in that respect, he would be thinking of those organizations with whom the government contracts, and they enter into service-delivery—service-purchase agreements, but in those cases, those things aren't captured. Think like a faith-based personal-care home that provides personal-care-home services.

To the member's former question, which I am endeavouring to now remember, that he just asked—I may need a refresh. *[interjection]* And my officials advise me that Estimates of revenue are already available, so the report is redundant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Wasyliw: Bill 16 outlines that, for the purposes of accounting, all subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro are considered to be part of Hydro.

Does the minister agree that it follows that when the government privatizes a subsidiary of Hydro, it also privatizes part of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has been clear that while it might be the NDP plan to privatize Hydro, it is not our plan to privatize Hydro.

Mr. Gerrard: My question to the minister is this: Will all the reporting agencies have to borrow only through the Province or would there be some exceptions of reporting agencies which could borrow outside, borrowing through the Province?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question.

I think the member recognizes that it's usually far more preferential for entities to be borrowing through the Province because of the fact that the Province can

go to markets and get better rates than would otherwise be the case.

There's an important form in this, as well, and it speaks to accountability and transparency. You could see with a myriad of arrangements whereby entities are availing themselves of their own funding that there could be problems with oversight.

But I would say sometimes when it comes to school divisions, those are exceptions where school divisions do have financial arrangements with lending institutions and that some sometimes for the purpose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask the minister, why did the government refuse to provide detailed information in the Estimates books last year to Manitobans?

Mr. Friesen: There's no refusal whatsoever, so I reject the premise of the question.

The member does know that we have been working hard to be able to provide good information to Manitobans. That member knows that when it comes to things like the—I'm trying to remember the correct word in our website where we do our disclosure—oh, it's a voluntary disclosure section of the government's website—that there are more documents than ever that are simply put there for the public to avoid a FIPPA process.

So this government's commitment to transparency and reporting is clear but we're always happy to make improvements, as we're doing this year in this new format.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, just to clarify a follow-up, school divisions would presumably be reporting authorities. Would they now have to borrow only through the government and not as sometimes they've done in the past which is borrow elsewhere?

Mr. Friesen: There is no mechanism in this bill that would preclude school divisions from the current practices that are in place whereby, in some cases, they borrow directly from banking institutions.

Mr. Wasyliw: Now, the minister had indicated that they include revenue estimates already but we know that's not true. Under the—Brian Pallister's last government, he didn't—or last budget didn't include revenue estimates.

So, the minister says, well, we're including these things in law so that we're transparent and open and the governments will have to do it, so why wouldn't

that also be true with revenue estimates? Why wouldn't you codify that practice in law so we can't have another Brian Pallister budget?

Mr. Friesen: The member was in the bill briefing for this FAA amendment act legislature—legislation, and so he's aware of the fact that officials were there and answering the question and making clear that the revenue estimates were a supplementary or an additional piece of information, but it didn't provide any information that isn't already disclosed.

So I want to indicate to that member that all he has to do right now on his iPad or his laptop is go to the Manitoba government Public Accounts and he can pull up, this afternoon, the revenue estimates in a format that simply—that supplement was redundant in making available.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the minister mentioned that—the concern about financial markets being destabilized by COVID-19, were there examples with any of the reporting agencies which had unstable situations, or is, in fact—this is not necessary to address a problem which occurred under COVID-19 because it actually didn't occur in Manitoba?

* (15:30)

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question. I don't think anybody can deny the extent to which, in those initial months of COVID-19 and this global pandemic, many financial markets were not behaving functionally. There was a scramble to determine how significant financial disruption would be, how it significantly disrupted access to capital would be, how significant that ability for provinces and senior governments to be able to meet their requirements, their obligations for borrowing would be.

And it was, I would say—I would reflect that it was, in those early days, it was challenging. What happened throughout the pandemic is that that stability came back, which we like to see. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't have good financial controls and that we shouldn't have a better way of voting—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Wasyliv: For decades, governments of all political stripes were able to provide detailed financial information to Manitobans without having to resort to legislation.

Why does this PC government feel that the only way they can provide basic financial information to Manitoba is through the provisions of this bill?

Mr. Friesen: Well, if the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) was listening, he would have heard that Manitoba is now one of the only provinces in all of Canada that still has this old-fashioned way of stating what its annual requirements are for borrowing. However, it's not transparent.

And so, in the spirit and the—of transparency and in an effort to go to best practice we are moving to the same practice as the federal government. We're moving to the same practice as five other provinces, and to be able to state far more coherently what the requirements of the government are for all legislators.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has indicated that there was a lot of surplus of borrowing capability because of previous loan acts, and I wonder, then—I mean, was that real borrowing capability? If it was, why wasn't the minister using it instead of bringing in an interim supply?

Mr. Friesen: Sometimes I wonder if the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) is trying to trick me. What the member knows—and he's smiling now, so I—I'm going to say what he knows that there is a difference between borrowing authority and authority to spend. And he knows that a province—our government could avail themselves of all the borrowing authority they thought they could if it could be passed. But it doesn't give them licence to spend. It is the Legislature that provides licence to spend through this process that we protect and uphold by our presence here.

So I thank the member for the question, but let's not conflate borrowing authority and spending authority.

Mr. Sala: Does the Auditor General support the changes to borrowing authority outlined in this bill?

Mr. Friesen: Long story short: yes.

The Treasury Board Secretariat, the comptroller for the government of Manitoba, the Auditor General, other jurisdictions, the federal government, all carefully—those approaches all carefully studied and the Office of the OAG, as the member has said, yes, carefully engaged in this process.

Mr. Gerrard: I think one of the interesting aspects of this bill is that it's an indication that the Finance Minister and the government want to keep on borrowing and borrowing and borrowing for \$9 million more than the debt is already.

Now, my question, however, is related to Hydro debt. Is the government separating the Hydro debt because it doesn't want the government debt to look as high as it would if Hydro was added on?

Mr. Friesen: Well, it's always an interesting day in the Manitoba Legislature when a member of the Liberal party stands up and lectures the government for borrowing and borrowing and borrowing and borrowing, so I would want to remind that member of what his federal counterparts have been doing for the last two and a half years.

But all kidding aside, you know the member's question is a good one in that, what's the plan?

And I think that the plan that I would want to refer to is the plan that last year we amended the Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Act and we said, look, as challenging as these times are, we still contemplate an eight-year path back to balance is important for governments to be able to be expenditure-conscious and deficit conscious and work towards stability for the benefit of all Manitobans.

Mr. Wasyliw: Are the changes to borrowing authority outlined in this bill, for both government as well Hydro, consistent with generally accepted accounts and principles?

Mr. Friesen: Yes, as I indicated previously, both gap compliance and actually, now, best practice. The federal government follows this same approach with their borrowing authority act. Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, none of those provinces provide for borrowing by their reporting organizations, but I can tell you that when you do the 'peet'—the provincial/territorial scan, Manitoba is clearly moving in the direction of best practice by adopting these new procedures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for questions has ended.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): You know, this bill is interesting, but not for what it says, but what it actually shows. I think this is a good example of this government being in the late stages of its death spiral. And we're seeing a tired government that is running out of gas, and certainly out of ideas, and what ideas they have, you know, 'chairably' are bad.

An Honourable Member: Well, they never had a good idea.

Mr. Wasyliw: Yes. So, it comes down to Bill 16, where the roll-out of this bill is very interesting. The government, you know, threw out the red carpet, they held a technical briefing, and they assembled all the members of the press because this was a big deal. And they drummed up the media on it, and they say the purpose of it was to increase financial accountability and reporting.

What they were sending a signal to their ever-shrinking conservative base, is they were trying to make this a debt ceiling law. They were trying to borrow because, of course, there's no good ideas in Canadian conservatism, so they go south of the border and they, you know, dust off some, you know, tried and true Texas law, and they want this debt ceiling.

But, of course, that's not what this bill is about. That's not its purpose. It's not its content. And it was very interesting being in the bill briefing with the minister, who went out of his way to assure everybody present that this wasn't a debt ceiling law, and that no government would ever actually have to, you know, be governed by this law, God forbid, and that there's lots of wiggle room, which is very interesting when they came out to the press and were basically trying to infer that, in fact—that this is what it was, and that, you know, they are a fiscally responsible government and so please stop leaving their party and please stop, you know, choosing to vote for other people.

So, this is an example of, you know, what basically this whole session has been. It's been all press release politics. There's hasn't been any substantive legislation that's been going through, you know, this House. I mean, we have a deadline next Tuesday and there's not going to be any surprises here. This is a government that's in hiding. This is a government that is basically bringing placeholder and housekeeping legislation through this Legislature.

I, you know, we have been very critical of this government, and when they're bringing in legislations that we're having trouble finding, you know, fault with, you know that there's something gone very terribly wrong with this government. And they've just stopped trying. They've just stopped trying and they've gone into hiding.

So, this is—again, this just shows you how tired and out of ideas they are, that they know they're deeply unpopular, they know that this is the final 18 months of their government and they're biding their time. And their sort of Hail Mary pass is that what if we go into hiding, because people certainly don't like our ideas and they certainly don't like us, so

if we don't say or do anything, maybe we can squeak by in the next election.

Well, you know, I wish them well with that. It's not going to work. But, you know, it's interesting to see. Like I said, it's fascinating.

So, this is not about really much of anything except virtue signalling. This is a virtue-signalling bill where this government is trying to send, you know, a message to their ever-'shinking' base that, you know, the old cliché that we're a fiscally responsible government.

* (15:40)

Well, you're not. You haven't been. And I think the record of this government for the past six years has been one of fiscal irresponsibility. So if we need a recent example of a similar piece of legislation, this is just a new version of the balanced budget legislation; it's bad political theatre.

And, of course, let's recall what happened with that piece of legislation. In six years of government, they modified it four times because they were at risk of violating the law on four separate occasions. And, of course, the consequences of that would be the ministers would have to get their paycheque docked and, of course, they couldn't let that happen. And so accountability went out of the window and they just simply changed the law.

And it was completely meaningless legislation. I think it was ridiculed in the press as being that way, that it was just bad political theatre. And we're at it again. And it's the same thing with this piece of legislation. It's just meant to virtue signal, it's meant to point to their base and say, look, we're fiscal Conservatives, sort of.

And when people ask, well, really, what makes you fiscal Conservatives? You've ran the largest deficit in Manitoba history. You're the only political party in Manitoba's history to have two back-to-back credit downgrades.

This is a government that has run the largest debt in Manitoba history and has borrowed money to give tax cuts to wealthy corporations and the wealthiest in Manitoba, including large commercial landlords like our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). In fact, we're sending tax dollars out of Manitoba to these large inter-provincial corporations that have property here in Manitoba. And somehow—and there is, yes, and clearly that has been terrible for Manitoba.

So this is a sham bill and it's not really doing anything, and that's problematic. And it's not just me saying this, although I know the members opposite value my opinion and certainly hang on my every word. It's the Free Press. The Free Press, you know, it's—so the Free Press, you know, commented about being dragged down to a technical briefing that was, you know, lacking in 'substant'. And they basically—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —commented how fiscally irresponsible this government is.

And, you know, despite this government getting record transfers from the federal government—in fact, the deficit was reduced here entirely by the federal government, this government did nothing to reduce the actual deficit. In fact, they made it worse by irresponsible and reckless wealthy people tax cuts. So, again, you can thank the federal Liberals for getting the deficit down. The money that we got into Manitoba was almost an identical match for the deficit at that time. So, and of course, despite that, you know, we now have record debt and deficits here.

And at the same time this is going on, and again, this is terrible fiscal management, we've had savage cuts to education, to health care, to infrastructure services. So, you know, and again, there's a pattern with this government. There is a set of rules that apply to them and their campaign donors, and then there's rules for the rest of us.

And, of course, we heard, I think, yesterday with the polar bear thing that there was some interesting favouritism in awarding contracts to one of the biggest donors of the PC party; interestingly enough, who gives more than any one of these members do. So that's, you know, you can measure one's commitment that way. We certainly would like to. It shows, you know, where their head's at.

And, of course, this government is notorious for shifting the tax burden off of people who can pay, off of people who are being very successful in the way our rules are set up in Manitoba, the way our economy is built, and putting it onto people who aren't as successful and who haven't been able to navigate our economic rules just as well.

And they've raised the cost of living on Manitobans and not only just, you know, routinely raising hydro. We also know that they have raised university tuition year after year after year. They've been raising child-care fees year after year after year.

And then, you know, what they don't understand, or maybe they do and they just don't care, and kind of very much shoulda, woulda, coulda, is that when you make cuts to education, those systems have to survive, and so they will find the money somewhere else, and where they try to make up the difference is in school fees. And school fees in Manitoba have been ballooning. In a public education system in Manitoba, you shouldn't have to worry and stuff, you know, \$20 bills into your toddler's, you know, backpack because they have all these extra school fees, which didn't exist a few years ago.

Well, why do they exist? Because the schools don't have any money, so now they have to start charging for things that they never, ever used to start charging before, right? That's a huge step backwards for Manitoba.

And then, you know, further cuts. So they all roll downhill. This government cut, again, year over year, six straight years, of cuts to education. You know, my former school division, the Winnipeg School Division had to cut their full-day kindergarten program, right? That's absolutely shameful. And the ultimate responsibility is on the Stefanson government.

But what happens when you do that? And what was so important—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —in that program is that many parents could actually go to work because they had high-quality, reliable child-care through a full-day kindergarten program and their children not only, many of them that may have potentially been at risk, had a start and they were able to catch up when they were behind and to have a promising start. It allowed parents, who often couldn't, because of child-care issues, enter the workforce. And so those programs actually paid for themselves through tax revenue.

And when you don't have those programs, you're having a parent who can't make those kinds of arrangements and is unable to enter the workforce and who cannot contribute to the tax base. It is absolutely self-defeating.

So, of course, this government, at the same time that they decided that the wealthy in Manitoba needed tax breaks, they borrowed record amounts to do that, right? They are saddling Manitobans with debt.

So you have—you know, it's a double insult. So, they made things more expensive for renters by reducing the rental rebate. At the same time, they were

giving their corporate landlord friends the biggest tax windfall that Manitoba history has ever offered. And I don't think it's a big accident that our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) was one of that exclusive club. And, of course, our former premier also had a windfall from that.

So not only did renters lose out from that, you know, tax rebate, they will now have to pay for the interest on the debt for the money we borrowed so that the government could reward their friends. In what world is that sensible, economically responsible and have certainly cost Manitobans millions and millions of unnecessary interest.

So, young people, racialized Manitobans, newcomers, female workers, they all took the brunt of the pandemic recession. They haven't shared in the recovery yet. Many have struggled to return to employment. In fact, there's data in Manitoba showing that the inner city, the core of Winnipeg, has not recovered, that Manitobans aren't equally returning back to this economy and have struggled ever since.

And, of course, Manitoba has the—we are now—and this is a terrible stat—the fourth-lowest own-source generated tax revenue per GDP in Canada, meaning that we are one of the lowest tax jurisdictions in Canada. Which, if you are in a recovery phase, having low taxes means that you don't really recover. If you have, you know, moderate taxes or higher level taxes, you're going to be able to recover quicker because you're going to have more tax revenue coming in—so, basically, the vision—economic vision from this government for Manitoba is that we are a low-wage economy, that they're looking at us as some type of, you know, call-centre economy, and that's their vision.

* (15:50)

But, unfortunately, Manitobans don't share that vision because that means a lot of people are not included in our economy. It means a lot of people are struggling in their daily lives. It means a lot of people do not see a future here in Manitoba. It is a cul-de-sac. It is not where we want to take Manitoba.

You can't cut taxes, cut good family-supporting jobs and have a vibrant economy; it just doesn't work that way. And, of course, this government has got rid of 18 per cent of our professional public service, and it's, you know, again it's one of those self-defeating cuts because we're not able to provide basic services to Manitoba.

You know, at one time it used to take two weeks to get a birth certificate in Manitoba. Now it takes nine months, and that's just shameful, you know. And people need these government documents for work, for immigration, for family law issues, and it can mean the difference between getting government supports or not. And it just adds a further layer of hardship to an already 'struggling' province.

But those type of concerns aren't with this government; they don't feel that; that's not in their experience. And, of course, if it doesn't affect them, to them it's not a problem. And that's probably, I think, the theme when you go to the Conservative caucus room. It's probably—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: You see it being, you know, etched in the woodwork above the door that, you know, doesn't affect us so it's not a problem. And I think that's probably the—better just translate that into Latin and there you go; you have your party slogan.

An Honourable Member: I thought it was shoulda, woulda, coulda.

Mr. Wasyliw: That's also good, too. There's competing ones. I should be fair. There's some competing slogans: You shoulda, woulda, coulda is up there.

So, yes—so, now—and let's just back up a little bit. This government took over when Manitoba had a vibrant economy. We had the second fastest growing economy in Canada, and if you took out oil-producing provinces at that time, we had the fastest growing economy in Manitoba.

Where are we today? Seventh. We've dropped to seventh, and that was even before the pandemic hit with this government's ham-fisted management of the economy.

So, we know the civil service is really broken, that we can't do basic things. Obviously, we're in another crisis with the Ukrainian refugee crisis. We have two people staffing that department. How on earth are you going to process quickly potentially tens of thousands of people coming to Manitoba when you have two people who can do the work? I mean, we have to staff up.

And this government—completely oblivious to it. We've asked repeatedly, you know, are you prepared to—you know, you say this is a priority; you say you care. Well, great; prove it. Staff up this department so we can actually have capacity, but I guess that wouldn't—that would be off-brand for this government

because COVID was a massive crisis in Manitoba and they certainly sat back and didn't staff up. And this was a slow-moving crisis. They had more than enough time to do it. After two years they still haven't staffed up.

We have, you know, the infrastructure crisis in Manitoba, where we get letters about. And, of course, we all, you know, have some tragic experience about that, about the lack of ability of Manitoba to even maintain snow plows and road clearing in a harsh climate like ours. And again, this government seems disinterested in all of this.

And then, of course, we had the, you know, convoy blockade crisis and—which was a huge hit to our economy. And this government, you know, basically was giving backrubs to the trucker convoys, was not, you know, certainly acting into the, you know, best interests of Manitoba. And they just, you know, turn to the federal government and say, help us please. And that seems to be their go-to.

You know, COVID—federal government, help us, please. Deficit—federal government, help us, please. Trucker convoy—federal government, help us, please. You know, and then, of course, now, refugee crisis—federal government, help us, please.

At some point, you have to decide why you're here. At some point, you have to say, like, what am I doing here? What's the purpose of a provincial government if the provincial government doesn't actually want to do anything? Right—there, you know, somebody over there has to show some leadership. And, you know, it's—and I say this in the least most partisan way I can. I mean, this is bad for all of us. You know.

And certainly, you know, we're ready to go on this side, but we need the government to get out of the way. And we certainly can do that with the refugee crisis. We're ready to go.

So we have the second highest mortality rate of any province in Canada. What a shameful statistic. How can a government member feel good about themselves coming into this building every day and knowing that? And then not wanting to fix it, not wanting to make sure that that doesn't become the legacy of this government. Because you'll move on, you'll go on to other things in life, and that will always be an albatross around your neck. That will always be people's perception of your time at this Legislature.

And that was directly the result of poor policy choices. I mean, we have similar provinces with demographics and everything, you know, next to us.

They didn't have that statistic. Why? Because they made different, better policy choices than we did.

And, of course, we've seen nothing from this government about rebuilding the economy. You know, you'd think that this, you know, to use their words, would be laser focused on doing that. But they haven't. And, of course, like everything in this government, the most vulnerable Manitobans are left behind, and that includes our recovery in our economy.

And, you know, their response to the—I think this is the only financial, outside of, just, you know, financial housekeeping bills, this is the only finance bill being introduced this session. Again, out of the normal financial things. And, you know, and this is what we have.

So, now, the Winnipeg Free Press characterized this bill, and I quote, piece of political theatre absent of any real relevance or impact for this government or its citizen, close quote. All right. Now, this isn't a new government. This is a very tired, very old government. And it's got a record, and it's not a good one when it comes to fiscal management.

So we have the highest deficit in Manitoba's history. We have the highest debt levels in Manitoba history, low growth rates in Canada, the second lowest minimum wage in Canada. How is that a stat that you want to be proud of? Right?

And again, we've talked, you know, previously about how that—for some members of the government, a low minimum wage is just fine. It means more money in their pocket. And I think we need a government that is not concerned about, you know, their political donors or lining their own pockets but actually the welfare and benefit of Manitobans. And I think it might be too late for this government.

And so this government has made a very—it's a fiscal mess. And they're making things worse. And they can't run from them. So the so-called caps on debt is pure virtue signalling. They have no real force or effect. The minister went out of his way to say they have no real force or effect.

So why do them? If they have no substantive effect, and they're meaningless, why do them?

Well, it's simple. They have a struggling candidate in Fort Whyte, and he can go to the door and say, look, you know, we care about fiscal responsibility. We have a cap.

So here's the concerning part. We have a minister that says one thing in public—that, you know, they're

attempting to virtue signal about this debt ceiling, and they're like, look, we're just like the US—and then privately makes very different comments that no, that's no such thing here, that there's actually with this bill no meaningful change in law or practice.

* (16:00)

Mr. Brad Michaleski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

There is absolutely nothing new. There's nothing substantive about this. This is purely a public relations exercise. It is cynical. It is disingenuous. And it is wrong. And I think Manitobans are getting sick of this government and their performative politics where it's all about the show and there's really nothing there. Right? I—the Free Press described this as unnecessary.

And the sad thing about this is that they really must think that—very little about Manitobans. They really must think that Manitobans can't see through this and that they will be, you know, taken in by it, and that they're going to, you know, frog march to the polls and vote for them because of some virtue signalling bill.

So, I'm going to quote the Winnipeg Free Press. Quote: The new bill is pointless, ineffectual, unnecessary. I think those are all great adjectives to describe it. And, of course, we saw again the very—it's already maudlin, this Hydro narrative that nobody believes, that nobody is listening to. And it's these—it's this, you know, lullaby that Stefanson government ministers have to whisper to themselves at night so they can get to sleep.

We know that's just—this isn't true. And some of the decisions that they now criticize were absolutely visionary, including the rerouting of the Bipole line. There was obviously commentary that with natural disasters, with climate change, having two lines next to one another is a strategic disaster waiting to happen, would have made our province exceptionally vulnerable, and it could have been absolutely catastrophic and irresponsible to have done that. And it was actually farsighted to route it a different way in order to protect Manitobans. And for this government now to come back and say, oh, but it cost extra money. Well, how much do we put a price on safety?

This is the same government that would have criticized their own premier, Duff Roblin, when he built the floodway. Oh, it's too expensive, we can't have a floodway.

Well, it's paid for itself over and over, time again, and now Duff Roblin is considered one of the better

premiers of Manitoba's history. But if this group was around that day, they would have got rid of him, too, because, you know, that costs money, and we'll never have a flood in Winnipeg.

And then, of course, you know, they talk about Hydro debt. Again, it's so disingenuous. We built a dam with that. It's an investment in Manitoba's future. We have to transition to a green economy. Where is that electricity going to come? We didn't have capacity. We now have capacity. We now have a \$5-billion contract with Saskatchewan. We are going to make money off of that line, which will keep hydro affordable and will prevent this government from continually raising hydro rates on the good citizens of Manitoba. So this, it is going to pay for itself. It is smart infrastructure investment.

But, of course, this government didn't want to tell Manitobans that. In fact, they hid the fact that they had a \$5-billion contract from Manitobans, and it had to come out, you know, in a way that they didn't certainly want or plan or hope for. And if they had their way, they would have misled Manitobans and allowed them to believe that this dam wasn't generating income for Manitoba and wasn't going to help us transition to our green economy in the future.

You never once hear this government, when they talk about Hydro debt, talk about transitioning our economy to a green economy where we'll need lots more hydroelectricity. And it's not just us; it's going to be our neighbours: our neighbours to the south, our neighbours to the west. They don't seem concerned about our neighbours to the east; we really need a transmission line going that way. They should speak to their friends in the federal government for help with that. They don't seem interested.

So the real purpose of this act, of course, is to, you know, drum up this tired propaganda that nobody believes. And it's a very transparent attempt to try to shape the narrative of Hydro. And it's very interesting because that was like classic Brian Pallister, like that's his greatest hit. Like, you know, when people write of, you know, the shameful history of his time as 'premier', that's going to be chapter 1.

And so, you know, this government went through the, you know, process of backstabbing him and pushing him out. I mean, it's a lot of messy work. And I'm not saying that wasn't in the public interest and I think Manitobans thank you, but the problem with that is that you still haven't got rid of his lines and you're still doing his business.

And Manitobans need to ask, has anything really changed with the new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson)? Because it doesn't look like it, and some would even go so far as say, things have actually gotten worse, you know. And I think, you know, when people look back with sentiment towards the Brian Pallister years, there is a real serious problem with this government.

So, I have more. I would love to keep talking. Sadly, my time is almost done.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy—Mr. Deputy Acting Speaker. They changed the jangle.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Thank you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. It's very important to get these titles right.

I just—before I get into my remarks, I want to wish everybody a happy St. Patrick's Day. I hope everybody enjoys themselves this evening. I'm sure the taxi industry will be busy. And just want to remind everybody, don't drink and drive, and stay safe out there. I think it's important that we—that we remember that, and I think it's important that we recognize that drinking and driving is a bad thing, no matter what the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) might have on his website.

So, but now just getting on to the issue that we have at hand here. Now, I want to provide some perspective for the member—and he knows the ribbing was in good fun. Now, I do want to provide some perspective for the member.

We—when we—we were shocked, I think, today, when we're—when we picked up our papers and heard the news about the police station in Winnipeg and heard the news about how, you know, an administrative officer at the City of Winnipeg has now been found guilty of accepting bribes and has to pay back a substantial amount. This is a huge scandal; it is.

And I'd like to remind everyone that part of all of that is also that that project ran way over budget, and that's kind of all bound into what questions we have around how that project went. Specifically, it went \$80 million over budget. That's a significant amount, and it's something that we should all be very concerned about.

But to put it in perspective, when the NDP were operating—or, trying to build the Keeyask, which they—I don't think they ever did get done, but we did manage to finish it—now, when they were on their way to do that and trying to communicate with Manitobans about how it wouldn't cost them anything, they hid

\$1 billion of overruns—\$1 billion of overruns. So I just mentioned how important the \$80 million of overruns that we had at the City—for the police station. This is a significant amount. And yet—and yet—with Keeyask they were hiding \$1 billion.

That's a number more than 12 times as high, and then take it on a little bit further and say not only did they try to hide \$1 billion, but they had that cost overrun. I mean, the \$80 million I'm quoting from—the police building project, that's an overrun. The cost overrun on Keeyask, conservatively estimated, is \$2.7 billion. That is 34 times as much as the overrun on the police station.

Now, previously in question period, members of the NDP said, if I'm recalling correctly, that what happened with that police station was huge, that it was very big—a very big concern and that they were deeply concerned. And yet they seem to be silent and complicit in something 34 times as large. And that's what we need to remember: the record of the NDP versus the record here.

Now, here we're committed to transparency. I think the Finance Minister has made that very clear, that he's fully committed to transparency. We're seeing that with our information that's being released as part our budgetary processes, and we're going to see that in the coming weeks as a budget is introduced into this House and that it contains more information than any budget has prior, that he's going to actually increase the amount of information that is disclosed as part of that budgetary process. That's what transparency looks like, and that's what this bill is going to get at.

* (16:10)

Now, the member for the opposition—the members for the opposition, seem to be quite frustrated with the fact, I believe the way the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) spelled it out is that he was having trouble finding parts of our legislation that he could disagree with. And that was frustrating to him because he thought that we—he should—he—we should be introducing legislation that the NDP found offensive in some way, I guess for political gain is his objective.

But when you're governing, I can remind the members opposite that your objective is not political gain, but rather the good governance and order of this province. That you are having the interests of the entire province at heart, not just the people that you particularly favour, or the ones that are—happen to be

in your particular intersection of the world, but rather all citizens of Manitoba need—and their best interests need to be the focus of government.

And that's why you'll see this session numerous pieces of legislation being introduced that, in fact, are, apparently, not offensive, I hope, to the members opposite. And we've already passed a good number of pieces of legislation. We've already received royal assent. And I expect that we're going to continue to do that, because good governments bring forward bills and legislation that see to the good governance of our province, and that's what our Province has been busy with doing.

Now, one thing I'd tell you, when I read this bill, when I got the briefing notes about it, I was concerned. I think \$44.4 billion is a big number, and it's important to know that that number is big, and it shouldn't really be getting much bigger, quite frankly. The member opposite was talking about a debt ceiling? Well, I think, you know, in the interest of not just myself, but my children, and hopefully, one day, grandchildren, I think we can all agree that Manitoba carrying so much debt, and Manitoba Hydro carrying so much debt without the offsetting revenue, is not a good thing.

We are going to be spending money for decades to come, paying interest charges on this debt, and we need to make sure that we can do something more responsible by reducing our debts, by paying off the loans that we've had to take, and so many of those loans came as a result of 17 years of NDP mismanagement.

I talked about the \$2.7 billion of cost overruns at Keeyask, there was cost overruns with Bipole, and if I had more notes in front me about all the other cost overruns, I could get into all of them. But the fact of the matter is that while the NDP were in government, they increased the provincial debt by about \$13 billion, it more than doubled it. It's a crazy, crazy amount. And that amount has to be borne by taxpayers here in Manitoba, by myself, by my children, and hopefully, one day, grandchildren.

Now, the member opposite, the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), he was speaking about fiscally responsible government and what that looks like. And I just want to remind the members opposite of what fiscally responsible government really looks like. What it really looks like is simply this. It's a government that is committed to fulfilling their word, to making promises and then actually doing them.

Now, for us, that means reducing taxes like the PST, decreasing, you know, getting rid of broadly the PST had been expanded. It means leading the budget back to balance. We did that once, we're going to have to do it again. And we have a credible plan to do though—do that. But it's a government that keeps its word.

Now, the member opposite, maybe he said more than he intended to say when he talked about what his hopes and dreams, I think, for Manitoba would be, and it sounded like what he wanted to say was that, well, Manitoba right now is a relatively low-tax environment. I'm not sure if everybody would share that assessment, but that was his assessment. He thought that Manitoba was a low-tax environment, and that he believed the plan for success for this province involved taking Manitoba from a low-tax environment to a moderate-tax environment. I don't know how you want to describe that, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, but to anybody with a thinking mind, that is called increasing taxes. That's the NDP plan.

Now, the only question that we have is what approach will the NDP take to that into the next election? What approach will the NDP take to their now revealed by their minister—or by their, sorry, by their Finance critic? Their Finance critic has said, essentially, what their plan is; it's to lead Manitoba to a moderate-tax regime, a higher tax regime, than where we are today. That's their plan. Are they going to be transparent about it? This bill is about transparency.

So, let's review. Back in 20—what was it, '14, 2015? Help me out here. This is before I served here as an MLA, but I know that many of my colleagues here went through that time of when the PST was increased.

An Honourable Member: Twenty twelve.

Mr. Teitsma: But in 2012, we had an election. We had an election in 2011—pardon me, we had an election in 2011 in this province. And in that province—or in that election, the NDP were asked to put forward their vision, and the Progressive Conservatives were asked to put forward their vision. And in the NDP vision, it clearly said they would not be raising the PST.

Not only did it not say anywhere in their vision for the province that they'd be raising the PST, but then, when directly asked a direct question, the leader of their party at the time, Greg Selinger, answered, very clearly, that was a ridiculous suggestion and it

would never happen. Oh, no, no, nonsense. Utter nonsense. That's what he said.

And that was the approach that the NDP took into that election. And sadly, Manitobans took the bait. Manitobans actually believed them. They actually believed that the NDP were a party that would say one thing and do that one thing.

But they found out, to their horror, their shock, their dismay, that that was not, in fact, what they had; but in fact, they had elected a government that had every intention of raising the PST and didn't want to tell Manitobans.

And now we have an NDP in opposition that has every intention of raising taxes on all Manitobans. They said it today. It's in Hansard. Look it up. That's what they're going to do. That's what they are standing for, and we are opposed to that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): I have the next one up to speak is the member from Transcona.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): It's always—your know, it's always important to debate bills like this when they come to the floor of the House.

And I certainly—I'm honoured to follow the member from Radisson, because I will say that citizens of northeast Winnipeg are certainly taking interest in the—what's happening in the House and are very interested in what their members are saying, and what the members are putting on the record.

What I find interesting with this bill, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, is that, essentially, it's a bill that says the government is going to do what they were supposed to do in the first place. And that is provide Estimates that are accurate, detailed, so that Manitobans have the opportunity to see what the priorities of government are.

And I think what happened last year—actually, instead of I think, I know what happened last year, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker—is that Manitobans were onto what this government was doing. By shrinking the Estimates books to the point where we couldn't get an—a real indication of what was going on.

So I'll give you an example, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker. In Education, the Estimates books used to be 140 pages. Last year's Estimates was down to—and I quote the actual number of pages—it was down to 29. Now, how are we able to see what happens in a particular department when it's shrunk to that point?

And, also, ever since this government has been in power here in Manitoba, they've received qualified audit opinions, which means that the auditor has questions. So, what is a qualified audit opinion? It's a statement by a certified public accountant that there is a lack of conformity with generally accepted accounting principles, a lack of conformity.

And, you know, for the people of Transcona, the people of northeast Winnipeg, who pay attention—because when you're obfuscating your numbers, that gets people's attention. And I can tell you, my constituents are concerned with that. They're concerned because this government is bringing a bill forward that is saying—and I will repeat—that is indicating that they're going to do what they were supposed to do before.

And so, why would you waste bandwidth on something like that when all, really, the government needs to do is to publish accurate Estimates books. That's what's important here.

* (16:20)

So, bringing a bill that says you're going to do what you're supposed to do; I can tell you the people of Transcona, the people of northeast Winnipeg, are going, well, why are we even debating this in the House? Why are we debating something that's been past practice in government for 50 years—going back to, just like the member from Fort Garry indicated—going back to the days of Duff Roblin in the 1960s, where Estimates books were beginning to be created that showed the direction that government went?

So, here's the narrative, though, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker. The narrative is that when we're sitting in Estimates, we get to see where the priorities are. And I can tell you in that—in the two years that I've been in Estimates, what was noted in the Estimates books, that were once concise but no longer are, what was noted is that there was a budgeted amount along with the FTEs that were there and then the actual amount.

So what happens is, if a person left the Department of Education, in curriculum or in assessment, they would say that that person is there in the FTE—but in the actual amount that showed that, that person wasn't replaced. So that has a direct impact not only on of course education pieces—curriculum, assessment, whatever department—but it also clearly indicates that this government isn't interested in invest-

ing in those very specific important areas that constituents expect—the No. 1 and No. 2 expenditures in the province: health care, education.

And what we have then are constituents that are asking me questions: Well, what are the priorities? What's the story here? What's the narrative? The narrative is is that this government wants to cut and they try to put up all of these smokescreens that say, oh, no, no, we're not doing that but when you get to the real details, to the real Estimates pieces that show them that if you have 14 FTEs, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, we expected there to be 14 people. Instead, we see six, and then what you end up having is yet inability, then, to provide services that people expect of their government.

I know many of my constituents have contacted me and asked, when can I get my health card? When can I get my citizen documents? When can I get very necessary pieces so that I can participate in this economy, so that I can participate and be a contributing member of Manitoba? And these are really important pieces that my constituents are really concerned about.

So when we say we have a bill that has come forward that says essentially that they're going to promise to do what they were supposed to do, it leaves one wondering what the reason is for this. And then you get to really see what the narrative is here. And the narrative is that they're trying to convince their base that they're reasonable financial managers. Well, and—but nothing from what I've seen in my limited time in the House has really indicated any of that.

We had bills that came before the Legislature, just in the past, and I think—I know for sure about—we all know about bill 64 and the other four bills that were squashed, but there was that other bill, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, that had a large financial hit, a penalty; and that was bill 71. That was meant to be a companion to bill 64. And with bill 71, we have a government that had to borrow money in order to write a cheque to people that didn't even live in this province—so ham-fisted and so unable to meet the needs of ordinary Manitobans that it left many of my constituents kind of shocked and wondering what the priority is here.

If this government were truly interested in ensuring that we're using our money wisely, Bill 71 would never have come forward without having a real and proper review of education funding.

So, instead, they fire this off first before they're getting into a really in-depth review of how we fund public education in this province, because I will say, too, that there does need to be a review of how that's done.

But what you don't do is put the cart before the horse, and that's what's happened here. And now they want to sort of bring that cart back by saying oh, no; we're not going to double that anymore, because they realize the folly, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, of writing a cheque for \$240 million that really didn't have that impact on some Manitobans that it needed to, and as a matter of fact, impacted those that really, you know, needed support the most, renters being one of them, students in Manitoba.

And so, again, what's the narrative? It seems to be one that's ham-fisted, one that really doesn't plan into the future. So then we get this bill, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, that says they're going to do what they were supposed to do in the first place, which does leave me a little perplexed. And that's the part that is really hard to understand.

I just want to review a little bit about how this impacts our constituents. When we're unable to dive into the actual numbers, let's say in Health Estimates, in education Estimates, we can't discover what the actual drive and impetus is, what the narrative is for this government. So how does, like, knowing what happens in Health Estimates, how does that impact the constituent?

Well, I can tell you the people that get a hold of me were profoundly disappointed, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, when CancerCare was removed from Concordia Hospital: a necessary service for northeast Winnipeggers that is sorely missed because not only was that something that was part of the community, it was often people that worked in that centre there lived in the community and created a really good space for people.

And so what we have then, is, again, an inability to see what the narrative is here, right. And if it's only about numbers, if it's only about how we can cut even more without realizing the real human impacts of that, then we begin to see what really the narrative is, and one that, as I said earlier, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, is sort of ham-fisted. There isn't a real—we don't know what the story is here.

And so, then, what we're left with is we're left with a government that goes out in front of the media and says we have this bold new strategy when, really,

this is a strategy that is—that should have been followed in the first place, and that's what's perplexing about this. There hasn't been any valid reason provided for why this bill has to come forward in its current form.

This bill—and I'll say it again—compels government to do something that they should have been doing in the first place, and that part is what has really left not only myself, but also our constituents that really pay attention to what happens in here, wondering what the direction of this government is.

Instead of bringing bills forward that will improve the health and well-being of citizens in this province, we get bills like this. I mean, it's well-stated, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, that we had the worst pandemic response in the country—one of the worst. Why? Because we had a system that was already feeling the strain of a ham-fisted reorganization process in health care that didn't have it as patient-centered.

I know that my colleague from Union Station has often brought that up, has often brought up that before the pandemic the system was already under strain. And then when we hit something that was really—something that was really, you know what, and I will agree when people say and when members in this House say is a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. The systems that we had in place were just unable to handle the strain. They buckled under.

* (16:30)

But here's the piece, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker: Manitoba had the advantage of seeing what was going on in other jurisdictions. We had the advantage of seeing in the first waves how they hit personal-care homes in Quebec and Ontario. We would have been able to plan for that.

Instead, no. We shut down necessary things like incident command centre, where we could have planned to ensure that personal-care-home space, emergency rooms were safe places to be before vaccination was readily and easily available. And again, this again speaks to a narrative that this government doesn't take seriously the health and well-being of every Manitoban.

I will say that it's greatly impacted my constituency because my constituency now has a large and vibrant seniors population that expects access to services, that expects a government to stick up for them when it comes to things like access to medical lab services.

So what ends up happening—yes, it's one thing that you—we know we can say, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, that we'll contract that out. Sure, but what does that mean? What does that mean for people?

I'll tell you what that means. It makes access to services that are necessary even more difficult to acquire. And so we have the examples, of course, as we know many people that are senior, that are older than 65, have to access family to get them to this new supersite that isn't even in Transcona.

You know, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, I will tell you—and I've put this on the record before, but it needs to be on the record again that in Transcona, before the pandemic, before—you know, even when this government was in power, first elected, we had three sites where blood work and lab work could be done in Transcona. That is, when I say Transcona, I mean east of Plessis Road.

Right now, there are zero locations. Zero. So the—for that senior that wants to be independent, that wants to do their, you know, look after their own health care, look after their own well-being, is now challenged to do that because (a) they either have to get a ride, (b) have to get down to Regent and Lagimodiere into a crowded parking lot, whereas before, this service was available at three different locations. And now, truly on their own. Absolutely.

And imagine that person who has looked after themselves their entire life, how difficult it is for them to always have to call people. Because I will tell you—I mean, I'll just give you my own personal experience. I have to go for regular monitoring. You know, and for me, it's easy, right? I get in the car; I can go. I even have access online. I can make an appointment, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, and pick the time that I can go. But I can tell you now that in my office, we've opened it up because people need to have access so that they can make their appointment instead of waiting. Because every time—here's the piece—when you contract stuff out like that, the waiting time for people that just show up for that blood work is often more than an hour. And when you're a person that is a little older, having to fast, having to arrange for rides, having to arrange for pickup, that becomes an onerous task: layers and layers of responsibilities that really— that weren't there before.

So these are the consequences of decisions. So when a government brings or has an opportunity to bring bills forward, we want it to have—we want bills that really impact the quality of life of Manitobans in a positive way instead of in a negative way, right?

Because the narrative here is one that isn't—that is simply, kind of—and I mean, I don't use this word lightly, or these—this combination of words lightly, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker. But we've heard the term tone-deaf not only indicated by media outlets but also ordinary citizens. The amount of outrage that has been on the airwaves this past week is just incredible because of a lack of sensitivity, a lack of connectivity to the very people that we are here to serve.

And so it becomes really, really hard for me because I know I'm going to go back to my office tomorrow, and I'll have phone calls and emails that are saying to me, how is this even happening in our province? Why are bills like this being brought forward that really don't impact my everyday quality of life? We are coming out of a pandemic—fingers crossed; we want to see bills.

You know, and they call me, my constituents say we want to see bills that are going to provide a road map for what it can look like coming out of the pandemic. We want to see bills that invest in Manitobans, that invest in a health-care system that is completely strained. We're still—we were in question period today asking questions about surgical backlog, transferring of patients, all these pieces.

We as representatives are here to bring voice to people that are saying, where are the bills that are going to deal with what we ask in question period; where are the bills that are going to give us hope, to give us light so that we can get to a place where we can then create, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, the Manitoba advantage. Because I will tell you, this is a fantastic place to live, work and raise your family.

I'll tell you, being a civil servant myself for 33 years, I saw some of the impacts of short-sighted government policy. Right? Especially near the end of my career.

And what Bill 16 says—it's kind of like I said earlier, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker: it's a waste of bandwidth; it's a waste of this Legislature's time to put into a bill what is supposed to be happening already when really we should have bills that are coming forward that paint—or provide a road map for where we can go coming out of the pandemic.

So here are some ideas: Bill 16 could have added to it some appropriation for—or even a mention of adult education investment because we know people always want to better themselves, and we know that you better yourself through education. And to make it so cumbersome and to make something as simple as

adult ed accessible, all this government has to do is say—bring a bill forward and say, you know what, EIA people are able to be in adult education instead of EIA saying no, you can't do that, you—can't be part of your plan to get off of assistance. How is education not part of a plan to get off of assistance? I mean, really.

We had the member from Notre Dame today bring a fantastic PMR forward, and I am looking forward to seeing that get through this House because that will have an impact, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, on a person's quality of life. This bill right here, the only thing it impacts is my ability to do my job as an MLA, right, as an MLA because then maybe I might get some Estimates books that actually have what is occurring in government.

And these are important pieces. And you know that, right? You know that. And when you bring this kind of legislation forward, all it says to people is that we're kind of tone-deaf here. We're not interested in what's going to make our province better, right?

* (16:40)

We get these kinds of things that are brought forward that are so difficult to explain to my constituents, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, that half the time I just say to them look, you know what? You want to know some of this? Email some of the government members so that you can get an indication of where they're going with this.

And so, here we are in this House debating this legislation. Again, if this government would have done what they were supposed to do with their Estimates books in the first place, this wouldn't be necessary.

And that, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks by saying we need this government to do better. How do you do better? You bring forward legislation that actually has a positive impact on people, that makes their lives just a little bit easier, and one that says their government doesn't try to pull this sleight-of-hand stuff all the time.

Because I will say that my constituents are expecting more. They are wanting and craving leadership, and what we're seeing so far in this legislative session, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, shows absolutely none of that.

So, at this point, I will cede the floor, and as I said earlier—

An Honourable Member: More.

Mr. Altomare: —it's always—you want more? I can go for more.

But I will say, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, just as I did before, we need more; we need leadership, and we can't let opportunities like this pass us by.

And I thank you very much for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): The honourable member—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Order. Order.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, it's a pleasure to put some words on the record about this bill. We have very serious concerns about it. There is no real need from a debt ceiling—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Lamont: —it seems to be an, as we put it, an Americanization of our system. But it also has impacts on accountability and democracy. It moves control out of the House—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Order.

I respectfully ask the House, there's a member up speaking to this bill, I would appreciate everybody giving respect, and back to the honourable member from St. Boniface.

Mr. Lamont: I mean, one of the benefits this is being—that's being pitched is the idea that'll—we will no longer have to do—will no longer have to present things in the House. And that, in itself, is a concern in terms of democracy and accountability and our ability as members to scrutinize the spending of government.

If it were simply about transparency, there might be an argument, but even in the bill briefing it was very clear that it's about control. And there's a big difference between transparency and making sure that you're—we all know what's going on, and about centralizing and having greater control, on the part of Treasury Board, over many institutions which are not core government, which should be independent, which need to be at arm's length—and which deserve autonomy.

We have independent, arm's-length organizations for a reason, and we have boards for a reason. Part of it is that we rely on the expertise of individuals, whether it's at a Crown corporation or a university or a college or some other institution, because they know

what we're—they know what they're doing better than we do.

In—it's, quite frankly, it's not just a question of second guessing them, but one of the reasons that this is being proposed is that, you know, sometimes an RHA or another institution wants to go elsewhere because they're frustrated with the pace of government, when, in fact, what's happening is that needed investments could be restricted under this bill. The fact that we're having a hard limit doesn't make any sense. It—it's—it doesn't make sense, and it's quite different than the legislation that's been proposed.

So, it's bad for accountability, it's bad for the independence that we need, it's bad for 'interexpertise,' and it is based on an overconcentration and overcentralization of power within Treasury Board. And, you know, it's an example of bills that have sought to give—that we've been talking about for decades, that seek to create permanent Conservative policies, whether it's in law or even in constitutions so that it doesn't make a difference who gets elected.

And then people wonder why it doesn't make a difference, no matter who seems to get elected and the bad—the balanced budget law in Manitoba is a perfect example. It was changed four times under the PCs. I believe it was changed seven times under the NDP.

Because it's—and frankly, having a balanced budget law or having a debt ceiling like this just means that, I think, there's a strong argument that it simply undermines people's confidence and trust in politicians because politicians are continually saying they want to—they're pretending that they care about balanced budgets while running deficits and while also altering laws specifically that are supposed to stop them from—or make them pay a price for running deficits.

So when you have 11 alterations to a balanced budget bill to justify deficits, which is a Keynesian I don't really have objections to, as long as they're being properly done. It just creates a ridiculous situation. It's really unfortunate kind of political theatre where we should just be talking about the needs—we should be focusing on the specific needs and what the needs and costs are rather than saying we're going to have an arbitrary definite fits this—well, this is the absolute—going to be the absolute limit.

It doesn't mean that we don't spend—we don't pay off debt because as we pay, we're actually continually paying off debt that are—they—the provincial debt is not like a single line of credit. It is not like a mortgage.

It is a series of bonds. We are continually in the process of paying off debt as we pay off—as we pay interest, as we pay principle on the bonds that people have bought from Manitoba and that people have bought from Manitoba Hydro. They are continually being paid off. Of course, we have concerns about debt levels but at the same time, we have to recognize the fundamental reality, economic reality that all spending is someone's income, including public spending.

So the more that the public—or if the government pulls back—if there's an expectation that that money will simply just be filled in by the private sector, it won't. It will likely be filled in by debt.

So, if government decides to say we're going to start to try to run massive surpluses, it actually means that they're pulling more money out of the economy than they're putting back in, at a time when we need to be investing. And that's—it's a fundamental rule that, you know, all—when you combine public spending with private spending, that's total income for everybody. So, if—especially in a recession, if private spending drops and public spending drops, as well, we all end up poorer.

You know, I'm a liberal democrat and a social democrat. I made a joke of once—about Brian Pallister, that he was actually a Marxist because Marx is one of the first people to say that governments should run like a business, because when Marx described what a post-revolutionary state like the Soviet Union should look like, he based it on a corporation where you have a board, shareholders, one person in charge, you don't have to worry about elections and you have total centralized control.

And that's one of the reasons why totalitarian states fail because of the absolute centralized control that exists; because they don't trust people to run their own affairs. They don't trust people in expertise and they don't decentralize. There's an expectation that there has to be total control from the top. And that's one of the things—that's another reason why this bill is not acceptable, both of terms of Crown corporations, whether it's Hydro, MPI or other Crowns.

These are independent. They're supposed to be at arm's length. And one of the things that's happened since 2016 is that we've seen the—that part of—I don't know that it's arm's-length anymore because there used to be a civilian board that was provided a buffer between government and the—and Crowns. That was removed in the name of efficiency. We've seen the government passing bills directing what exactly—what

Manitoba Hydro's rates are going to be and other bills attempting to get around the Public Utilities Board.

The other aspect of this and this was hammered home to me both when it came to people who work for Hydro and the fact that Hydro is essentially a monopoly but also that MPI is a monopoly, that it—both of those Crown corporations have the ability to drive people out of business instantly, overnight, if they—because if—they are literally the only game in town.

So whether it's insurance brokers or whether it's autobody shops, repair shops, collision shops, they all of a sudden faced a massive shock when MPI decided to change its policies and they literally—that is where they get their business. Whether they survive or not depends on whether they can—being treated properly by MPI. And the same is also true for lots of people with Hydro. And that—frankly, that is a very serious amount of power and control over people's lives when you have a monopoly.

* (16:50)

So we have to balance that the monopoly power of Hydro and other Crown corporations with very, very strict public oversight to make sure that those corporations aren't abusing their power but also that politicians don't make the mistake of interfering in ways that could end up hurting people. And that is something that we have to be very, very concerned about.

In terms of revenues, look, I—we've—I've said many times that there's lots of—there could be lots of tax revenue that's gathered if we were actually could ensure that people who owe taxes paid them.

We know that there are lots of people who don't pay taxes. There are people who avoid taxes, which is legal. There are people who evade taxes, which is criminal. And in Canada and Manitoba are both tax havens. They're—I mean, you can talk about the high burden of taxes, but at the very high end, Manitoba is—we are a have-not province. We have some of the highest taxes for middle- and lower income people, but we do not have the highest taxes, anywhere near the highest taxes, for people at the highest income.

So, there are people who could be paying more, theoretically, but the other thing about it is that there are lots of people who hide their money in all sorts of ways that really should be dug up because it's only a certain—it's only people who have enough money to hire very expensive tax lawyers and others who can make recommendations to them, who can actually

take advantage of many of these tax breaks. They're not tax breaks that people who work for a living can enjoy, generally speaking. It's people who own for a living, and it's something that needs to be done, and it needs to be done at the provincial level.

The other thing about it is this: when we talk about costs and we talk about, you know, how much we spend on services, the reality is, and this is a big picture, the worse you treat people the more it's going to cost you in the long term. If you don't provide people's education properly, it means it's going to cost you more. If you don't make—if people are sicker than they need to be, it's going to cost you more.

And this is a province that, over the last decades, has treated First Nations people very poorly and has actually treated—and has treated people in poverty incredibly poorly. And that has a real cost in it—there's a human cost; there's the cost in how much more we all have to pay because we're treating people worse than we need to. If we were treating people better, over the long run it would actually cost us less because they would be more prosperous and more independent.

The other is just when we have to talk about, you know, the history, because often, I will say, that the NDP are very often portrayed as being wildly to the left of being big spenders. The reality is this is a position that has allowed the PCs to pretend to be much more centrist than they actually are, when they've been much further to the right than they actually are, that if anyone thinks that, say, that my party is far to the left, you have to be pretty far to the right to actually believe we're anything but centrist.

But, you know, we're—if you look at the history of where we're at, I mean, 1992 EIA rates were frozen; they were rolled back to 1986 levels. And so people are trying to survive now on the same EIA rates—there are some changes to Rent Assist—but that existed in 1986. It's been 30 years, and people are still—and there are people on disability, people who have mental health crises, people who have injuries and aren't able to work; they're only covered for so long and end up trying to live on \$9,000 a year.

It's impossible. It's impossible and, frankly, it's cruel. And we would all be better off if we could support these people better, if they could be allowed to work more, but they're not because we've had an EIA system that has not been significantly reformed in any way for decades.

And, at the same time, we had some of the highest middle- income, middle-class income taxes in the country. And when it comes to Hydro, the other thing is, yes, some money went to go to a dam, but if over a 10-year period when Hydro's debt went up by \$10 billion, \$4 billion—40 per cent of that—went to the Manitoba government, roughly \$2 billion each to the NDP and the PCs. The PCs actually ended up taking more money in a shorter period of time out of Hydro than the NDP did.

The Public Utilities Board said, look, you need to change what you're doing. They actually said, look, since you—since the NDP, I will say, made the right decision by insisting on having bipole have a different route, it nevertheless required greater costs for Hydro, and that because there was—that was a political decision that Hydro should be compensated for that, that Hydro—essentially they should stop taking so much money out of Hydro, about \$900 million worth.

If that happened—if that happened—which, it should happen, if this government stopped taking money out of Hydro the way they are, we could have lower rates than we do. We wouldn't face any kind of financial—we would ruse—reduce the likelihood of a debt pinch or a debt crisis at Hydro, and we wouldn't be facing the kind of layoffs we've had—that workers at Hydro have had to endure.

And that's—and these are all important issues because, I mean, some of this is just truth in accounting and honesty in accounting. Because the result of these years of austerity, which it has been, is that there's an austerity in order to provide tax cuts for—sometimes for, I mean, yes, we've had the small-business tax cut has gone—tax rate has gone down to zero.

But it's also the case that small businesses, which are Canadian corporations—there's an example just recently that one of the founders of BlackBerry was using a tax avoidance scheme that allowed him to shift his small businesses out of Canada into another jurisdiction and pay a lower rate.

It's all just an accounting trick. There's—and, fundamentally, we do need to make sure we're collecting all the taxes we can in a way that's fair, because lots and lots of people are avoiding them.

But the other is that, if you actually look over the history of the last, you know, 30 years and 40 years, there has been a shift, in part because people have realized that the so-called fiscal conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s isn't working. It's broken down.

And I'll just—Marc Lavoie is a professor at the Department of Economics, University of Ottawa, who wrote a very interesting article in *The Globe and Mail* in 2015, simply to say that one of the things that happened in 2008 was that people actually realized, well, we're going to have to spend money.

Though, that was incredibly—that was a massive sea change that happened in 2008. And I'll just example because, actually, Professor Lavoie said in September 2008, he ran into Jack Layton at the airport in Ottawa and said, you know, if you want to pre-empt a huge recession, you should ask for a stimulus program and argue in favour of a large federal deficit; to which Mr. Layton responded that provincial NDP governments had run eight balanced-for-surplus budgets in a row, and told me that if I held such crank ideas, I have to start my own political party.

And it is true. He said, I didn't have to—he said, I—he didn't have to do such a thing because two months later, the NDP, along with the Liberals and the Bloc, all demanded the implementation of a fiscal stimulus package.

And that's one of the things he said. But he also made a comment that, when right-wing parties run deficits, nobody in the banking industry or the mainstream media seems to care, whereas it's anathema when a left-leaning party does such a thing.

When Ronald Reagan first pursued his supply-side economics program in the 1980s, reducing tax rates, creating huge budget deficits and inadvertently becoming the US President to have pursued the most Keynesian fiscal program, public deficits were off the radar. But as soon as Bill Clinton and Barack Obama came to power, fiscal deficits and debt ceilings became the talk of the day.

He's—when he said the well-known Polish economist Michal Kalecki wrote that the social function of the doctrine of sound finance is to make the level of employment dependent on the state of confidence. Sound finance, like a free trade agreement, is just another trick in the hands of powerful vested interests to gain more traction in society.

A sound fiscal position is not crucial to economic growth and job creation over the long term in contrast to what other acts have claimed. Countries such as Botswana, Iran, Estonia and North Korea have public debt ratios that are much lower than Canada's, but I doubt many Canadians would like to live there.

The reality is is that—and it's quite unfortunate that, I think, we are still dealing with economic ideas that are completely outdated. They were outdated in the 1970s.

Paul Romer, who was the chief economist for the World Bank, has said that, at this point, we've had 30 years of intellectual decline when it comes to describing how economics, mainstream—macro-economics, works.

And it's—we're now at the point that it's post-real. The fact is, this is political theatre. I don't see a benefit to it. And—*[interjection]*—what's that? Oh yes, I could—yes, I—oh no, I will. Like, maybe I'll just add—I'll just double-up on all my comments in French now, so. *[interjection]* I have 25 seconds, at least.

But—look, it is—these things do matter, but distribution matters too. Who benefits matters, and who

doesn't benefit is actually absolutely critical. I don't see any of that being displayed in this bill, which is why we will not be supporting it.

Thank you.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Thank you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I believe it is—

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Order. *[interjection]* Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Keewatinook will have 30 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m., Monday, March 21st.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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