

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, 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

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill 36—The Manitoba Hydro Amendment
and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act**

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, that Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, Bill 36 is about ensuring the long-term sustainability of Hydro, which is currently facing levels of debt that exceed any public utility in Canada, after massive cost overruns at Keeyask and bipole transmission lines by a previous government that added billions of dollars of debt.

The bill establishes an integrated resource plan, debt equity targets over time to bring Hydro to a more sustainable position. It also protects ratepayers by setting three-year rate periods and setting a cap on any rate increases. The PUB itself and its roles are strengthened. They get a budget and a role to expand and review and make recommendations on future Hydro construction proposals to ensure the interests of the public and ratepayers are protected.

The three—the four pillars of Hydro are: low rates, economic development, carbon-free electricity and a stable foundation.

Madam Speaker, that foundation was threatened but we will protect it.

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

**Bill 219—The Employment Standards Code
Amendment Act
(Leave for Miscarriage or Stillbirth)**

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I move, seconded by the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), that Bill 219, The Employment Standards Code

Amendment Act (Leave for Miscarriage or Stillbirth), be now read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Lathlin: I am pleased to introduce Bill 219, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Leave for Miscarriage or Stillbirth).

The unexpected loss can be emotionally trying on expectant and new parents. This bill would allow parents to take up to three days of paid leave following a miscarriage or stillbirth. Currently, Manitobans who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth have to cut into their sick leave, lose part of their paycheque or risk their jobs just to take time off to heal.

I hope this Assembly will follow the lead of these other jurisdictions and unanimously support this bill.

Ekosi.

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Social
and Economic Development
Third Report**

Mr. Len Isleifson (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the third report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

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

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on March 21, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 4) — The Path to Reconciliation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réconciliation**

- **Bill (No. 9)** – *The Scrap Metal Act / Loi sur la ferraille*
- **Bill (No. 12)** – *The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act / Loi sur la réorganisation de Peak of the Market*

Committee Membership

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020 and subsequently amended, Rule 82(2) was waived for the March 21, 2022 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

- Mr. BUSHIE
- Hon. Mr. GOERTZEN
- Mr. ISLEIFSON
- Hon. Mr. JOHNSON
- Mr. MALOWAY
- Mr. NESBITT

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

Substitutions received during committee proceedings:

- Mr. BRAR for Mr. BUSHIE

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Hon. Mr. LAGIMODIERE
- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 12)** – *The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act / Loi sur la réorganisation de Peak of the Market*:*

*Pamela Kolochuk, Peak of the Market
Peter Loewen, Garden Valley Vegetable Growers Ltd.*

Written Submissions

*Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 9)** – *The Scrap Metal Act / Loi sur la ferraille*:*

Logan Orloff, Orloff Scrap Metals

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 4)** – *The Path to Reconciliation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réconciliation*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 9)** – *The Scrap Metal Act / Loi sur la ferraille*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 12)** – *The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act / Loi sur la réorganisation de Peak of the Market*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Isleifson: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Bangladesh Independence Day

Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, today I am honoured to join the Bangladesh community in Manitoba and around the world in recognizing and celebrating the 51st anniversary of Bangladesh's independence on March 26th.

Manitoba is a proud home of a large and vibrant Bangladesh community, which has significantly contributed to our province's rich and diverse multi-cultural fabric.

Canada was one of the first countries to officially recognize the independent state of the People's Republic of Bangladesh following the war in 1971.

Recently, on February 14, 2022, Canada and Bangladesh are proud to mark the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between our two nations.

I also want to note, the UNESCO declared February 21st as a day to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by people of all over the world and Bangladesh, and it holds a strong connection to this day. With the passion and persistence for the local Bangladeshi community, a beautiful

plaza has been built in Winnipeg commemorating the importance of all mother languages.

On this anniversary, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Bangladeshi Manitobans for dedication, preserving their culture and traditions while helping to build a brighter future for our province.

On behalf of Manitobans, to everyone celebrating here at home and around the world, happy Bangladesh Independence Day.

Thank you.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Today the Manitoba NDP joins Bangladeshis and Bangladeshi Canadians across this province in celebrating Bangladeshi Independence Day, which is on March 26th. After a war of independence, Bangladesh became a nation 51 years ago. The nation is an upstanding member of the international community and its impact can be felt around the world, including here in Manitoba where many Bangladeshis currently live.

One major group of Bangladeshis in Manitoba are Bangladeshi post-secondary students. Like all international students, these Bangladeshis should be seen by all of us as valuable members of our Manitoban community. We appreciate how they support our economy, offer their insights into our classrooms and enrich our cultural landscape.

Unfortunately, the PC government has hiked their tuition and cancelled international health insurance coverage. It's the wrong approach. But, Madam Speaker, newcomers from Bangladesh persevere.

The Manitoba NDP commends all Bangladeshi organizations in this province working for the advancement of their people and culture here in Manitoba, including the Canada-Bangladesh Association of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg Bangladeshi Students Association and the University of Manitoba Bangladeshi Students Association—

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

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I seek leave to speak in response to the ministerial statement.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: I'm glad to rise today to speak to Bangladesh Independence Day.

The Bangladesh community here in Manitoba has been phenomenal to work with. I know I have been to quite a few events over the years, one most recently with the minister who brought forward this statement where we had the opportunity to learn more about building up trade relationships with Bangladesh.

Madam Speaker, it is important to provide a little bit of background on the independence of Bangladesh and how the partition of India, back in August of 1947, was when Pakistan gained independence from Britain and therefore became separated from India.

Back at this time, Bangladesh was referred to as East Bengal, and then East Pakistan, and it was in 1970, after their general elections, Pakistani military ruler refused to hand over power to the major winning party, Awami League leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and, after that, East Pakistan began demanding independence.

During this time, Madam Speaker, the government was arresting Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, army personnel, and on March 25, 1971, Operation Searchlight was declared by the Pakistan Army and this created a military operation that was essentially Bengali genocide, leading to approximately 3 million Bengalis being killed during the liberation war—

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired. *[interjection]*

The member has requested leave to complete her statement. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: It was the following morning, March 26th, that the independence of East Pakistan from West Pakistan was declared by Major Zia, who later on became president and prominent leader in 1979.

Madam Speaker, independence didn't just automatically begin here. Unfortunately, for nine months to follow, there was a war raging between both regions where, ultimately, many more people died. This war became known as the Bangladesh War of Independence and, finally, came to an end on December 16th, 1971.

Madam Speaker, knowing this history is why we recognize and celebrate the independence of Bangladesh. It is why in different parts of the world, there are celebrations demonstrated through parades, fairs and many different festivities. People can also celebrate from the comforts of their own homes by streaming events and posting on social media.

Those few words, I want to thank the minister for bringing forward this statement.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Robert T. Kristjanson

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I rise today, on World Water Day, to honour a constituent who has steadfastly brought attention to the health of our Manitoba lakes.

Robert T. Kristjanson is a lifelong resident in my constituency of Interlake-Gimli. His family has lived on the shores and fished Lake Winnipeg since 1890: over 130 years, Madam Speaker. Robert T. has been a commercial fisher for over 70 years and passed along the family business to his son and two grandsons. He also served with the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary for 41 years.

Robert T. has spent his life on Lake Winnipeg, and the lake that he loves and respects. He has frequently said: Lake Winnipeg is the jewel of Manitoba. Let's look after it.

This passion for the lake has led him to become a strong and vocal advocate over the years, 'tiyessly' engaging Manitobans to do their part to clean up the pollution that goes into our waterways. He has made it his personal mission to increase public awareness and—of the ongoing algae and zebra mussel issues.

Robert T. led the implementation of the Canadian Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and has a distinguished record of service to a variety of community organizations. Robert T. and his family continue to bring attention to our lakes and economy through a television show that showcases commercial ice fishing in Manitoba. Ice Vikings has been broadcast in 44 countries around the world.

Madam Speaker, I commend Robert T. for his lifetime contribution to ensure the ongoing health of Manitoba lakes and the industries those lakes support.

I would encourage all Manitobans to follow the advice of Mr. Kristjanson in helping preserve our lakes for generations to come.

Amy Jackson

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): It is my great pleasure today to highlight the accomplishments of entrepreneur Amy Jackson from Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

While pursuing a master's degree in Native studies at the University of Manitoba last year, Amy, like so many others, found herself increasingly isolated and depressed while the COVID pandemic was raging. As a way to cope, she began to design stickers through an app on her computer, with the simple goal of balancing out the many depressing things in this world with humour and humanity. Soon after, her business, Native Love Notes, was born.

What started as an outlet for Amy turned into a business with a intergenerational—with a international following and a bricks-and-mortar store in the works. The company's merchandise includes not only stickers but also stationery, buttons, jewellery, phone accessories, prints, clothing and home wares. The goods are plastered with phrases such as Ever Sick, Live Laugh Skoden and phrases such as Go Smudge Yourself.

But other designs tackle much more serious issues. They denounce racism, the Indian Act, the colonizer mindset. Or, like the sticker says, Intergenerational trauma ends with me, they show a desire to make the world a better place.

By now, Native Love Notes has sent merchandise to most European countries, Australia, New Zealand, South America and, of course, all across North America and even Hawaii and the Polynesian islands. Amy and her four staff members are looking forward to opening a Native Love Notes store on May 7th at 1116 Portage Ave.

Despite the success, Amy has no doubt she'll return to university to finish her master's, then a doctorate in history. Her mom said—her mom always told her she was the most determined person she ever met, so Amy says, why not determine to do it all?

Please join me in congratulating Amy for her accomplishments and to wish her all the best in all of her future endeavours.

Ekosi.

John Hendrickson

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I rise today to congratulate the hard-working committee and volunteers who worked so hard to make this year's 75th annual trappers' festival and championship sled dog races in The Pas such a success, and I want to focus on recognizing an individual who has truly earned the name of King Trapper: John Hendrickson.

This year, I had the opportunity to join seven of my colleagues to this great festival.

John began his quest in 1993 entering the Junior King Trapper event where he went on to win two junior titles and, over the years, 11 senior King Trapper titles. John displayed his talents in participating in 21 out of 22 events, like pole climbing, moose calling, axe throwing, flour packing and tea boiling, to name a few.

His interest in King Trapper was generated in school where they ran mini-events. John said as a child his role model was a gentleman named Walter Koshel, and he wanted to follow his footsteps as King Trapper.

In 2006, John won his first King Trapper title. He also attributes his success to Grandpa Mike, who always took him fishing and exploring the outdoors. John said his fellow competitors were like a family and encouraged each other, and that was the spirit of the competition.

Working hard at events that are difficult like pole climbing and the gruelling nine-mile snowshoe race is key to success, as this is where titles are won or lost. John also came second this year at the Cross Lake iron trappers event.

Last year, John took a leave of absence as he is busy pursuing his career in the bachelor of nursing program at UCN.

When I asked John about his future aspirations, his reply was: to graduate from my chosen career where I can help people, and to work in the off-season getting ready for the 2023 King Trapper event. This builds character and is a celebration of coming together to celebrate tradition and heritage, and I am proud to be a part of.

Congratulations, John, good luck in 2023, and we will be cheering you on.

Mennonite Central Committee

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): All Manitobans have been shocked and saddened by the images and stories coming out of Ukraine over the last four weeks. The devastation is almost incomprehensible, and our hearts go out to the people suffering there. For the tens of thousands of Mennonites in our province who trace their heritage back to Ukraine, this horror feels especially real.

While the conflict has meant—has left many feeling powerless, organizations like the Mennonite Central Committee have continued to work to support those in need.

For over 100 years, the MCC has been on the ground providing support for the people of the Ukraine directly. Although the current conflict has forced MCC staff out, many partner organizations remain, helping internally displaced people even as they themselves flee the violence.

Simple but important local relief efforts fill in the gaps and complement larger relief efforts, including providing food, distributing clothing and blankets and buying medicine to support those who are unable to flee. Local churches are offering housing and sanctuary, and the Mennonite Family Centre continues to provide programs for seniors and children living with special needs in Zaporizhzhia, which finds itself on the front lines of the conflict.

Here in Manitoba, the MCC Thrift Shop in Portage held a fundraiser that raised thousands to assist. In Steinbach, The Mennonite Heritage Village held a candlelight vigil to show solidarity and peace. And relief kits continue to be prepared locally and money collected by MCC in Manitoba is still being able to be delivered to those on the ground.

While the work MCC is doing currently is emergency-based relief, they have begun to think about ways to support Ukraine long term, including psycho-social and trauma support, temporary and emergency housing and rebuilding projects.

MCC also wants to remind us that this is just one of many conflicts in our world, whether it be in Ethiopia, DR Congo or Columbia, and just one of the many places that MCC is working to support people impacted by conflict.

In the shadow of a war that involves world powers, the work of the Mennonite community is relatively modest. But for Mennonites from Manitoba, it is one small but important way that we can all work for peace.

Slava Ukraini. [*Glory to Ukraine.*]

* (13:50)

Tyndall Community Market

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Tyndall Park continues to grow in many ways, one of which is by having our very own community market.

This market is organized by Around the World in Winnipeg, in collaboration with Tyndall Park Community Centre, and it is anticipated to take place every weekend from spring 'til fall.

Last year, in 2021, there was a very successful track-the-flavour-truck initiative led by Around the World in Winnipeg working with local food trucks and Tyndall Park Community Centre where \$2,500 were raised and donated to Harvest Manitoba.

Now, Madam Speaker, the market is special in many ways. It contributes to our diversity and vibrancy in Tyndall Park by showcasing local vendors and local talent.

It is open to everyone and has vendors ranging—from food, to crafters, to people who make their own jams and preserves, to farmers and artists.

The market is also seeking applicants, so if you are a local to Tyndall Park and surrounding areas, and have a product, service or skill you are interested in showcasing or selling at the market, please email tyndallcommunitymarket@gmail.com and if you are a youth entrepreneur, there are some designated free spots with the goal of building future entrepreneurs and leaders in our community.

Madam Speaker, the goal is to run a successful community market, but, as with any new initiative, groups need help.

That is why I am asking my MLA colleagues, but, even more so, I am calling on those who live in Tyndall Park to come on out to enjoy the market. The first date will be May 7th, and it will run on Saturdays from 4:00 to 9:00 and Sundays 3:00 to 8:00.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate and thank both Lyn and Lou Alarkon, the co-founders of Tyndall Community Market, for caring the way they do in bringing our community together. I can't wait to attend.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Surgical and Diagnostic Services Timeline to Clear Backlog

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): The wait for surgeries and important diagnostic tests continues to grow. Madam Speaker, 6,000 more people are waiting in pain, waiting with uncertainty, since last count. That brings us close to 170,000 Manitobans who are now waiting while this government refuses to act.

That's right, Madam Speaker, their plan to do nothing to solve the problem simply isn't working. The wait-lists are growing. More people than ever before are waiting in pain.

Will the Premier stand up today and announce a date by which the surgery and diagnostic test backlog will be cleared?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I want to thank our Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force for the incredible work that they're doing, and we look forward to further updates from them moving forward, Madam Speaker.

What I will say: when they did update Manitobans most recently, we had CT scans that were down—the wait-list reduction of two-hundred–2,252; ultrasounds—wait-list reduction of 3,931; MRIs—a reduction of 2,214.

Madam Speaker, we are making progress. There's more work to do. We look forward to the update from the task force.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the waits for MRIs and CT scans are increasing. The number of people waiting for a surgery is skyrocketing. This government can't even keep a simple promise to hold an update to deliver news to the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, behind every one of these figures is a person waiting in pain. When we talk about 167-almost-170 thousand Manitobans waiting, these are not abstractions. These are people that we know in the community. These are loved ones. These are people who are suffering right now while all this government does is stand and make excuses and try to torque the facts.

Will the Premier simply change the page, stand up today, and announce a date by which to clear the backlog?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, the only one who's torquing the facts is the Leader of the Opposition.

I just stated, in this Chamber, Madam Speaker, CT scans—according to our Diagnostic—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —and Surgical Recovery Task Force in their latest post on their website and their update, CT scans—an improvement of 12 per cent; ultrasounds—an improvement of 16 per cent; MRIs—an improvement of 13 per cent.

We recognize there's more work to do. We thank the task force for the work they're doing.

We will ensure that all Manitobans get the surgical and diagnostic procedures that they need when they need them, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, we listen to the doctors. And what the doctors said today is that the wait-lists are increasing. More than—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —6,000 people more are waiting. That's close to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —170,000 Manitobans waiting in pain. And no, we don't listen to the government when it comes to that—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —167,000 Manitobans waiting in pain. We listen to the doctors.

We know that the Premier and the failed former ministers of Health always like to attack doctors. But how did that work out for them? Not super well, Madam Speaker.

And now we're talking about—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —Manitobans waiting in pain.

Will the PCs stop heckling long enough to stand in their places today and announce a date by which to clear the surgical and back—diagnostic backlog?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, again, we are listening to doctors.

And certainly, there are doctors who are on our Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force who have been tasked with this very issue of eliminating the surgical and diagnostic backlogs, Madam Speaker.

So what I will say is, the Leader of the Opposition—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —while he wants to continue to put false information on the record, Madam Speaker, we will continue to put the facts on the record.

The facts are that in areas of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —CT scans, ultrasounds and MRIs, we are making headway, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: We recognize there's more work to be done. We thank the task force for the work that they are doing. We will continue to take the advice of the professionals when it comes to the elimination of the surgical and diagnostic backlogs—not from the Leader of the Opposition, not from the members opposite that are chirping from their seats, Madam Speaker.

We will continue to take the advice of the professionals. *[interjection]*

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Somebody not looking to see that the Speaker is standing and when the Speaker's standing, I'm expecting that there's going to be respect in the room for the role of the Speaker, and that is something I'm asking all of you to please co-operate with.

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

WPS Headquarters Construction Request to Call Public Inquiry

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): A Manitoba court has ruled that the former CAO of the City of Winnipeg accepted a bribe as part of the police headquarters construction.

That is what we know so far. Manitobans deserve to know more.

Now, the mayor of Winnipeg has said that calling an inquiry is in the city's best interest. The current council of the City of Winnipeg is in agreement on that point.

Now, we could get more information. We could get more answers on the record.

This would help uncover just 'whent'—just what went wrong with this police headquarters deal.

Will the Premier listen to the mayor of Winnipeg? Will she call an inquiry into the construction of the police headquarters?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows that this matter continues to remain before the courts, and we

will watch what comes out of that and what ends up being on the record as a result of those court proceedings.

* (14:00)

The Mayor Bowman absolutely knows that the city has—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson:—the ability to investigate these types of matters, Madam Speaker. He has the ability. They have the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson:—ability to question people under oath.

If the mayor wants to go in that direction, he has the powers to do so. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, the PCs and the Premier know full well that civil action does not prevent them from calling an inquiry—no objection to that statement of fact.

We also know that the mayor of the City of Winnipeg wants there to be an inquiry. We know that the current council of Winnipeg wants there to be an inquiry.

We also know that the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Fielding) was a member of council at the time that this happened and he was chair of the finance committee. There's a reasonable apprehension of bias there. It means that, at the very least, the member for Kirkfield Park should recuse himself from any decisions or conversations about calling an inquiry.

Will the Premier assure this House that the member for Kirkfield Park will recuse himself from all discussions about an inquiry into the police headquarters? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues with his smear campaign.

We will continue to do what Manitobans have asked us to do, Madam Speaker. They have asked us to make life more affordable for Manitobans: we are continuing to do that. They've asked us to strengthen health care: we will continue to do so. They've asked

us for economic recovery and growth: we will continue to provide a better, brighter future for all Manitobans.

While they are in the gutter—in gutter politics, Madam Speaker, we will continue to work on behalf of Manitobans.

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

Mr. Kinew: It should be very easy for the Premier to assure Manitobans that the member for Kirkfield Park will recuse himself from a matter that took place while he was chair of the City finance committee. The fact that she does not is very telling.

Yesterday, we also learned that the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—former mayor of Winnipeg, Sam Katz, donated to the Premier's leadership campaign. We know that Mr. Katz oversaw the building of the police headquarters, and so far, the Premier has refused to call an inquiry into that scandal.

The Premier should listen to the calls of the mayor of—City of Winnipeg.

Will the Premier take action and call an inquiry today?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I've stated already that this matter remains before the courts. I believe the member opposite is aware of that. We need to allow the process to go forward. We will continue to follow what the findings are there.

Mayor Bowman knows that he has the ability now—the City has the ability to investigate these types of matters. He has the ability to question people under oath. If he wants to go down that route, Madam Speaker, he's welcome to do so. He has the powers to do so.

WPS Headquarters Construction Request to Call Public Inquiry

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The list of wealthy insiders who donated to the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) campaign was finally released yesterday, only a day before the Fort Whyte by-election.

Sam Katz is on the list. We've been calling for an inquiry into the scandal that he oversaw as mayor. I hope his donation hasn't influenced the Premier's refusal to call an inquiry. She should ignore the money—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine:—Madam Speaker, and do what's right for Manitobans.

Will she get up today and call an inquiry into the scandal it—the City?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Of course, once again, the sort of mudslinging from the opposition is trying to obscure the truth.

And the truth is, as stated by Derek Olson, a senior litigator and a former commission councillor for the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry—an inquiry that was called into the handling of the family services system when the NDP were in government—said that there certainly is a preference to see civil proceedings concluded before an inquiry is held to avoid possible inconsistencies or conflicting results.

That's from a commissioner from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. I invite the member to look it up, Madam Speaker.

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

PC Party Leadership Campaign Premier's Financial Contribution

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Yesterday, we found out who bankrolled the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) election campaign. It wasn't the Premier. She could even—couldn't even spare a dollar from her \$31 million to donate to her own campaign. Instead, she asked all of her wealthy friends to do so.

Ask a business person what they think of a CEO who doesn't buy stock in their own company. That's not a good sign, Madam Speaker.

Will the Premier tell the House why she didn't donate to her own campaign?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I have no idea what the member is talking about and I'm only comforted by the fact that I don't think she has any idea what she's talking about either.

It is true, Madam Speaker, I believe that many, many Manitobans wanted to support this Premier in her role. And we can see why, because she's a dedicated person, given her entire life to—much of her life to civil service, wanted to ensure that her skills were brought to bear to benefit the people of Manitoba, and

many, many people wanted to support her along the way in doing that.

If the NDP are jealous because they can't raise money, if they're upset that they can't raise money, if they're upset because they can't win a by-election—well, we'll see what happens tonight, Madam Speaker.

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

Refunding of Campaign Donations

Ms. Fontaine: The Premier ranks last across all of Canada and, on top of her poor ranking, her performance over the last five months, I'm sure, has her donors very worried: failing on health care, leaving Manitobans to take care of themselves and making out-of-touch remarks.

And the Premier wants us to believe that she only found out about the donors list when she sent her thank-you cards. We know that's not true, Madam Speaker. They're her wealthy friends who, I'm sure, are having buyer's remorse right now.

Will the Premier be refunding any of the donations she received during the leadership campaign?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, Madam Speaker, we are 'guilty' of having hundreds of people who want to donate to support the Premier. We are guilty of having thousands of people who want to donate to support the PC Party of Manitoba. Those are all true things.

Of course, the NDP tried, for many years, to try to have the vote tax because they couldn't raise any money for their own party, Madam Speaker, so they had to bring in that scheme to try to get money into their coffers.

I know the member opposite is very negative about a lot of things, Madam Speaker. We have an economy that's growing. We have among the lowest unemployment in all of Canada. It's spring in Manitoba. The restrictions are lifting. The Jets, well, they probably are going to do better in the next 20 days, and the Bombers are going to repeat in the Grey Cup.

There's lots to celebrate in Manitoba today and in the future, especially under this Premier, Madam Speaker.

Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Community Support Worker Wages

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, support workers who support adults with intellectual

and developmental disabilities are facing challenges like never before. They've taken huge risks during this pandemic, but their wages are not keeping up. There is a tremendous labour shortage in this field, which needs to change.

Will the minister ensure that these skilled professionals can afford to keep working in these very important jobs?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'm very pleased that the member asked this question because it gives me an opportunity to rise in this House and thank the hundreds of dedicated workers who came to work each and every day throughout the pandemic to care for nearly 7,000 Manitobans with intellectual disabilities.

* (14:10)

We certainly salute them. We applaud their efforts. We did provide support through the pandemic staffing support program. We are in conversations in terms of how we can make their work environment sustainable so that we can have a strong recruitment-retention aspect to enhancing their work sector.

And I'll be more than happy to give updates to this House in days to come.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, wages for those who support adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities are falling far behind. These workers are dedicated and they are committed and they provide dignified care.

But many of them are living in poverty, and that is not right. You can actually get paid more at a starting job at Tim Hortons than at a starting job in some of the houses in this province taking care of people with disabilities.

We need a government prepared to make a difference.

Will the minister change direction and start paying these workers what they deserve?

Ms. Squires: Well, I'd like to thank the member for pointing out that, under the NDP government, CLDS workers received zero increase in 17 years.

Our government is going to correct that. Our government is going to correct the wrong path that the NDP started down by ignoring these workers, and we

are going to be helping build a sustainable workforce and providing them with the wages that they deserve.

I'd also like to take this opportunity—that, also under the NDP, they did absolutely nothing to support children with disabilities. That is why we brought forward an \$8-million bridge program to help children with intellectual and developmental disabilities get the support that they need.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, the staffing situation for community support workers is dire. Non-profits are not able to provide competitive wages, and inflation is now 5.7 per cent and staff turnover has gotten worse.

Some clients have to have two, three, four hundred workers in their lifetime or more, and this is really bad for the people who need support.

This government has had six years to make a difference on this file. People's wages have been frozen. We need a government prepared to address this problem.

Will the minister provide new funding for community support professionals today?

Ms. Squires: Madam Speaker, our government has been investing more in our budget each year to support people with disabilities, more than the NDP ever did. And we will be providing stability and sustainability initiatives to ensure that we have a strong, stable workforce for people living with developmental disabilities.

This was work that was neglected for 17 years under the NDP government, where people slid deeper into poverty. We are going to correct that record. We are going to make investments—[interjection]—we're going to continue making that—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires:—investments so that people living with disabilities can have a dignified life in the province of Manitoba.

Employment and Income Assistance Recipients Early Canada Pension Plan Claims

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): When a person claims CPP early at the age of 60, it results in a large reduction to the money they receive for the rest of their lives. When I raised a concern last week about

the PC government doing just that, the minister just deflected and refused to answer the question.

People like Bertrand Murdoch are being forced to take CPP early against their will; and if they don't, they're being cut off of EIA. The result: Mr. Murdoch is now being—is now going to be evicted at the end of the month because he was kicked off EIA disability in January for refusing to take CPP early.

Will the minister help Mr. Murdoch and immediately stop this practice of forcing EIA recipients to claim CPP early?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Well, I'd like to just point out for the member that we have invested nearly 25 per cent more in EIA since we formed office than the NDP government ever did. We're nearly \$500 million up from their \$383 million.

In regards to her constituent, I can assure the member that the minute that she had brought that information to my attention, instead of debating it on the floor of the Legislature, I went to my department and I asked my department to review the case and to get in touch with her constituent, which I have been assured that the department is working very closely with her constituent. In fact, calls were made as late as yesterday afternoon, I'm told, and if there's more work to be done, we will certainly be doing that personalized case work, not on the floor of the Legislature but in the department where it belongs.

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

Mrs. Smith: Many letters were sent to that minister, and she knows it. Only because it was brought to the floor has she now begun to take notice of it.

Today, a court hearing is beginning against this government's wrongful practice of clawing back CPP benefits to pay back provincial disability assistance, leaving people without enough money to meet their basic needs.

Two years ago, the Manitoba Court of Appeal found it illegal for this—for the government to force people on disability EIA to claim CPP early.

Madam Speaker, clawing back and forcing people off social assistance is wrong for everyone, disability or not. The minister has a chance to right the wrong today.

Will she do the right thing and stop this practice of forcing EIA recipients to claim CPP and stop

forcing Mr. Murdoch from claiming CPP, as well—as she well knows that call was saying—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ms. Squires: I would like to point out that our government has exempted nearly 50 different benefit programs from the EIA regulations so that people can keep certain benefits as well as their EIA benefits.

I would also like to point out for the member that we have invested significantly more in our EIA program—more than 25 per cent increase since when they were in government. We've also quadrupled the Rent Assist program so that we've got more people receiving more benefits.

In regards to her constituent, I can assure the House that we have made the appropriate calls and we are handling casework where it belongs: in the department, not on the floor of the Manitoba Legislature.

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

Mrs. Smith: I spoke to Mr. Murdoch, and he is still being forced to take CPP or not get his EIA benefits reinstated. So, that minister knows that.

She's putting more people in poverty because they're being stretched thin and thinner because this government is forcing them to take CPP early, which means later in their life, they're getting less.

Claiming CPP means that people are getting a third less. It's forcing more people into poverty now and will have greater effects long term. They're stretched thin and having trouble paying basic needs like hydro, which this government has continually raised year after year. It's wrong, and the minister knows it, and will she rectify this today?

Will she stop this practice of forcing EIA recipients to claim CPP early, including Mr. Murdoch?

Ms. Squires: What was wrong was kicking 26 per cent of all Manitobans off of the Manitoba Housing wait-list, and that member knows it. But that was exactly what her government did. They took people off of the wait-list.

What our government is doing is investing more to reduce poverty in the province of Manitoba, including exempting more than 50 other benefits from the EIA regulations, including CPP in certain circumstances.

So, we are making life more affordable, we're raising more people out of poverty than ever before.

That is why we invested 25 per cent more in our EIA budget that the NDP ever did.

Madam Speaker, we know we have a long way to go. We have more people to lift up out of poverty. We know that the last two years has been a challenging time for people in poverty. We're not done the work, but we're going to continue it.

Parents Grieving Miscarriage or Stillbirth Request to Support Paid Leave

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): The experience of a miscarriage or a stillbirth can be incredibly emotional and physically traumatizing for the parents. It is crucial that folks are able to access paid time to care for themselves and take time to grieve and heal.

Manitoba's employment standards currently fall short in providing the necessary time off. That is why I introduced Bill 219 for a second time today, to ensure all grieving parents have access to a separate and fully funded paid leave.

Will the minister legislate paid leave for parents grieving a miscarriage or stillbirth?

Ekosi.

* (14:20)

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Thank you for the question from the member opposite.

Interested in reading the bill that she introduced, and we're looking forward to debating it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lathlin: During the already traumatic and stressful experience of a miscarriage or stillbirth, parents should not have to stress about their next paycheque.

In Manitoba, there is no full-rate–full wage replacement available for parents who are grieving a miscarriage or a stillbirth. If a pregnant person miscarries, they can apply for EI at a fraction of their normal wage.

This is not a meaningful support for people who shouldn't have to stress about finances during an already devastating time.

Will the minister support paid leave for parents grieving a miscarriage or a stillbirth?

Mr. Helwer: Thank you to the member opposite for the additional information. I look forward to hearing more information as the bill is debated.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lathlin: Manitoba has the unique opportunity to lead with compassion on this issue by legislating a paid leave for parents grieving a miscarriage or a stillbirth. There is no provincial jurisdiction that provides a full wage replacement for grieving parents in Canada. Manitoba can be a first.

Will this government do what is right and legislate paid leave for Manitobans grieving a miscarriage or a stillbirth? Yes, or no?

Ekosi.

Mr. Helwer: There are several programs available through Finance for EIA or for mental health that are available. We're reviewing all those programs, and we're listening to the member opposite to see how we can best respond to this.

I know there are several programs available, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba's Pandemic Response PPE Procurement Spending

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We have to ask whether the PCs' handling of pandemic procurement has been as bad as the rest of their pandemic preparedness and response.

As these tables that I table—or, these documents that I table show, in 2020 this government bought \$19 million US, or \$26.6 million Canadian, of masks that didn't fit and couldn't be used; \$1.2 million in unusable, unapproved hand sanitizer made with fuel ethanol; a non-refundable down payment of \$7.2 million to Providence Therapeutics for a vaccine booster that will never be delivered.

Just three 'procurement' deals cost the public purse \$35 million with nothing to show for it.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain how this happened under the PC government?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Well, perhaps the member opposite was not present during the 'pandagma'. I'm not sure what he was doing. I know that our department was responding to the public health crisis.

And we did everything we could to make sure that Health was supported throughout that. We found masks throughout the world that we could use in times of need when we couldn't buy N95 masks anywhere, Madam Speaker. We have production in Manitoba now producing those masks so we can make sure that they're here for any future situations like this. And the Manitoba Emergency Response Warehouse has been set up.

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

Cost of Expired Face Masks

Mr. Lamont: We know the PC government spend \$35 million with nothing to show for it in just three procurement deals.

The hand sanitizer wasn't safe and was never supposed to be sold, according to Health Canada. The vaccine money is gone. And there were millions of masks that couldn't be used. For months after they were purchased, people in health care and early-childhood education were using masks from the last H1N1 pandemic a decade ago.

What happened to the \$26.6 million worth of masks that this government bought and couldn't be used?

Mr. Helwer: Well, we did indeed place a \$35 million order with the federal government, the first province to do so, when they offered supplies of PPE for the pandemic. They couldn't fulfill the order, Madam Speaker. We had to go throughout the world to find supplies for our health-care system.

We bought hand sanitizer that was approved by Health Canada, and then they rescinded that approval, Madam Speaker. That was not used.

So, Madam Speaker, we worked closely with all of our federal and provincial counterparts to make sure that we could keep Manitobans safe.

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

Ukrainian Refugees Health-Care Services

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): There are literally thousands of people fleeing from Ukraine to Canada, many of which will be coming to Manitoba. There have been extreme changes to our health-care system over the last five years, and the issues of health care, both physical and mental, are on the minds of everyone, especially those coming from Ukraine.

Will the province commit to allowing full and free access to those coming from Ukraine and ensure proper investments are made to ensure timely health-care services for everyone?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Manitoba government's support has been immediate, strong and unwavering. We've mobilized all of government's—weeks—to prepare for large-scale arrivals, to deliver a full range of provincial settlement supports for housing, health and mental-health care, K-to-12 education, child care, English language services, social assistance, job placements. Also \$650,000 in humanitarian aid to Ukrainian congress and the Canadian Ukraine foundation thus far.

We have pledged to welcome as many Ukrainians seeking haven as soon as the Government of Canada determines how many are coming.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Cosmetic Pesticide Use Changes to Legislation

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Madam Speaker, stakeholders like Manitoba municipalities have urged our government to take science-based action when it comes to the use of pesticides in Manitoba, as well as consistency with federal agencies.

Can the minister elaborate on Bill 22 and what the stakeholders are saying about science-based use of pesticides?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): I'd like to thank the member for McPhillips for that question.

Last week, I was proud to introduce Bill 22, which will amend The Environment Act to allow the use of Health Canada federally approved cosmetic pesticides throughout Manitoba.

Unlike the members opposite, Madam Speaker, our government stands on the side of science. The current restrictions on cosmetic pesticides, which were introduced by the former NDP government, were based on ideology and ideology alone. These products go through a rigorous testing process and are continually reviewed to ensure they are safe.

Last week, following the introduction—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: —of Bill 22 I was pleased to be joined by Kam Blight, President of AMM. and David Hinton, the Manitoba Nursery Landscape Association, which indicated, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: —they've seen dramatically higher costs and decreased effectiveness associated with them.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Post-Secondary Education Funding Concerns

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, inflation is 5.7 per cent. For the coming school year, that means cuts to the University of Manitoba. This provincial funding puts U of M 5 per cent behind the rate of inflation. Virtually all programs at the university saw no new resources whatsoever.

Again, inflation is 5.7 per cent. The approach this government has is doing lasting damage to our post-secondary institutions.

As schools develop their budgets, will the minister guarantee no cuts, including inflation, at post-secondary institutions for this coming school year?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Madam Speaker, our government is committed to work collaboratively with our post-secondary partners and students to provide the best quality of post-secondary education in Manitoba while keeping the tuition one of the lowest in Western Canada.

We will continue to work with partners to deliver on our commitment.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Moses: Funding below the rate of inflation means cuts. And since 2016, the PC government has cut operating funding for many post-secondary institutions by millions of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Moses: —dollars. Conservative cuts hurt.

Inflation is 5.7 per cent. The situation for next year is worse. This is simply unacceptable.

Will the minister reverse course and commit to no cuts at post-secondary institutions for this coming school year?

Mr. Reyes: Madam Speaker, as I've mentioned before, our government continues to invest over \$1 billion every year in post-secondary education.

This year's funding announcement includes a \$10.3-million boost in ongoing grants to support the nursing seat expansion and \$350,000 for the permanent—permanent—expansion of Université de Saint-Boniface bachelor of education program.

* (14:30)

We will continue making key investments to provide world-class post-secondary education here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, this government's cuts and their priorities are simply out of line with the rest of Manitobans'. Conservative cuts hurt.

Manitobans want and deserve a government that prioritizes quality and affordable education. Again, inflation is running at 5.7 per cent. The minister thinks he can solve it by—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Moses: —jacking up tuition and charging some students even more than others. And that's not right.

We need real investment in education, in colleges and in universities.

Will the minister reverse course and commit to no cuts to colleges and universities in this coming school year?

Mr. Reyes: Yesterday, I had a great opportunity to tour the engineering building at the University of Manitoba, and had a meeting with the president and board chair of the University of Manitoba. I was very pleased to hear their plans and their commitment to provide world-class education to our students in our province.

Madam Speaker, our government will continue to support our post-secondary partners who strive; unlike the NDP, who took the ideological approach to the post-secondary education in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Public Insurance Diversion of Revenue

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): This government's interference costs all of us more. Last year, \$60 million was transferred out of MPI and into a—core government operations. They plan to take another \$53 million this month.

Ratepayers should be enjoying an additional 10 per cent decrease for their insurance. Instead, this PC government took it away.

Will the minister reverse the decision and give the money to the Manitobans today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation): There is no question that when the former NDP government moved driver's licensing into MPI, they set it up very, very badly, Madam Speaker. And that has been left for our government to try to deal with it, and we continue to ensure that the resources are there, even though it was set up so badly under the NDP government.

But, of course, there is good news coming out of Manitoba Public Insurance. We were all glad to see that more than \$300 million in rebates were returned to Manitobans to make life a little bit easy and a little bit more affordable for those ratepayers, Madam Speaker.

We all shudder to think what life would be like under the NDP-Liberal coalition government, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) 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's 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 George Braumiere [*phonetic*], Tracy Smith, Murray Garrioch and many other Manitobans.

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

Further petitions?

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 Sue O'Brien, Christine Reid, Steven McKay and many, many other Manitobans.

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.

* (14:40)

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 many Manitobans.

Cochlear Implant Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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 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 implement—implant about 40 to 45 devices per year.

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

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

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

Signed by Padev [*phonetic*] Anderson, Ken Rose, Glenn Guenther and many other Manitobans.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background of 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.

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): 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 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:

* (14:50)

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.

This petition has been signed by Miranda Constant, Dana Braun and Colleen Pronteau and many other Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Eating Disorders Awareness Week

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba—oh, sorry, I missed the first page.

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 disorders awareness week.

This has been signed by Barb Miles, Lindsey Barsdon [*phonetic*] and Nicole Malette and many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, 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 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-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 petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): First, on House business, pursuant to rule 33(7), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin), and the title of that resolution is Recognizing Climate Resiliency and Green Strategies in Manitoba Transportation.

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

resolution is Recognizing Climate Resiliency and Green Strategies in Manitoba Transportation.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you for that announcement, Madam Speaker.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please call this afternoon for debate second reading on bills 26, 15, 16 and 23.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that—by the honourable Government House Leader that the House will consider the following bills this afternoon: second reading Bill 26, second reading Bill 15, debate on second reading of Bill 16 and second reading of Bill 23.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 26—The Officers of the Assembly Act (Various Acts Amended)

Madam Speaker: I will now call second reading Bill 26, The Officers of the Assembly Act (Various Acts Amended).

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 26, The Officers of the Assembly Act (Various Acts Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Administrator has been advised of the bill, and I table the message.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Justice, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill 26, the officers of the Legislative Assembly, various acts amended, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Administrator has been advised of the bill, and the message has been tabled.

Mr. Goertzen: It is a pleasure to speak to this bill this afternoon in the Manitoba Legislature. The focus of this bill is to address inconsistencies in the enabling legislation for officers of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and their deputies, which can create misunderstanding and uncertainty for members of the Legislative Assembly and the public in general.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Manitoba has eight statutory officers of the Legislative Assembly—often sometimes, mistakenly, I think, referred to as independent officers, I know they

prefer to be referred to as officers of the Legislative Assembly—that help the members of this Legislative Assembly comply with the rules and processes of the Assembly and monitor and assess government program effectiveness and performance.

These OLAs are responsible for upholding and promoting the fundamental principles of democracy, fairness, transparency and sound governance. Each officer of the Legislative Assembly is assigned a specific mandate through a statute to oversee these principles and ensure that they are respected in the operations of the executive and the legislative branches of government.

The officers of the Assembly are the Advocate for Children and Youth, the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Adjudicator, the Ombudsman and the lobbyist registrar.'

These OLAs report to the Legislative Assembly, and their financial and staff budgets are approved by the Legislative Assembly Management Commission, something we refer to as LAMC. And most officers have a permanent full-time staff complement, ranging—ranging from 20 to 50 people.

* (15:00)

Despite the intent that these officers are to be independent from the Manitoba government, the officers are currently appointed by order-in-council, often referred to as Cabinet, based on the recommendation of an individual from the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs. Their remuneration is also determined by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council.

And so a committee of MLAs is formed, a subcommittee is formed from a broader standing committee, they go about the process with help from staff members to recruit toward the filling of these positions, a recommendation is made at that subcommittee, it comes up to the standing committee of whatever committee was struck to do the hiring and then, ultimately, that recommendation is approved and signed off on by Executive Council by Cabinet.

But this bill would amend that process to require that the OLAs be appointed by a motion of the Legislative Assembly, rather than the provincial Cabinet, and this aligns with the practice in most other provinces.

So instead of the committee being struck, the standing committee, a subcommittee then being struck, MLAs and staff on that subcommittee making the recommendation coming back to the committee and then being approved by Cabinet, it would actually—that recommendation could come to the House and the House would approve the hiring of the officer of the Legislative Assembly, which is more consistent with them not being directly responsible to Cabinet.

Responsibility for OLA remuneration, their pay, would also be transferred to LAMC to align with their financial oversight for all other aspects of the office.

So right now, the pay, while I believe is negotiated through that hiring process but then it is then signed off through an order-in-council through Cabinet, it would be done by LAMC because LAMC, for those members in this House who have sat on LAMC before know that, every year, the budgets of the independent—of the officers of the Legislative Assembly come to LAMC and then get discussed and approved. And so this would be in line with that by having the pay for the officer of the Legislative Assembly also go to LAMC.

Under the bill, the OLAs will be required to have a deputy OLA appointed, again, with the approval of LAMC, also making it more consistent. The amendments would also clarify that the deputy OLAs are authorized to act if the OLA is absent or that position becomes vacant, which has happened from time to time.

The positions of Deputy Ombudsman and Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly would be enshrined in legislation to align with the practices of other large OLA offices.

It should be noted that a deputy officer of the Legislative Assembly for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, Information and Privacy Adjudicator and lobbyist register positions would not be created due to the level of work and size of those offices; they are relatively small offices compared to the other offices. These positions have traditionally been held by one individual with the support of an administrative assistant.

The bill would also establish a term limit for the Chief Electoral Officer. Manitoba is one of only four provinces that do not specify a term limit in legislation for the Chief Electoral Officer. The length of the term of office is proposed to be from the date of appointment until 12 months after the date set for the return

of the last writ of the second general election for which the Chief Electoral Officer's responsible.

So, for example, a Chief Electoral Officer is hired. They then would preside over two general elections and then, 12 months after that, their term would expire and, of course, they could then be renewed. This is similar to the term used in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, other provinces and the federal government use a set number of years for a term limit. Manitoba chose to follow the election cycle term limit approach to mitigate the risk of the office being vacated during a critical time in the election schedule.

Current OLAs and deputy OLAs would be grandfathered in their current roles and continue to continue in the office upon the enactment of the bill. So the current Chief Electoral Officer would not be subject to the term limit provisions in this bill. Any new OLA or deputy OLA would be appointed under the new processes created by the bill.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will have the opportunity to discuss this bill in more detail at committee stage. But I would conclude by saying that all of us have borne a witness to the good work of officers of the Legislative Assembly, all of us have had many interactions with them. Those who have sat on LAMC have maybe had more interactions in terms of the internal workings of the office.

The intention has always been—and I think from a government perspective, whether the NDP were in government, and I believe the independent Liberals would feel the same way, that the intention was always to ensure that those offices are not only independent of government, but are seen to be independent on government.

So this really puts into practice ensuring that they not only are independent of government, but they are also seen to be independent of government.

So, I hope that all members can accept this bill in the spirit in which it has been drafted and tabled today.

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: the 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 member. No question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Would the minister tell us how Bill 26 will increase transparency and fairness in how independent officers are appointed?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): It's an excellent question from my friend, and the officers of the Legislative Assembly is, if she know—that I think she may have sat on some of these processes for hiring.

They are hired at a subcommittee level, but then ultimately becomes the Cabinet who has to sign the order-in-council.

It is more transparent if that decision comes back to the Assembly and all members ratify the decision.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Wondering what happens with a minority government when there's an election and the Chief Electoral Officer's term is up at a time that's coinciding with a provincial election.

Mr. Goertzen: So the Chief Electoral Officer would be able to preside over two general elections and then 12 months after that second general election, the term would be up. I think the member might be suggesting what if, after that second general election, there's a minority government and there's a potential for election.

I think that, like a lot of things, the members of the Assembly would see that as a challenge and likely move pretty expediently to reappoint a Chief Electoral Officer. This just brings us in line with other provinces. Of course, like every piece of legislation it can't foresee every potential reality in an election cycle, but my expectation would be that the decision on the extension of—

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

Ms. Fontaine: What prompted the Minister of Justice to bring forward these changes at this time? Where did that recommendation come from?

Mr. Goertzen: It is part of my long-standing desire for peace, order and good government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But also because I understand, and I really do appreciate this Assembly and, you know, those of us who've been here for a relatively long time. I've only been here 19 years, so half the time of the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), but, you know,

you do learn to appreciate the inner workings of things, LAMC, the roles of the officers of the Legislative Assembly, and it just became clear that it was an inconsistency.

It could have gone on for a long time. I don't think there would have been any problem or anybody would have had an issue with it. But it just seemed like an opportunity to clean up something that didn't quite make sense.

Ms. Fontaine: I got so many questions, Deputy Speaker. Could the minister explain to the House which other jurisdictions follow the format of requiring a resolution of the Assembly while hiring an independent officer?

Mr. Goertzen: So I think it's either my advancing age or the acoustics in here, but I didn't quite pick up the question that the member asked. She said something about which other provinces follow an exemption, but I didn't catch the exemption part.

Ms. Fontaine: Could the minister explain to the House which other jurisdictions follow the format of requiring a resolution of the Assembly while hiring an independent officer?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, indeed, my hearing was faulty on that—a resolution, not exemption.

* (15:10)

So my understanding is that this brings us in line with all or most other provinces in terms of not having the Cabinet sign an OIC for an officer of the Legislative Assembly, but I will, for committee—and I've done this before with—I've seen it at yesterday's committee—I will ensure that I have a clear answer for the member opposite prior to my opening comments at committee when this bill comes to committee.

Ms. Fontaine: Could the minister explain why it's actually important to take this decision from the authority of the—of Cabinet to the Legislative Assembly? Like, why is that important?

Mr. Goertzen: It's a thoughtful question from my friend. I think that, you know, would anything have changed, or could, you know, what kind of—what could have happened in the future?

I suppose that, you know, the legislative committee could have come back with a recommendation and Cabinet could have said no, we don't agree.

Now, I don't recall that ever happening, nor do I foresee a situation where that could happen. But I do think that the perception is much better when an

officer of the Legislative Assembly, who is beholden to the Assembly and not to government per se, is actually ratified by the Assembly itself.

Ms. Fontaine: Could the minister explain the appointment process in place for clerks in other jurisdictions?

Mr. Goertzen: I don't know that I have a detailed answer for how every clerk is hired. I might look to the Clerk to provide some of that answer because I know, with her long experience, she would have that—but not to drag her into the debate.

But my—this particular legislation would ensure that it goes through LAMC. And again, LAMC is a body that has MLAs appointed to it. It would be similar, I think, to the federal House Ways and Means committee where things are done by consensus.

And, again, we've been very lucky to be served by tremendous clerks in this House: of course, the current Clerk; Binx Remnant, the former clerk; and that assurance that MLAs are involved in that process, I think, has been a big part—

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

Ms. Fontaine: Could the minister clarify the following: Will all salaries for officers of the Assembly be determined by LAMC?

Mr. Goertzen: So I believe that they will be ratified by LAMC. If I understand the process correctly now, when a committee is formed to hire an officer of the Legislative Assembly, and then a subcommittee is formed, they advertise for the job. People bring in their applications—send in their applications—there is a salary expectation.

I believe when an offer is made to an individual, once the committee has decided who they want to hire, they do so with a salary. Now, that salary then normally gets applied by Cabinet. In this case, that salary expectation, through the job offer, would go to LAMC.

Ms. Fontaine: Can the minister clarify: With the proposed changes in Bill 26, does LAMC now approve appointments of deputy officers for each of the independent officers and how does that—what will that look like?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank my friend for the question.

I believe what will happen is that the officer of the Legislative Assembly who will come to LAMC—and of course they often appear before LAMC, usually on

budget issues—but they would make a recommendation in terms of who their deputy would be, and then LAMC would essentially ratify that person as a deputy. In case the officer couldn't act or was unable to act there would always be a deputy that LAMC was aware of who would be acting in their place.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I just wanted to ask the member—the minister, what happens when the House is perhaps not sitting and there's a need for an appointment? Would this cause delays in the process of getting some of these officers and officials appointed when the House is not sitting for one reason or the other?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes. It is—it's a good question and I don't foresee that delay happening. Of course, if there was a need to ensure that the House was coming and was back to have a resolution tabled, that could always be done. We could always ensure that it would happen.

But, you know, it's a fair question, and I appreciate the member opposite asking it. I'm—can provide him some more details of the different mechanisms by which these things can happen intersessionally at committee, but it is a very important question.

Mr. Moses: Just to follow up on that, I'd just—wonder if the minister, perhaps, considered options, or perhaps looked to other jurisdictions to seek guidance on this question, to see whether there are other models of, perhaps, all parties getting together and deciding we need to cold the Assembly together so that we can put forward a resolution to fill one of these positions, if it is a urgent need of a vacancy.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm not sure that I heard all of the question, and, again, I'm sure that that's my fault or the bad acoustics in here. I think he was asking about, you know, the opportunity for all members to get together when it comes to resolutions and 'thersorse' sorts of things.

I mean, that does happen to some degree in the Manitoba Legislature. I don't know that it happens as much as members sometimes would like, or would like to see more of that. Member's a relatively new member, he may have some ideas. Of course, we're having discussions around rules right now, and we have iterative discussions around rules and there could always be rules that could be changed to provide more of that opportunity.

Mr. Moses: Just to clarify on that point, I was just asking is the minister open to the idea of, perhaps, an all-party committee to discuss when situations would

arise when there's a vacancy in a 'partish'—a particular position, and the House does need to be recalled so that we can pass a resolution.

Is the minister open to that idea of maybe having an all-party committee to discuss when the House should or should not be recalled to fill these sort of vacant positions?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I better understood the member's question, thanks to my earpiece here.

For sure. I mean, this is one of these topics and these situations where when it comes to officers of the Legislative Assembly, I think we've done a pretty good job—although there have been some notable exceptions and I was a part of some of those—where there were disputes about officers of the Legislative Assembly.

But 90 per cent of the time, this is done on an all-party basis. So if there's a need for an all-party discussion about having to bring back the House to ratify a motion or something like that, if there's not another mechanism, of course, I think we all benefit by trying to make these 'non-politleral' discussions when it comes to these OLAs. So that is the spirit with which this bill has been brought forward.

Mr. Moses: I just wanted to ask the member—the minister if there are any other jurisdictions even beyond Canada where perhaps there are further degrees of independence that would allow these positions to be appointed even more independently than what is being offered in this bill. And I only ask that because in this Chamber we are very, you know, independent in somewhat respect. We also hold partisan hats in another respect.

So to wonder if the minister's thought about other options that would be very—increase the independence of appointing appointments for these positions.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I suspect, I haven't done sort of a survey of the Westminster parliamentary system to see how their officers all work. I—that might be good work to undertake, and I, you know, we could certainly look at that undertaking if the member wants.

I want to be clear, right? I mean, I refer to them as officers of the Legislative Assembly. They operate independently, but they do operate under legislation of the House, and they do come to LAMC and make presentations on their budget.

So, you know, independence is always in the eye of the beholder. They're—operationally are independent, but, of course, they are tethered to this House through legislation and through the financial realities that everybody is in Manitoba, and so they present in that way. So they—as officers of the Legislative Assembly, they certainly have operational independence, but—

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

Ms. Fontaine: I got to use it all, Deputy Speaker.

So, it's been almost two years since the Ombudsman office released a scathing report documenting the government's lack of timely responses to FIPPA requests. These same offices still regularly fail to respond to FIPPA requests on time.

Could the minister explain why his government has failed to improve response times since the Ombudsman report?

Mr. Goertzen: I suspect if I wanted to make a point on relevance, I probably could, but that's not really what I'd want to do at this time.

* (15:20)

Clearly, you know, independent officers, they do have a role to release reports. I think it was the auditor that released a scathing report on Tiger Dams, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and how the government failed to get Treasury Board authority to make purchases, and that there were all sorts of concerns about conflict.

So, yes, independent officers, Office of the Legislative Assembly, have a responsibility to provide reports, and sometimes they are critical of the government.

Mr. Moses: I—you know, I think it's important that we look at improving independence when it comes to some of these appointments.

Is the minister looking at improving independence in appointments of other positions, for government positions? In particular, I'll just name one, for example, judges in this province. Are they looking to increase independence when it comes to appointing those types of positions?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm sure that the member will know that the judicial independence is a hallmark of our system of government, where you have the separation of the 'judiciary' and the executive branch of

government. That is well governed by statute; it's government by case law, and we continue to support the independence of our 'judiciary'.

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

And before we open the floor, I just wish to draw attention to a comment made during the question period. Sometimes it's hard to hear in this place; maybe acoustics, maybe one is aging. And ear pieces are available for all who wish to use them.

Debate

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

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I love my ear piece. Yes. It's great. I suggest everybody wear their earpiece, it's a good tool for the Assembly.

I am happy to get up, Deputy Speaker, and speak to Bill 26, The Officers of the Assembly Act. This bill amends various acts with respect to the appointment of the following officers of the Assembly: the advocate for child and youth, the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Clerk of the Assembly, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Adjudicator, the Ombudsman, the register appointed under The Lobbyists Registration Act.

And currently, these officers are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council on the recommendation of a committee of the Assembly. Their remuneration is also determined by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council.

As a result of these amendments, the officers, other than the Clerk of the Assembly, are appointed by the Assembly on the recommendation of the standing committee of Legislative affairs. The Clerk's appointment is on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly Management Commission.

The officers' remuneration is to be determined by the Legislative Assembly Management Commission. The officers may appoint their deputies prior approval—with prior approval to that commission, and current officers of the Assembly and their deputies continue in-office on the coming-into-force of this act.

And then amendments are made to The Legislative Assembly Management Commission Act and five other acts.

So, that's the gist of the bill, and we've heard questions and answers from the minister and from various members that have asked questions here.

I want to spend a little bit of time just commenting on—you know, we on this side of the House certainly do—are in support of maintaining the independent nature of these offices—officers of the Assembly. And so, I don't think that we have anything particularly—any particular concerns in respect of Bill 26.

I think that it's always a good day when we can put an infrastructure in place that ensure the independence for offices in the Assembly.

I do want to concentrate a little bit on the department—or, the office of the Manitoba advocate for child and youth, you know, which will—is part of Bill 26 as well. And so, as you know, Deputy Speaker, Manitoba advocate for child and youth or MACY as they are called, is an independent non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. It represents the rights, interests and viewpoints of children, youth and youth adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving or are entitled to receive public services, and that includes child and family, adoption, disability, mental health, addictions, education, victim supports or youth justice.

The office does this by advocating directly with children and youth or on their behalf with caregivers and other stakeholders. Advocacy also involves reviewing public services after the death of any young person, any young Manitoban, when that person or their family was involved with a reviewable service as defined in The Advocate for Children and Youth Act.

Additionally, the Manitoba advocate is empowered to, under the provincial law, to make recommendations to government and other public bodies. It conducts child-centered research, it disseminates its findings and educates the public on children's rights and other matters under The Advocate for Children and Youth Act.

So it does a phenomenal amount of work for Manitoba, for Manitoba youth and, obviously, everybody in this House will know that those powers were extended just a couple of years back when it included all of these other reviewable bodies. And so we know that the mandate for MACY has increased and that their work has increased.

And they've done some pretty phenomenal work. I just want to concentrate or offer a little bit of commentary on a couple of them. You know, we've had the pleasure of participating in—well, in the last couple of years, certainly over Zoom calls—when MACY was about to release some really critical and

important research and reports that they did. I'll talk about a couple of them, Deputy Speaker.

One of them, back in November of 2021, MACY released the Manitoba advocate's investigation into suicide. Homicide deaths of 45 boys reveal common risks—risk factors which include poverty and discrimination.

And so, what that report did, you know, the advocate made four recommendations to address systemic inequities experienced particularly by First Nation children, youth and communities. And so they—that investigation included looking at the lives of 45 boys who died from either suicide or homicide between the years of 2019 and two thousand and 2018, that those boys had passed and that MACY had done this report and this research.

And what I really appreciate about MACY, what I really honour about the work that MACY does is that they often work with the guidance and expertise and wisdom of elders that they have in the communities and they also have a council. It's called the MACY's Knowledge Keeper and Elders Council. And so I think that that's pretty phenomenal that MACY has been able to include those knowledge keepers and those individuals that hold the wisdom, you know, not only for, you know, Indigenous youth or Indigenous communities, but really for all of us. I think that we can agree that elders play a significant role in all of our lives and so I like that MACY does that.

And they were guided—this report was guided by the guidance of these elders, and together they worked with Dr. Marlyn Bennett. I don't know if folks know Dr. Bennett. I've known Dr. Bennett since we were in university together and she is pretty incredible. She is incredibly brilliant. She has wrote so many reports, particularly with, you know, within the systems and particularly concentrating on children or the exploitation of Indigenous women and girls. And so they worked with Dr. Marlyn Bennett who's from the University of Manitoba on this report.

* (15:30)

And then what I—what they did here was they also held a digital story time—storytelling workshop with two First Nation boys, and they created a music video where the boys reflect on their lived experiences, and so helping to inform this report.

And why is this report and the way that MACY executed this report, why is it important? Because this report should help inform the way that governments respond to systemic issues of racism and poverty and

discrimination for Indigenous boys. And so that's why this report, which is just one report, is so important.

And I just want to read for the record something that the acting Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth said on the release of this. As we create—and I quote: As we created this report, elders spoke to us about the importance of recovering what has been lost: the traditions and ceremonies that connect young boys to their grandparents and support their identity development including storytelling. In this special report and video, the government of Manitoba has an opportunity to listen to the voices of young men and their families. Together we must honour the lives lost by investing in a future where boys—and First Nation boys in particular—have equal opportunities to grow and thrive. End quote, Deputy Speaker.

I think that that is, again, why MACY is so important because it offers the government of the day the opportunity to learn the lessons of youth who passed, right? Who died of suicide or died of murder, so that their lives were not for—were not just for nothing, that their lives matter.

I think that's something that a lot of folks kind of miss on these things is, particularly the way that Indigenous youth, and in particular, well, all Indigenous youth, but, you know, Indigenous boys and Indigenous girls are socially constructed in very different ways. Indigenous boys have been socially constructed as, you know, gangsters, as criminals. I mean, I think all of us remember several years back when the premier, the former premier, Brian Pallister, you know, tried to construct or—you know, all young Indigenous men as criminals.

And there are very real consequences to that social construction. When we construct Indigenous male youth as inherently criminal, or as inherently bad, or as inherently not worthy of trust, or inherently unlovable, it creates the conditions in which young Indigenous boys and young Indigenous men take their lives and/or are murdered.

And so, you know, when we look at Bill 26 and we look at the importance of Bill 26, you know, it's important that we have officers of the Assembly appointed to these bodies that are truly independent so that we don't have—and as the minister said earlier, you know, recommendations from the subcommittee coming and Cabinet saying, you know, yea or nay or nay; that they don't like the individual because the individual potentially is going to be offering too much criticism of the government.

And so, you know, I would agree with the Government House Leader or the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen) that it's important to have officers wholly independent. And again, I think one of the—a good way to illustrate that is the reports from MACY.

I do also just want to put on the record a little bit in respect to the work that the independent office of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth in this report put on there. The aggregate investigation revealed common and modification risk factors for the young men who died, 78 per cent of whom were identified as First Nation youth, and 49 per cent of whom lived in northern Manitoba.

Risk factors included living in poverty, experiencing racism and discrimination, witnessing caregiver substance use and independent partner violence between adults, involvement in the justice system, poor attendance in school and problematic substance use. Gang involvement was also a commonality among many of the young men who died of homicide.

So, you know, I think it's important to put these words on the record because I—you know, my concern is that since we on—some of us on this side of the House had that meeting with MACY, I—we haven't seen any, you know, any press releases or any programs coming out from the government that I see that is tackling the increased risk of Indigenous youth to suicide and homicide. We haven't seen any of that.

And so, you know, it's important that these officers are independent and these offices are independent. But what I would put on the record is that it's one thing to be independent, but then for a government not to do anything I think is problematic.

And so this is a good start but, like I said in the last, you know, six years—or seven years, I don't even know how long it's been here but, you know, we haven't really seen much commitment or action from the government on any of these files, and this is just one of them.

So I want to just put on the record the four points here, the recommendations for the government of Manitoba, and they were: (1) to co-ordinate between government and Child and Family Services authorities to include evidence-based and culturally safe supports for parents with substance use disorders in their homes, with the goal of reducing apprehensions; (2) continue work on an Indigenous inclusion strategy that includes culturally appropriate school engagement initiatives tailored to Indigenous boys to help close the achievement gap and increase high school

completion rates; (3) demonstrate the development or continuation of sustainable initiatives in anti-racism education for all students, administrators, teachers and support staff; and (4) collaborate with the Government of Canada and consult with Manitoba communities to update, fund and implement a provincial youth gang prevention strategy.

So that's one of the reports that, in the last two years, MACY has undertaken. And, again, I would suggest that that report was done in the spirit in which MACY operates, which is as an independent body and I would suggest will become, you know, more independent in respect of the appointment of its advocate.

So another report that we sat in on with the child advocate, the acting child advocate, was in June of 2021, so just last June. And it—that report that they released was the—it was a report on Manitoba Justice's progress on the use of solitary confinement and segregation. And, again, during that time MACY called and renewed its call for a system change. And that was borne out of, you know, many different reports, not the least Nelson Mandela, a report coming from that on the use of solitary confinement, particularly for children.

And so I think that this is a really important report to put on the record here in the House because, again, we're talking about children and using what can be forms of torture, really. The use of solitary confinement can be a form of torture for children.

So it—yes, Bill 26, you know, creates the process whereby appointing Assembly officers to be more independent—which, again, is fine—but when you appoint officers of the Assembly to be independent, but you actually don't adhere to any of the work or the recommendations that they're bringing forward, I think it's problematic.

* (15:40)

Bill 26 could've actually gone even further. Bill 26 could've, you know, embedded language that, you know, the government has a responsibility to respond to the reports that all of the agencies—or, all of the independent offices bring forward, including MACY. They could've strengthened Bill 26 by doing that. And so it's important to put on the record, particularly for everybody in the House here, you know, what is the call for MACY.

And in 2019, a special report made six recommendations calling on the Manitoba government and Manitoba Justice to end the use of segregation for over 24 consecutive hours and work with other government

departments to enhance therapeutic alternatives to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of young people in custody.

And so, again, when I go back to—yes, Bill 26 is, you know, trying to create an infrastructure whereby the appointment of officers are more independent. But since the 2019 publication, MACY has been monitoring the government's process—or, progress by analyzing monthly data and working with departmental officials on strategies to move each of the recommendations closer to completion. And so, in June of 2021—to date, only one of their six recommendations, which was increasing oversight of pepper spray use, had been deemed fully compliant by MACY.

So, the report came out in 2019 and, by June of 2021, only one of the six recommendations had been fulfilled. There's only six recommendations. It's not like it was, you know, 300 recommendations and—they only got one.

So, again, Deputy Speaker, I want to go back to the fact that—and I said this yesterday—or today? Today. No, couple of days ago. Whatever, I don't know.

You know, the government does, you know, tries to bring forward, you know, bills or resolutions or whatever it may be, to act like they're doing something. But at the end of the day, in all reality the government is doing the bare minimum.

And so, yes, Bill 26 is fine and it's good to move forward in respect of, you know, independent officers and, you know, putting that—giving that responsibility to LAMC and then ultimately to this body here, to this room here, that's fine, but here's MACY, one of the independent offices of the Assembly, who has brought forward, again, recommendations there, only six recommendations here, and there's no action.

And I think what's frustrating is that in—and why I'm concentrating my comments on MACY is because we're talking about children. We're talking about, you know, the most vulnerable of Manitoba—Manitobans, which is children, and if you can't get the government to move on following through on all of the recommendations in respect of vulnerable children, what can you get the government to move on? The government has—is doing the bare, bare minimum in respect of Manitoba children who are most at risk.

So, again, you know, the government had an opportunity to strengthen Bill 26, to make themselves more accountable to the reports that come out. You know, in—back in June, when the Manitoba Advocate

for Children and Youth, they released the special report, and it updated—provides insights into the Province's ongoing use of solitary confinement and segregation in youth custody facilities.

And the purpose of their report was to update and amplify the voices of youth who continue to experience segregation and solitary confinement in Manitoba youth custody facilities and also the voices of Justice personnel who say they need more tools to manage children and youth who enter custody already carrying emotional trauma and other complex needs.

I'll share with the House in the couple of minutes that I have left, several months ago I had the opportunity—I've been to MYC, Manitoba Youth Centre, many, many times over the years. I cannot even count how many times I've been there. I went there, oh, I don't know, 20 years ago. We used to—I used to be on an Indigenous woman's drum group. We had a big drum. We were called Daughters of the Dream Drum. And we were asked to go and sing on our drum at the MYC, Manitoba Youth Centre.

And every single time that I have an opportunity to go there—which, again, included just a couple of months ago I was there. And, you know, the youth that are currently housed at MYC are, you know—contrary to the way that they would be constructed—are just babies. Like they're just babies who have so much trauma, who have so much hurt, who have experienced things that, you know, most people will never experience.

And so, when you look at the recommendation for MACY to end segregation more than 24 hours, you know, I don't understand why the government hasn't moved on that. I know that I have. I'm currently—I have a bill that's just getting finished that I will introduce that would, you know, take the advice of the Manitoba advocate and every other professional and expert who says solitary confinement for children is not good. Solitary confinement and segregation for children is a form of torture. And, you know, solitary confinement and segregation that's used predominantly against Indigenous children is a violation of Indigenous children's rights in this province.

And so, you know, I'm just a lowly, you know, opposition MLA, and I'm trying to do the best that I can to listen to the experts that MACY brought together, and to honour the report and the recommendations that came forward from youth and from personnel. I'm just a lowly opposition MLA, but I'm bringing forward legislation to stop that. I don't know why the government hasn't acted on that.

So, you know, it's fine and dandy to stand up in this House and say that we're going to, you know, with Bill 26, create more of an independence within, you know, the Assembly offices—or, officers. That's fine. That's fine and dandy, we all want that, but government has a responsibility to do more. Government has a responsibility to actually read the reports that these offices are producing. And in particular, if you're only going to read one—which, I mean obviously, you're in government, you should be reading all of them—but if you're only going to be reading one, you should be reading the Advocate for Children and Youth. And you should be reading the reports that they brought forward.

I can't go through all of them, Deputy Speaker. I wish I had, like, four more hours to speak on this. You know, in March of 2021 they also released Bridging the Gaps: Achieving Substantive Equality for Children with Disabilities in Manitoba. In December of 2021, they released their annual government compliance report, which acts as a report card summarizing the progress made by the Province toward the intent of the advocate's 51 recommendations made between 2018 and 2020.

Let me put this on the record, Deputy Speaker. I know that I've said it many times. Bill 21 could—or, Bill 26 could have been strengthened by having some form of accountability on the part of the government, and here's why. This year's compliance report, kids can't keep waiting, outlines individual assessments for each of MACY's recommendations, as well as trends observed in compliance by special reports. Only 8 per cent, or four of 51 recommendations for service improvements, have been fully implemented—four out of 51. Less than half, 43 per cent of the recommendations, have demonstrated substantive actions towards implementation.

* (15:50)

Manitoba Education is the department with the highest compliance levels, at an 'overile' compliance rate of 75 per cent compared to 42 per cent the previous year.

Manitoba Health and Seniors Care continues to have the lowest average compliance rating at 25 per cent. This rating can largely be attributed to a lack of action reported towards addressing recommendation to prevent sleep-related infant deaths.

Manitoba Justice has an average compliance of—rate of just 45 per cent, while Manitoba Families has a 43 per cent compliance rate.

These are not great numbers. These show a lack of action, a lack of commitment, a lack of care, a lack of concern, a lack of knowledge on the part of the government, again, towards Manitoba children. Towards Manitoba children who are some of the most at-risk children.

This is not a good record. And members opposite in the PC caucus—and I've said this many times in the last six, seven years, whatever it is—each and every one of those members are complicit in not following through or getting in compliance with any of the recommendations.

So, each and every one of them is responsible. We could've done more with Bill 26—

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

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I 'appreciate' the opportunity to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 26, and I'd like to thank the minister for all the work that I know that he and his staff have put into this to review all of the facts, and compare other jurisdictions.

I know that there's always more work that can be done, and we had some of that discussion during the question period about what other Commonwealth nations do in regards to this.

But I think we recognize—on—all recognize how important it is to have these independent officers of the Legislature, and that there is a clear and obviously accountable process and that the results of their recommendations come forward to the Legislature in a way that we all can appreciate and work with them.

I know that many of us over 'thna' years—and I know that the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) went into some detail of her interactions with the children's advocate—and a number of us have had interactions with the children's advocate on case work and also by going to see and meet with them, and also when they come to report to committee. And we all respect the work that they do.

I think it's very important that that is a very transparent process as much as is possible because we know that there are probably going to be times when some of the recommendations aren't popular with government, whether it's this government or previous governments, and the—but we need to hear what needs to be said and begin to build on that.

And if—you have to have the right people in the right position, and I think that very much, this is what

this bill is all about, is making sure we get the right people, in the right way, in the right jobs, at the right time.

Same with the Auditor General. Of course, we all know that the 'audigeneral's' report is very important to the finance side of how we operate here in Manitoba. He doesn't always agree with Finance Minister. That is a fair judgment, and I know the Finance Minister takes into consideration with great respect what has come from the Auditor General's report, and certainly follows with great diligence what can be done in regards to dealing with the issues.

Chief Electoral Officer, I think we've all had some interaction with during the election campaigns. They are a very important office and we need—and we certainly need to have in place the right people there, and a good working relationship is important. All 57 MLAs at one time or the other—in fact, all candidates—have interaction with the Chief Electoral Officer, and it's important that that continue.

And we all—we report regularly to the Information and Privacy Adjudicator of what our information and our personal assets are each session. And I think it's important that you have a good working relationship and understand what they're looking for and what you have to report in regards to that.

And, of course, every day we deal with the—in the House, here, we deal with the Clerk of the Assembly. We appreciate what she has to say and what she has to know because the range of knowledge that she has is phenomenal. I am not sure how well that this House would operate without her good advice and it's—we're always learning something from her, and I think it's important that that process—that's the appointment of such an important person. Let the record show she seems to be embarrassed by this, but it's the truth. We certainly appreciate the great work that she does and it makes our lives easier, and I think all Manitobans benefit from her.

Other officers, of course, of the Assembly, we appreciate what you contribute as well, and we are always learning in this House. It seems learning the process of governance is never done. There are so many precedents that I don't know how you begin to sort them all out on some occasions. I know I'm certainly learning a great deal every day moving forward.

Did want to comment briefly on the Lobbyist Registrar, which we haven't done too much with here in Manitoba. I had the pleasure of being involved with

the Canadian Federation of Agriculture when the federal government went through the lobby register process. It was very complex to be registered. We were amongst the first through that process. I think it's refined and working a little better now. But at that point in time, we had to register as lobby as—federally, to speak to ministers or even to MPs in Ottawa, and we had to do the reporting, not them, which was sort of, in my mind, a backwards way of doing it.

And at that particular point, they were taking a very broad analysis of what constituted a lobbyist at that point in time and if you had a conflict, from their point of view.

And, of course, in those days, to be involved with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture you had to be a farmer somewhere in some province, and depending on your appointments and election whether or not you had to be a lobbyist. And the federal government took the view that if you were a farmer, you couldn't be a lobbyist because you benefitted from your lobby. And it took us several years to work through that definition and finally started to a level where it was workable and that we could actually continue doing what we needed to do, which was just to meet on a regular basis and explain our case to the various federal officials.

I hope that we can work a more rational approach here in Manitoba. But I do think it's important that lobbyists do report who they see, when they see and I think it's also important that, on the other side, that ministers are transparent on this.

The Ombudsman's process—and many of us have been—dealt with the Ombudsman because of Freedom of Information requests. I know, when I was critic for Family Services, we had—any time, literally dozens of requests into the department for Freedom of Information requests and we had to deal regularly with the Ombudsman, because in those days we were averaging more than six months wait for any Freedom of Information request, and sometimes quite a lot more.

And we would have—often have to repeat them because we would be told no such information existed and we knew—of fact—it did and so we would have to re-file and re-file on these things to eventually get the information. And they were quite helpful in the process and we were able to work with them in a very positive manner.

And just mention in passing the ethics commissioner, which I think it's important that we all be perceived and, in fact, be ethical in our behaviour in this

House. I think it's very important. I think that is something that everybody looks to us to do and I think it's very important moving into the future.

* (16:00)

So, with those few remarks, I certainly support this bill and I would encourage all members in the House. It may not be absolutely perfect, but I think it's a move in the right direction and a very positive step forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Happy to take a few minutes today to speak on Bill 26, The Officers of the Assembly Act.

This bill is—it makes a few changes into the appointment of several officers and officials in terms of the roles that they play, and seeks to increase the independence of the appointments of those positions.

Bill 26 will allow new appointments of independent officers to be made through a resolution of this House in the Legislative Assembly—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

We can keep chatter to a respectable level, that would be helpful.

Mr. Moses: I appreciate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, Bill 26 will allow new appointments of independent officers to be made through a resolution, this House, here in the Legislative Assembly, rather than through the Executive Council. And the—which—this would provide more opportunity to ensure that there is a consensus-based decision. And having that type of decision and that type of model would allow there to be greater independence in the appointments of those positions.

Additionally, these amendments proposed in this bill, in Bill 26, will have the appointment of a new Clerk of the Legislature now follow that same process of requiring a resolution of the Assembly after LAMC has made a recommendation.

Those independent officers will also be able to choose their own deputy to fill in during their absence.

Now, our independent officers have done such tremendous work in Manitoba: from producing so many of our special reports on child welfare to auditing parts of government COVID response; to holding government accountable to freedom of information; to conducting democratic elections; and ensuring members follow conflict of interest laws.

Our officers work hard every day on behalf of Manitobans, and I want to thank them for that hard work.

When we thank them, we're talking about, specifically, the officers of the Advocate for Children and Youth; the Auditor General; the Chief Electoral Officer; the Clerk of the Assembly; the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, which, as we know, is to be replaced by the ethics commissioner; the Information and Privacy Adjudicator; the Ombudsman; the registrar appointed under the lobbies registration act.

Those, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, are some very important and critical roles where independence is not just a suggestion, but it's really something that's at the heart of and critical to those roles, to being able to provide independent decisions when it comes to conflict of interest; being able to provide independence when it comes to our election system.

Those are also so important, not just to all of us in this House, who it often directly affects, but really, to all Manitobans who rely on a good, working government each and every day. And so, we are excited about debating today a bill that proposes to increase independence in these important roles that Manitobans rely on.

I want to take a few minutes to thank those people in those roles and talk a little bit about what some of those roles are and how some of those roles affect Manitobans and what they do for Manitobans because not everyone in our province is aware of these roles let alone how important they are, let alone why it's important for those roles to have increased independence.

Let me begin, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the Advocate for Children and Youth. Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth is empowered by legislation to advise children, youth and young adults of their rights and their services, which should be available to them, because as you, I'm sure—I've no doubt that you're well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are many things in our province, many services available in our province, many rights that are available to people in our province that they may not be aware of. And having an advocate able to explain and to help provide access to services is especially important, and I think it's even more important for the vulnerable people or the people who may not have complete access or information. I think children and youth fit into that category.

Those young people who are looking to—looking for help many times, looking to access a service, perhaps sometimes looking to access that service or that help in time of great stress, in a time of great need, and having an advocate work on their behalf is critically important. You want to make sure that that advocate is able to fulfill their job in the most independent way possible so that they can provide the best advocacy role for children and youth.

Now, the advocate also has the responsibility to raise issues with government on behalf of the Province's children and to advise the government on issues and areas of concern. This is exactly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why the independence is so important. If they're feeling like they have some conflict of interest or some other areas where they might have their interests lie on one side or the other, they might make advocacy difficult for them. It might make their role for raising issues with the government a challenge.

And so the more independence we can add to these positions—and in this case, with Bill 26, through the appointment of these positions—only goes to strengthen their roles, and goes to strengthen the advocacy that children and youth, young people, could have in Manitoba.

The Advocate for Children and Youth also conducts research on issues affecting Manitoba's young people. While doing that research, they monitor, they analyze and they publicly report on the compliance of public systems and services and service providers with those recommendations. And part of that that I think is the most valuable is the part about publicly reporting them: as they're reported publicly, as you're able to shine a light on some of these issues that affect Manitoba's youth and young people, you're able to then see how those issues can be resolved and what role the Province of Manitoba can play in solving those issues.

We know that our province isn't perfect. We know that one of the ways to solve issues that people are facing in Manitoba is by highlighting them, by drawing people's attention to them and calling Manitobans, especially those in this Chamber, to action to work on solving some of these issues, especially for people in Manitoba such as children and youth who are—might be more vulnerable than other Manitobans.

* (16:10)

So, we call not only today to thank people who work for the advocacy of children and youth. We, quite frankly, just call on all Manitobans to do more, to do more to help children and youth.

I think that could be done in the provincial level by adding supports for youth services, after-school programs, more provincial supports for K-to-12 education, for healthy programs for students, for initiatives such as available menstrual products, for initiatives like healthy eating campaigns and food nutrition programs. These are all things that would help students, help young people, help you. And these are the sort of things that we want to advocate for because we know how important young people are in our province.

And so this role of the Advocate for Children and Youth is just one of the roles that's affected by the change to this bill.

Another role that's affected by the change is the Auditor General, who has a—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't imagine you've ever held the role of Auditor General, but I can only imagine that it would be difficult, not just for you, but for anyone to hold that role. And so I want to put a special emphasis on the good work that the Auditor General, and the good role that that is in our province.

Obviously, The Auditor General Act establishes the Auditor General as an officer of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly to provide the Assembly with independent information, advice and assurance. Their office examines and reports on how well the government accounts for the resources entrusted to it and how well it manages its operations.

As the legislative auditor, the Auditor General provides the Legislative Assembly with financial statements and audits and projects audits. Now, this is important when we're taking on such a large financial responsibility, as the Province of Manitoba does, to have clear process of independence for the Auditor General so that the Auditor General has the ability to independently and accurately provide those audits on the financial accounts of the Province of Manitoba.

The Auditor General examines and audits the financial statements included in the province's Public Accounts and any other statements the Minister of Finance presents for audit. As well, as we know, the Auditor General can examine the operations of any government organization or the use of public money by any recipient of that money. It's called the project audits.

So, supported by staff of more than 55 individuals, the Auditor General serves the Legislative Assembly and, in turn, it serves all Manitobans.

And I think it's clear that we've seen, over the history of our province, the importance of that role of Auditor General. We can look at the various reports the Auditor General has put out and published, not just in recent years but going back many, many decades, and how that's impacted people of Manitoba and operations of government. And having that clear delineation, that clear separation between the operation of the Auditor General, the independence of that role and the operation of this House and members is important because we want to be able to have and trust in the Auditor General, trust in a report as being brought forward by the Auditor General because, in many cases, it calls out many of the important decisions and decision-makers, in our province.

So, we hope that that role, it can be strengthened and the independence of that role can be strengthened. And we see some of that, a portion of that, being brought forward, and steps to award—increasing that independence being brought forward in Bill 26.

As the government operations become increasingly 'complex', the Auditor General's role has become increasingly important to investigate matters that are in the best interests of Manitobans. This government needs to ensure—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Members are not meant to be having phone calls in the Chamber, or video calls, and I just remind all members of that rule. If you do need to take a call, there's places to do so just in the anterooms.

Mr. Moses: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll just continue with my remarks there regarding the Auditor General.

So, the Auditor General—his office needs to be properly resourced. The government needs to ensure that it is properly resourced so that it can do its job effectively. As I mentioned, there are 55 staff who work as part of that team. They need to make sure that they have the proper resources to do their job effectively.

This government got a qualified opinion from the Auditor General, which is why last year they brought in and introduced a bill to change the Workers Compensation Board. And it's reports like this, it's opinions like this, it is the work done by the Auditor General and that office that really is what we rely on for making better laws which make the people in

Manitoba understand that we have a responsive system in this province which can respond to their needs.

You know, oftentimes, you know, I know, as a private citizen before elected, I always wondered why things often took so long in government to change and be responsive to the needs of the citizens of the province. And, you know, understanding that these things take time, but also seeing the work done by good offices like the Auditor General to call out when the government needs to make a change; and when the government needs to act, and act more correctly in the favour of workers and employees in our province, such as the Workers Compensation Board.

I also want to touch on another important role affected by this bill, which is the Chief Electoral Officer. And we all can clearly see, especially those in this room who have been elected, can 'sealy' see and know the importance of the Chief Electoral Officer and why independence in this position is key.

As many people in this room, I'm sure, and I hope all members—I don't—can't say I've committed to memory the number with which every member in this Chamber won their seat by, but I'm sure some were large wins. I'm sure some were, you know, good sized wins, medium wins. Some, I'm sure, were very, very close—razor thin. And it's those officials who work to run our elections properly that give us the confidence, give us as Manitobans the confidence, in those close decisions.

And when we see a result that comes down to, you know, 1 per cent, 49 to 50, you know, a really neck-and-neck race, you know, between two candidates vying for an elected office, we want to have that confidence in that—how that election took place, and the result of that election.

And so, by strengthening the independence of the officer—the Chief Electoral Officer, it—the hope is—my hope is that it will only add to the confidence that Manitobans have in their election results as we move forward in our province.

It's clear that the role the Chief Electoral Officer plays, administers provincial elections to ensure that they are fair, to ensure that they are free of political interference and influence. And that's all set out in The Elections Act and The Election Financing Act.

Of course, reporting to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the CEO must be, and must remain non-partisan, and may not vote in an election. That officer of the chief—the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, that's, as we know commonly, Elections Manitoba,

must always be ready to conduct elections, by-elections and referenda. And in that process of being ready, you must understand the amount of work that it takes to get election ready.

I know we all—and in this Chamber know—what it takes to get election ready in terms of a candidate and a campaign but we might not always understand what that means to get election ready in terms of running an election from the point of view of a Chief Electoral Officer.

And so, I thank the Chief Electoral Officer for the good work that they do, and all the staff who work in that office, and all the staff who—and volunteers who come up and work and help out during election time. Like so many of our campaigns, and as so many of us, we ramp up in the lead up to an election. And we ramp up in staffing and in the efforts that we do to prepare for an election.

* (16:20)

And I know Elections Manitoba does the same. They ramp up in what they do. And so, all those who were working, you know, all year round to prepare and make sure that Manitoba is election ready, and to all of those who are part of that team who come on board in the lead-up to and during an election: I thank you.

I can even think of times when, you know, during my time as a candidate going door to door and knocking and meeting residents in my community, where I have, you know, coincidentally bumped into people who are trying to enumerate citizens in our province and residents in my area.

And seeing the good work first-hand, up close, face to face with people who are working with Elections Manitoba really heartens and strengthens my confidence in the system, the electoral system, and the electoral process that we have.

And so, it's pleasing to know that, you know, we're trying to take steps through Bill 26 to even further strengthen the independence of that role, and thus, strengthen the electoral system which we all rely on in Manitoba.

Of course, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer remains ready to go into election mode, and Elections Manitoba enables all qualified Manitobans to vote in provincial elections. They do this several ways which are beneficial, and I think one of the ways

that I think all Manitobans know is by promoting opportunities to vote and educating voters about the electoral process.

Those are, I think, standards and initiatives within Elections Manitoba which benefits all of us in the province.

The next role that I want to highlight as a part of this bill, which I—again, I want to thank for their hard work and—is the Clerk of the Assembly. And I know that we have an amazing Clerk here who is always a wealth of resource for us in the Legislative Assembly, and is a 'perman' employee—permanent employee of the Legislature.

The role, as we know, is responsible for the Legislative Assembly through the Speaker, for maintaining the records of the Assembly, and for the 'custodity'—custody of legislative documents. These documents—such as Order Papers, votes, proceedings, debates, things in Hansard—are the lifeblood, the living daily documents that we rely on to organize our debate; to prepare ourselves for question period, for bill debate, for committee hearings and for votes.

And all these documents, all this work that we do gets supported, and gets led and gets cared for by the amazing team of clerks that we had headed by our—the Clerk of our Assembly.

And so, I want to thank our head clerk, our Clerk, for the good work that she does, and all the people who support her team because that's an invaluable role that we as legislators cannot take for granted and must appreciate for what it is, for what it means to us, and for how it allows us to do our jobs better in representing the views, opinions of our residents, our constituents, and how it allows us to advocate for their best interests in this House to the best of our abilities.

And so, I thank our Clerk for the amazing job that she does.

Of course, next, we cannot forget about our Conflict of Interest Commissioner, as I am sure that we have all in this Chamber had the opportunity at one point or the other to get in touch with, making sure that we ought to ensure that we have no conflicts of interests.

I know that we, you know, are required to fill out documentation at the start of a session to declare what any conflicts that we have. And I know that we all take that very seriously. And I know that it's something that we should—if there's a failure in judgment, perhaps you forget to file something on a report, perhaps it's

overlooked by the elections commissioner, by—sorry, by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, that those issues are dealt with seriously and that, you know, best effort is made by all members to right a wrong or an error in judgment. And I think that most would agree that the majority of public office holders are decent, are hard-working individuals, that they do their best to serve the public as they understand it.

And so the conflict of interest legislation is largely intended to assist elected representatives by providing an objective understanding against which they can gauge their actions and satisfy themselves with the public that they are acting appropriately. And that's the call that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner faces; that the call that they put on all of us elected representatives, that we can actually go back to the public and say, am I acting appropriately? And I think we can all here today think of examples or perhaps people didn't act appropriately or forgot things that should've been mentioned on conflict of interest documents. But I won't go into that right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I won't go into that right now.

I'll just simply say that that's an important role, and having independence in that role is clearly important; it's clearly important. And having even more autonomy in that role is something that we should all value as elected officials, giving that commissioner the ability to take on instances where elected officials have failed and their conflict of interest documentation is important and should be looked at. And I understand that there may be other legislation to deal with that area that we might debate at other dates, but I think to say now, right now, that it's important that we have that—that we note the importance of that role being independent from this Chamber.

And as we move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just highlight some of the conversation that we had during the time of our question period with the minister in regards to this bill.

And the question period was pretty—you know, I think the minister was able to handle and answer many questions and though there were some pieces that he was taking away in terms of getting back to us, you know, before committee hearings or at other points in time, and that's understandable. I do want the minister to, you know, clearly understand and take to heart our questions around whether this is the best way to provide independence in some of these roles and to see and endeavour to see if there are other ways to increase independence in these roles even further, looking perhaps at other—or other jurisdictions and

other models that might exist even outside of Canada and other Westminster models where they might have other arrangements to even further strengthen the independence of these roles and allow for a better political system in our province.

I also wanted to highlight in my questions to the minister about what happens, as this bill calls for a resolution to name and appoint officers in this role. What happens, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when this House is not sitting?

As we know, our House doesn't sit 24-7, 365. You know, there is at some point in the year where we are on recess for one reason or the other, and during that time, there might be a need to have an official with Elections Manitoba appointed, or needs with the Ombudsman, someone at the role of the Ombudsman appointed or the role has a Conflict of Interest Commissioner appointed or advocate for children appointed. And those appointments come up, and the timing of those appointments come up when the House is not sitting. I would hate for those roles to sit vacant or that work to not get done as well as it could if this House is not sitting and we're not able to provide a resolution to appoint a person in that role.

* (16:30)

And so I brought that concern up to the minister for him to investigate, to see if there is a way for us to mitigate that concern, and perhaps one option is for us to have an all-party committee where we, you know, each independently raise our voice and say there's a clear need, a urgent need, a vacant need—and this vacancy in this position—and we ought to call the House back, get to the work of debating and appointing a role in this—a person in this role—so that Manitobans don't suffer. And Manitobans, at the end of the day, are the ones who we are working for in this Chamber.

And so, as we move forward with Bill 26, I'd like to close by saying that everything and every role here that's affected by Bill 26 works for the best interests of Manitobans. I know, on our side of the House, we work every day for the best interests of Manitobans and we work to strengthen the independence of those roles so that they can work again to better the lives of all—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk just for a few minutes about Bill 26, which deals with the offer—officers of the Legislative Assembly.

This bill shifts the responsibility from the Cabinet, from the privy council to the Legislative Assembly, where it more properly resides, for making the appointment and the appointment on the recommendation of the Standing Committee of the Assembly on Legislative Affairs. This is a positive step. It enhances the sense of independence of the officers of the Assembly from government of the day and the ability of these officers to respond to and be responsible to the Legislative Assembly.

This positive step is associated with a few additional changes and amendments in procedures. I note, for example, that the term of office for the Chief Electoral Officer is from the date of appointment until 12 months after the date of the return of the last writ for the second general election, for which the Chief Electoral Officer is responsible.

Now, there could potentially be a problem if there's a minority government and there may be an election occurring sometime around the time of a year after the last writ for the second general election, and thus there could be some concerns. However, there is the ability for the person who's the Chief Electoral Officer to be reappointed in such circumstances, and so that should resolve that issue.

The legislation that doesn't put a limit on the number of times that the Chief Electoral Officer can be reappointed. Often, in circumstances like this, there is a limit on the number of reappointments. I don't know what the legislation is in other provinces; it would be interesting to look at. But in general, this is legislation which we support, making sure that the officers of the Assembly respond to the Assembly and have greater independence of the government.

And so, with those few words, I look forward to this going to committee and then to becoming legislation in due course.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to share a few things about Bill 26, The Officers of the Assembly Act. A number of pieces of legislation that had come before this House are meant and well-intended to do better, to streamline, to increase accountability, transparency, and there's aspects of Bill 26 that do those things, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This bill amends various acts with the respect to the appointments of the officers of the Assembly: the Advocate for Children and Youth, the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Clerk of the

Assembly, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner—I guess, soon to be replaced by the ethics commissioner, the Information and Privacy Adjudicator, the Ombudsman, the registrar appointed under The Lobbyists Registration Act.

Currently, as it sits now, these officers are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council, on the recommendation of a committee and the Assembly. As a result of the amendments, the officers, other than the Clerk, are appointed by the Assembly on the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs. The Clerk's appointment is on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly Management Commission. The current officers of the Assembly and their deputies continue in 'office' until—on the coming into the force of the act, and the 'amendments' were made to Legislative Assembly Management Commission Act and five other acts under this—under the structure and the purpose of this bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the basis of these offices and these officers is to have not just the perception of independence, of non-partisanship, of trust, of fairness, but they need to truly have those qualities and those attributes, and this bill steps towards being able to do that.

There's obviously a lot of different ways, if we had an all-party committee, to truly go through some of these bills and bring all those ideas to the table. There would be a lot of—a lot more constructive criticism, a lot more great ideas to be able to strengthen Bill 26, to be able to give it—and we've used that word many times—more bite, more effectiveness.

But ultimately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's about creating that independence of these offices, that non-partisanship, that trust because Manitobans—not—and not just MLAs here in the Chamber on both sides, all sides of this House, but Manitobans in general have to be able to trust the process of which government is held to account, of which government functions, and the officers that make that function, or play a role in that function of government.

So it's very important that they be able to have that trust and that faith, and by them doing this, this is something they can kind of work towards, and to be able to say well, yes, these offices—the Chief Electoral Officer, the Clerk's Office, the Ombudsman's office, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner—I truly have faith that those organizations are now non-partisan, that those organizations are truly not going to be influenced—whether it be by government or whether it

be by opposition or other members of the Chamber or members just in large—that they truly have an independence to them.

While we are—we're very support of maintaining and furthering the independent nature of the Assembly. It's very important that these positions maintain that non-partisanship, including their appointments, and being able to, kind of, have government not say and not—or even the perception of being able to say we influenced a decision that was made within those offices of the Assembly, within the conflict 'minster', Attorney General (Mr. Goertzen) and those kind of things, and we have those—an independence. Not just to say we have it, but actually have an independence in that structure.

Independence is a key thing to maintain that trust from government, and maintain that trust of Manitobans. And albeit, I mean, there's, you know, a number of politicians, MLAs elected, whether it be—whichever may stand from to represent their constituents, to represent Manitobans here in the Chamber, but there's that independence that needs to be maintained. And it goes across all of those—all those bodies, and all of those officers.

The Advocate for Children and Youth, for example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth is empowered by legislation to advise children, youth and young adults of their rights and services which should be available to them.

And I'm sure every member of this Chamber has had a constituent or a family or a group of individuals or an organization that has come forward with a concern, when it comes time to the advocacy for children and youth in your riding, in your family, in wherever it may be across Manitoba. And that—those young voices need to be heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it's very imperative that those young voices have that strong advocacy outside of influence of government, outside of influence of organizations or people in a position of power. So the Advocate for Children and Youth does that.

* (16:40)

They also have the responsibility to raise the issues with the government on behalf of the province's children and to advise the government on issues of areas and concerns. But it has to be something that the government actually takes and uses that—those questions and those concerns to develop and draft policy

to better the lives of children and youth here in Manitoba, not just create this organization and have this body created to be able to say, well, we have it there, we've checked that box, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has to actually have that ability and that organization. And the advocacy office needs to be able to say that, yes, you know, this—these are real concerns, it's going to help develop and draft that policy and it will—we want to see that policy implemented because it is the best thing for children and youth here in Manitoba.

So it can't just be kind of a figurehead organization, a figurehead body. So those organizations have to be able to bring forth their concerns and bring forth their policy develops and their suggestions and have them taken and drafted and developed to actually come out with a great idea. And let's take all those good ideas and come out with something great, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Advocate for Children and Youth, they also conduct research on issues affecting Manitoba's young people. They monitor, they analyze and they publicly report on the compliance of public systems and service providers with recommendations the Advocate for Children and Youth makes for improving services for young people in Manitoba.

And that just reinforces the comments I just made, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about when the organization and the advocacy office brings forth those ideas, they have to be developed, they have to be nurtured and they have to be put into real-world applications, not just, like I said, not just a box to check to say, yes, we've consulted with, we've taken the report from the advocacy office. Let's actually look at those suggestions, look at those recommendations and let's move that into real policy development and say, this is what—truly what we want to do.

Just a few months ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Manitoba advocate said to work—said the work to implement dozens of recommendations to protect this province's youngest people has ground to a near halt. And that's just reaffirms the comments I'm making about being able to—let's take those recommendations, let's take those suggestions, let's take those ideas and implement them into real-world situations, not just check the box, but actually go and do that work because those recommendations are coming from somewhere.

Nobody's just sitting around a table and drafting recommendations out of nowhere, out of thin air. They come from real-world situations, and real situations of young people in here, Manitoba, and

situations that they've had to live through, they've had to endure. So why not take those suggestions and take those situations that have developed?

And there's a number of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm sure every member across this whole Chamber doesn't know every situation, doesn't know every example, but we've all heard some. And we've all heard different versions of it, we've all heard different aspects. Maybe somebody's heard something I've never heard before and vice versa. And we need to be able to take those situations and bring those to the advocacy office and have that appointment brought forward and have those ideas brought forward in a truly independent way.

And by way of doing this and having these appointments now done in this way will help to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It'll help to raise those ideas without fear of retribution because of who may be in a decision-making role, whether it be in government or whether it be in a position of power in an organization. It has to have that independence and people have to be able to feel that comfort to raise their voice and to bring their ideas forward. And it's for the betterment of all youth.

We've all said and I've said this many times, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my goal for my children is to be smarter than me, for them not to have to experience some of the hardships that I have endured, that my parents and my grandparents have endured. So that means we've taken and we've helped without being called a formal child advocacy office. Your families are child advocacy offices. Your child are family adequacy organizations because you know and you want to speak for the betterment of children in your community, children in Manitoba.

So let's bring those ideas forward. Let's all share those ideas across all party lines and be able to bring those ideas forward and have, in this forum, to tell the child advocacy office, to be able to say this is the organization that's going to come, totally independent of government, totally independent of any party, totally independent of any organization so they could truly speak their mind and maybe raise the concerns and share the stories that nobody wants to talk about in some situations, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And that's important, to be able to maintain that independence.

The Auditor General is another organization and another member of the Assembly that—the Auditor General Act established the Auditor General as an

Officer of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly to provide the Assembly with independent information, advice and assurance. And, again, there's that word—*independence*—to be able to bring forward those ideas. And this office examines and reports on how well the government accounts for the resources entrusted to it and how well it manages its operations.

And that's an important role, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to be able to say to government, and it's something that's not defined by party lines. It's one thing for a member of our caucus to be able to get up there and criticize government, how they're 'expending', you know. If we were there, we would do it this way; you're doing it this way, and we'll agree to disagree sometimes on things, but we'll—and ultimately, sometimes, we'll just—ultimately just disagree. So, to be able to have the Auditor General's independent office be able to do that and hold the government to account.

As a legislative auditor, the Auditor General provides the Legislative Assembly with financial statements, audits and project audits. The Auditor General examines and audits financial statements included in the Province's Public Accounts and any other statements that the Minister of Finance presents for audits.

And, again, that criticism and that report that comes out of the Auditor General's office needs to be adhered to. It needs to always have that independence.

So when we look at Bill 26 being able to now have these organizations appointed and staffed in a neutral—in a more neutral way and a more independent way, that's a step in the right direction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Also, the Auditor General can examine the operation of any government organization or the use of public money by any recipient of that money called project audits. Supported by a staff of more than 55 individuals the Auditor General serves the Legislative Assembly and, in turn, all Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a staff of 55, in some places it may seem like a lot; in some places it may seem like not enough. But it's imperative that when we're holding the government to account and especially with government finances and the function of government, that this organization is properly staffed and properly—and we look at retention or recruitment of individuals to work in this organization.

We know many organizations where there's a lot of good people. There's a lot of good people that may

come into our organization but, for whatever reason, they may not feel appreciated. Whether it be just that the environment or whether it be the financial appreciation to be able to say, but it's important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Auditor General's office and their 55-plus staff—we need to keep that properly resourced. We need to keep that organization properly staffed. And it shouldn't be—there shouldn't be, if the Auditor General has an opinion that's raised of government, there shouldn't be retribution to the staff. There shouldn't be retribution to the office to say well, you know what? Fifty-five people—that seems like a lot; let's cut that down to 40 just so we can try and avoid some kind of accountability. And that's not the way the organization should work.

The Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is another role that's very important. We're going to see that today. We're going to see those organizations and the Chief Electoral Officer conduct work today. So, that's ongoing work on a regular basis. You know, to some Manitobans that we may think, you know, every four years we'll have an election or, in this case—the last case—maybe three years and we have an election. And that's the only time we talk about electoral officer, you know, is a little window before elections, whether it be six weeks, two months, before elections.

And that's the only time you see the electoral officer, or you hear about the word electoral officer. But that job is imperative year round, every day, to be able to look forward to what's going to happen. We debated diligently just the other day about vote counting and being able to improve that system. So, in that system the Chief Electoral Officer also plays a key role in that system, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to be able to make things more efficient.

So Bill 26 can hopefully go a ways to be able to improve the efficiency of that office, to improve the independence of that office, because, truly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in provincial election time it should be nothing but independence. There shouldn't be any side dictating how the election is run. There shouldn't be any side having influence on how the election is run or strongly hinting or strongly recommending how the electoral process works. It should be truly independent. And by appointing a Chief Electoral Officer in a manner that's not just perception of independence, but actual independence, is imperative.

* (16:50)

And it's imperative so that Manitobans have that trust in that system to be able to say, you know, that's a truly independent process that's going there. They're not influenced by the PCs, by the NDP, by the Liberal Party; they're not influenced by anybody.

It's truly an independent organization, and the Chief Electoral Officer is the—is a paramount and a key role in the independence and the truly non-partisanship of that organization. And of course, the—it reports ultimately to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, and the CEO is imperative that they're not—that they're non-partisan.

And, of course, they don't get to vote in election. Albeit you may think, you know, my one vote doesn't matter, but Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's—time and time again, I mean, that's—and I think that's a common theme between our party and, I'm sure, the PC Party also: get out to vote. It's imperative that Manitobans get out to vote, and that's something that we strongly encourage.

We strongly encourage all Manitobans to get out and vote. Whether or not they vote for an individual, or a group, or, you know, if they don't—may not vote for you if you're knocking on their door, it's imperative that they vote and that they participate in the democratic process, because we can't take that for granted.

But again, if you're going to ask somebody, no matter how you vote as long as you vote, I want to ensure you, though, that that process is done fairly, is done equitably, and is done in a non-partisan and independent way. And having the Chief Electoral Officer be the one to say, I'm truly independent, I'm truly non-partisan, that then puts faith in that Manitoban to be able to say yes, I believe in that process; yes, I can get out there and do that.

So, again, that's—and that's just—and maybe I'm actually speaking to a role that the Chief Electoral Officer may take. You know, 'provoting' those voting opportunities to all voters. You know, educating voters about the electoral process.

Like I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's a job that doesn't just happen six weeks before elections. It doesn't just happen two months before an election. That's something that's imperative all year round, 365 days a year. I don't want to say 24-7 because, obviously, the Chief Electoral Officer needs to have some time off, too, but it's a lifestyle that they promote the electoral process.

So, it's very important to maintain that independence.

So, they—but they also work with parties. They work with the NDP. They work with the Conservative Party. They work with the Liberal Party to be able to say, you know, we're going to do this in a proper way.

So that Chief Electoral Officer has that independence. And sometimes that's difficult, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if an organization or a person in a role such as this may not want to be able to say, hey, I have to criticize what—you can't do this. You know, you're not able to do this.

Sometimes that's a difficult thing, you know, for a little bit of intimidation factor, and maybe that person may not feel that they can actually do that. But by organizing this structure, and having a Chief Electoral Officer appointed independently via this bill, that enables that to happen.

And I'm sure there's been a number of times where members opposite, members on this side, have had conversations with the Chief Electoral Officer or the electoral officer in your riding or polling station, to be able to have that open communication, to be able to say, you know, I'm not here so you can tell me what I want to hear. I'm here because I want you to tell me exactly how this system's supposed to work.

And if they truly feel there's no fear of retribution and they have that independence, then they can actually say what they want to say, and that's an important part to the democratic process, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We've heard a few speakers now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, speak about the Clerk, the Clerk of the Assembly.

And the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is a senior, permanent employee of the Legislature. They're responsible to the Legislative Assembly through the speak for maintaining records of the Assembly, and for the custody of the legislative documents, like the Order Paper, votes and proceedings, debates proceedings, Hansard, for example. The Clerk also serves as manager of the non-political staff of the Legislature based here in the Legislative Building.

The Clerk provides advice and assistance relating to the parliamentary procedure to the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the deputy chairperson, committee chairpersons, and to all MLAs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They answer questions, they provide clarification respecting the rules of the House, and sometimes that's a difficult conversation to have.

I'm sure members on all sides of this Chamber have had their—that look from the Clerk to say, hey, that's—you're not supposed to do that. They may not—they may do that through the Speaker, but they'll—I can tell sometimes when we've made comments and we've been, perhaps, out of line or out of order, the Clerk's head has popped up, and then the Speaker turns around, and there we go, you know, order, order, is kind of how that went.

And I respect, I have absolute respect for the Clerk of the Assembly to be able to hold all of us to account because that's important too. And I have great respect for the work they do there.

And I know I personally would never be able to do that work because it's just something that's so difficult to be able to do. There's so many moving parts throughout the day to be able to say that, you know what, and I truly don't understand how the clerks and the desks of the clerks can stay sue—throw—so calm through some of this—some of these—maybe they'll call them shenanigans, whatever they want to refer to that sometimes, but at the same time, it's with great respect that the Clerk's office conducts their business to all members here in the Chamber, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And that's something that takes great skill. That's something that takes—I have great aggravation for that position. But again, that's based on the independence. The Clerk's office and the Clerk here in the Assembly has to be able to have that freedom to say, hey, I'm going to call you to order no matter who you are, no matter which constituency you represent, whether you're a minister or you're an opposition MLA or a backbench MLA or an independent MLA, to be able to say that, you know what, I have to call you to order on this thing; what you did was either not right or I just want to correct it. And there's always constructive criticism and there's always comments after and they're very approachable.

The clerks here are very approachable to be able to say, you know what, I have a question, I have a comment, especially when we've had—and I'm sure members opposite, some were elected for the first time in 2016, some of us were elected for the first time in 2019, coming into this place and having a lot of questions. And you can rely on your colleagues for some answers, but you can also rely on the clerks for those answers. So that takes a lot of work and it takes a lot of dedication.

So every time, and if you see that—if you see any of the clerks in the hallway: please, always good morning, good afternoon, good evening, have a great

day. Because, you know what, they've earned that. They've earned that right to be able to have that feeling of accomplishment, that feeling of appreciation for what they do. And sometimes it gets very difficult.

The Clerk also directs the activities of the office of the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk, office manager, secretary and other offices of the Assembly including the committees, Hansard, Journal Branch, Members' Allowances Office, the Visitors Services Program for the Legislative Assembly. The Clerk is also the secretary to the Legislative Assembly Management Commission, the program administrator for the Legislative Assembly Internship Program and is a secretary for all the Manitoba branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Now, that's a pretty good job resume if you want to ever put that out there and you want to say, this is my duties. For—as an MLA, you list certain duties you—and those of us that are professionals before we got here in whatever organizations or whatever groups you came, if you start doing your kind of duties and your experiences, for the Clerk to be able to list those things as experiences, that's incredible, to be able to do that kind of work.

In addition, it is their responsibility for recording and maintaining the official documents of the Assembly and its committees, and for administrative service for the MLAs. And again, that's just goes down in history, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So that office of the Clerk of the Assembly is imperative to be able to have those correct, have those right. Many of us have gone back and looked at either your own comments in Hansard or debates in Hansard, to be able to say that, and there's a lot of what you would see as kind of behind-the-scenes work that you really don't see in there. But really, if you wanted to go through a lot of the records of Manitoba legislators throughout the years and the decades, there's a lot of unforeseen—unseen work in there that's due to the clerks and being able to keep that independence.

And, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. And I think most would agree that a lot of us—and I would say all of us—are very decent to be able to deal with. And I could say his name, Mr. Jeffrey Schnoor, correct? I could say Mr. Jeffrey Schnoor's name?

So, my first conversation with Jeffrey Schnoor when I first got elected was very pleasant. And he

made it very clear, very pleasant but also very professional, about maintaining the independence, maintaining the, you know what, this—and it was a conversation of, I mean, I'm not going to get into details of my specific conversation with him, but it was very pleasant and—*[interjection]*—I don't have \$31 million, but I won't go there—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bushie: But to be able to have that conversation, and there is a true sense of that independence. And the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is very important to the function of government, to the function of

Manitoba, to be able to say that whether you're government, whether you're opposition MLAs, but more importantly when you're government, that you're making decisions that are based in the best interests of Manitobans—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) will have five minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

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