

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

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Second Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ALTomARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	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>	Thompson	

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated, everybody. Good afternoon.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

#### Bill 228—The Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** I move, seconded by the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), that Bill 228, The Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Naylor:** I am honoured to present Bill 228, The Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act.

This bill proclaims February 1st to February 7th of each year as eating disorders awareness week.

An estimated 1 million people in Canada suffer from eating disorders. They are serious mental illnesses affecting one's physical, psychological and social functioning, and they have one of the highest mortality rates of all mental illnesses.

Education and awareness about this topic are necessary to dispel dangerous stereotypes and myths

while decreasing stigma. Dedicating one week every year will heighten public awareness, encourage Manitobans to develop a healthier relationship with their bodies and highlight resources and supports needed to meet the needs of our communities.

I look forward to unanimous support from this House.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

**Dr. Joss Reimer**

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I stand in the Chamber today to honour Dr. Joss Reimer, the medical lead for the Vaccine Implementation Task Force, for the work she has done for Manitoba in helping to fight against COVID-19.

Since the outbreak of COVID over two years ago, Dr. Reimer has become a trusted and reliable source of COVID vaccine information for Manitobans. Her calm, honest and reassuring updates to Manitobans became a staple in most households during all four waves.

Dr. Reimer continuously reviewed emerging evidence and sought collaboration advice to ensure vaccines were given first to those most at risk, while also leading to an impressive level of vaccine update across the province.

Madam Speaker, her selfless leadership to inform and protect Manitobans during the pandemic is the very definition of medical humanitarianism.

Dr. Reimer oversaw the largest vaccination campaign in Manitoba's history and helped structure it into the robust machine that helped protect people of all ages, communities and backgrounds.

Its success can be measured in what it accomplished: 2,866,670 doses administered; 87.9 per cent of Manitobans 18 or older fully immunized; 80.1 per cent of Manitobans aged 12 to 17 fully immunized and 74,277 children under the age of 11 are vaccinated

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to share with the members of this House that, following an extensive recruitment process, Dr. Reimer has accepted the role of chief medical officer for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. I know that she is looking forward to working with medical staff and operational leadership across the region as Manitoba continues to move forward as part of a modernized health-care system.

Dr. Reimer will step into her new role on April 18th.

Thank you, Dr. Reimer, on behalf of all Manitobans, and I ask everyone in the Chamber today to please join me in honouring Dr. Reimer and congratulating her on this new opportunity.

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to thank Dr. Joss Reimer for her outstanding work as the lead of the Manitoba vaccine task force and congratulate her on her appointment as chief medical officer for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Throughout this pandemic, Dr. Reimer and her team have demonstrated incredible leadership, tenacity, knowledge, flexibility and empathy as she helped to get over 1 million Manitobans vaccinated against COVID-19. She was one of our many health-care professionals who were there for Manitobans in their time of need, and guided us through some of the toughest months of this pandemic.

Throughout her entire career, Dr. Reimer has served Manitobans in many capacities. She hails from Winkler, Manitoba, and completed her degree at the University of Manitoba. Since 2012, she has been working as a medical officer of health, focusing on sexually transmitted diseases, such as syphilis, and on drug policy.

Dr. Reimer was named Humanitarian of the Year for all the work she has done to inform and protect Manitobans through vaccines.

This job, Madam Speaker, was far from easy, with the rapidly changing information, logistical challenges, battling widespread misinformation and even threats, or tackling the numerous other barriers faced by folks wanting to get vaccinated. Dr. Reimer has

stated that she loves being a part of the solution and she's demonstrated through—she's demonstrated this through her outstanding and amazing efforts over the past two years.

Dr. Reimer also reminded us that many Manitobans have yet to receive their booster shot and, with widespread transmission of the Omicron and subvariant BA.2, COVID is still a threat and we must be vigilant in our efforts against the disease.

\* (13:40)

As we honour Dr. Reimer's work as lead of the vaccine task force, let us continue to support the efforts of all health-care leaders and professionals to protect ourselves and others against COVID-19.

Thank you.

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

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

**Mr. Gerrard:** Madam Speaker, Manitoba Liberal MLAs join all other MLAs in recognizing the efforts and the achievements of Dr. Joss Reimer and her team in leading the effort to get as many Manitobans as possible vaccinated to protect them from COVID-19 infections. It has been a major effort and has been very important in protecting all Manitobans from the serious impacts of the SARS-CoV-2 virus infection.

The latest data from the Centers for Disease Control in the United States clearly shows that unvaccinated people aged 12 years and older have a 21-fold higher risk of dying from COVID-19 and a seven-fold higher risk of being hospitalized from COVID-19 than individuals who are vaccinated with a primary series and a booster dose. With such high risks it is important, as Dr. Reimer emphasizes it, that everyone who can get a booster dose as well as the primary vaccination series.

We thank Dr. Reimer, not only for her role in leading the rollout of the vaccination program, but also for her role in communicating effectively, including referring to the scientific basis for decisions which have been made.

As we all know, the job of controlling the COVID-19 pandemic and protecting Manitobans is not over. The evidence, even though we're no longer getting the daily dashboard updates, suggests that we're likely entering the sixth wave. We should not let

down our guard. We should continue to pay attention to masks and to improving ventilation. And with respect to ventilation, we still have a way to go to improve the ventilation in all schools.

Let us today honour and thank Dr. Joss Reimer for her tremendous contributions, which have been large and have been much appreciated. We wish Dr. Reimer well in her new position with the WRHA.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Further ministerial statements?

The honourable Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services, 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.

#### **Anniversary of Humboldt Broncos Accident**

**Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the fourth anniversary of the tragic Humboldt Broncos bus accident on April 6, 2018. It was a day when 16 lives were lost and 13 others sustained serious injuries, many with life-changing consequences.

It was a day no one will ever forget. It was a day when an entire nation mourned in prayer and grief. It was a day when thousands of Canadians reached into their hearts and sent thoughtful condolences and generous donations to help the team, their families and friends with the healing process. It was a day to embrace your children and remember just how precious and tenuous life is.

Madam Speaker, I remember that day well and I know each and every member of this Chamber remembers that day. With our 'neighbours' in Saskatchewan, we share the pain and loss of so many young lives with such bright futures ahead of them. We remember the grief of the families who lost loved ones or who sat anxiously in hospitals hoping and praying for miracles.

Madam Speaker, one member of that team was Evan Thomas. Evan was the grandson of Frank and Betty Thomas of Brandon. He was very close to Frank and Betty. They were, indeed, a hockey family. Frank and Betty were very proud of their four sons as they played hockey at an elite level. I would often cross paths with Frank in a small town in southwestern

Manitoba when he was a regional manager with CIBC. I could tell how proud Frank was of his family and would often hear a story about their hockey or baseball. With four busy sons, Betty handled the logistics and held it all together to make sure everyone was in the right place, at the right time, with the right equipment.

Frank and Betty retired to Brandon and moved from following their sons to following their grandchildren. They were both a great help to me all the way through my careers, and I was always struck by their optimism and positive outlook.

Madam Speaker, Frank and Betty were on the way to the Broncos' playoff game when they received news of the crash. I reached out to Frank that Saturday morning, offering condolences and any help that they would need. Frank sent his thanks and then sent another email asking me to let his friends in our business know that he would be away for a few days. That's Frank, always thinking of others.

Frank and Betty, our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family and the entire Broncos family. Take care.

A lone bus traversing the dark prairie night through adverse winter weather on long journeys to the next town, the next game and the next step in life hockey—lifelong hockey dreams is as iconic a Canadian image as there could be; a bus full of young dreamers, with athletes dedicated to a sport that is loved and revered across Canada.

This time, the bus did not arrive, and those dreams of bigger and better days ahead are gone for many. Forever changed, teammates, coaches, families and friends were left to mourn the losses and struggle to overcome their grief and the despair that comes with such a tragic event.

Madam Speaker, to the families and friends who still struggle to make sense of this, we think of them today as we do on each anniversary date of the Humboldt Broncos accident.

Today, the Broncos are back in action, riding from one town to the next, pursuing those same hockey dreams and honouring the memory of the team, their community and those who rode the buses before them.

Green Shirt Day is tomorrow and it is but one of the positive impacts that came out of this tragedy. Canadians were seeking something positive to grasp onto, and Logan Boulet gave us that with his

courageous gift of his organs and tissues for transplant donation to help many on the transplant waiting list. I'll speak more about that tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members to join me in remembering April 6th, 2018. I ask—also ask for a moment of silence in the House, to take a moment to reflect on the lives lost.

Thank you.

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** Four years ago today, 16 people were killed and 13 injured in the Humboldt Broncos tragedy. All Canadians remember this day and the profound feelings of shock and sadness, knowing that such senseless events can happen to anyone anywhere. We'll never forget these young people and their coaches and the pain that their families went through and continue to live with.

Everyone in this Chamber is committed to reforms that address the tragedy of this day, and we know more needs to be done to ensure safety on our roads.

But the story wasn't just about tragedy but also about the capacity for forgiveness. After the incident, a number of family members of the boys injured and killed in the crash were somehow able to forgive the truck driver. One of them was Scott Thomas, whose son, Evan, died in the crash. Scott met with the truck driver, Jaskirat Sidhu, and according to reports, when Scott entered the room, Sidhu was down on one knee, tears dripping onto the floor. Scott held out both of his hands. He pulled him up to his feet and hugged him close, as if he were comforting a weeping child. Both men wept.

The Thomas family's story is just one of many from that day, but I believe it serves as a moving example of how some have chosen love over anger, but always sadness.

\* (13:50)

On this day, the Manitoba NDP reiterates our commitment to address the conditions that helped lead to the crash. We support increased signage, rumble strips, improved signage on our highways and rigorous training, working with an eager industry to improve standards for truckers.

Our condolences are with the families and the larger Broncos family, many of whom have, as we heard, connections right here in this province. This Humboldt Broncos tragedy has inspired a nation to recommit to highway safety, and we are committed to doing our part as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak to the ministerial statement.

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

**Mr. Lamont:** It's the fourth anniversary of the Humboldt Broncos tragedy, where 16 people died in a highway accident. On behalf of Manitoba Liberal MLAs, we renew our condolences and share the grief with the families and community who lost loved ones.

There is so much that is bitter in this sad event—young people in the prime of life, living their dreams, with so much more to do and so much more to give. And it's an especially difficult loss because there was no preparing for it. And it's a loss we all know could happen to any of us, that there but for the grace of God go we.

At times like these, I believe it helps to tear our eyes away from the loss, to turn back to the life that each of these individuals lived and remember them: their smiles, their habits—both good and bad—their own triumphs and comforts, to think of the contributions they made to making lives sweeter and more joyful in the time they had here with us.

To all who loved and miss them, there is healing and comfort to be had—in each other, in their memories—and we hope that in the united gesture of all the members of this Legislature who mark the anniversary of this loss together with you we will lighten the burden of your grief.

Thank you. Merci.

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave for a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

Please rise.

*A moment of silence was observed.*

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Healing Community Wounds Post-Pandemic

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** As restrictions have eased and Manitobans return to a new normal of living with the pandemic, it is now time to turn our attention to healing the wounds within families, the faith community and our communities as a whole.

There has been a lot of fear, anger and uncertainty from everyone over the last two years. While we adjust to living in the new normal post-pandemic,

there have been harsh words spoken and accusations made which will not be easily forgotten.

But it is a time to heal and a time for forgiveness that we all know is easier said than done. As decision-makers at all levels of government, we must take the high road and help our communities heal the pandemic 'rifts'—rifts which have risen over the last two years.

I recently spoke with a friend from Alberta who is a municipal councillor in a small rural community. He expressed the same concerns about the deep divides within their community and how to go about rebuilding that sense of community pride.

As MLAs, we have a role to play in helping our constituents build back the trust and values that we as Manitobans are known for. We will not forget the lives lost or the extraordinary effort made by so many to keep us safe and healthy throughout the pandemic. There have been lessons learned and changes to our everyday lives which can be a positive influence on all of us going forward, if we are willing.

I encourage all of us as MLAs to rise up to the challenge of forgiveness and of healing the wounds in our communities. One only needs to look to what is happening in Ukraine to truly appreciate all that Manitoba and Canada has to offer today and in the future.

Thank you.

### **Support for Ukrainian Refugees**

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** Madam Speaker, today is day 42 since Russia launched its attack on Ukraine, and day 42 since this government's response has neither matched the expectations nor the commitments of Manitobans to stand with Ukraine.

There are 6 million Ukrainian refugees in Europe now, and Canada is in a unique position to help. We have the largest Ukrainian population outside of Europe, and our Ukrainian community and so many others have been going above and beyond to help both refugees and those who remain in their country.

Many other provinces are doing much more than Manitoba, including providing resettlement services, opening up immigration offices in Poland and providing real dollars for humanitarian relief. Manitoba is once again choosing to follow instead of choosing to lead.

Ontario recently announced 30,000 jobs that are waiting for Ukrainian refugees in that province.

Saskatchewan has provided \$335,000 in funding to resettlement services, while Manitoba has provided none. Even municipalities are coming forward, offering dormitories and facilities to shelter refugees.

Manitobans expect more from their government. The Province should be providing substantial funds to Ukrainian Canadian Congress so they can hire full-time resettlement co-ordinators.

We are currently experiencing a labour shortage. This government should be co-ordinating with the business community to match skills to employment opportunities and improve 'accreditation' process for foreign credentials so that skilled Ukrainian workers can use their expertise and work in their chosen profession right here in our province.

This government should be proactive to ensure families arriving in Manitoba will be able to access child care, schooling and housing. Manitobans have already taken on the work to support Ukrainians both at home and abroad, but the government must do its part to ensure that this province is ready to successfully settle and integrate Ukrainian refugees.

There is no more time to waste.

### **BMO Farm Family Award Recipients**

**Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Municipal Relations):** I had the opportunity to spend time in Brandon last week and take in parts of the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair.

What a fantastic live event it was. Thank you to the event organizers for co-ordinating and getting it put together on what was a very short notice.

I had the opportunity to meet many producers and constituents who were attending the event either for their own enjoyment, work or to showcase their animals. I was very pleased to learn that two Agassiz constituent families received the BMO Farm Family Award. This award recognizes families and their contributions to the agriculture industry in Manitoba.

It is my pleasure to congratulate the Baron family farm from Carberry and the Wiebe family of Beaver Creek Farms in MacGregor—was a great honour to have these ag families recognized for their hard work and the contributions to the farming industry.

Earl and Faye Baron of Baron farms have raised three children: Randy, David and Yvonne. Both David and Randy and his son Joel manage their own grain and potato farming operations today. For five generations, Baron farms have demonstrated commitment

and passion for farming and agriculture, and I wish them all the very best as they teach their practices to the next generation.

Don and Stan Wiebe, brothers and co-owners of Beaver Creek Farms, received the same recognition. Beaver Creek is a potato and grain operation that works with the latest technology and farming equipment. The farm grows potatoes exclusively for McCain Foods and has won the top innovator award in past years. Beaver Creek was founded in 1968 and is now third-generation farming business, with both Wiebe sons, Darryl and Colson, along with their nephew Andrew Doerksen.

Madam Speaker, these are just two of the great farming families in Manitoba, and there are so many more to be recognized for their hard work and dedication to farming. I would like to say thank you to all the farm families across the prairies and best wishes for a successful farming season ahead.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### **Harjinder Kaur Brar**

**Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples):** April is the month to celebrate Sikh heritage in Manitoba. I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize Harjinder Kaur Brar.

Harjinder is a proud member of the Sikh community with strong roots here in Manitoba. She arrived in Manitoba in 1985 at the age of 16, completing her bachelor of nursing from the University of Manitoba in 1994.

Harjinder is a valued member of the health-care profession. She started off her career as a surgical nurse at Victoria hospital and is now a full-time manager at the Seven Oaks hospital with the renal program.

Apart from her valued work in her professional field, Harjinder's work in the community is equally of-valuable. In 2019, Harjinder became the first female president of the Sikh Society of Manitoba in the organization's 53-year history.

\* (14:00)

A strong community leader, she has been actively involved in the Sikh community in the-numerous ways. Harjinder has served as the principal of Khalsa School, connecting our youth to the Sikh heritage and values through language, Sikh history, Gurbani and kirtan.

Working closely with Khalsa Aid, Harjinder has led many fundraising initiatives for the organizations such as Main Street Project, Winnipeg Harvest, CancerCare Manitoba and many more.

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask all the members of this House to join me in recognizing Harjinder. Harjinder is an incredible—sorry, Manitoba is incredibly lucky to have people like Harjinder who are keeping our youth connected to their religious roots.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### **Benefit Concert for Ukraine**

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the generosity and compassion of the constituents of Borderland who attended a special concert on March 18th at Seeds Church in Altona in support of the Mennonite Central Committee's Ukraine emergency response, an effort which aims to provide trauma healing, temporary emergency housing, emergency distributions of locally purchased emergency supplies, such as blankets, and distribution of food packages for those affected by the invasion.

Local businesses stepped up and contributed, and we saw displays and artwork put on—put up for auction by local artists. Throughout the night, we heard a variety of musical performances by a number of talented musicians. We were all moved by the defiant and inspiring words of Yevgeniya Tatarenko, who represented the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. A video presentation by Anton, a young Ukrainian who at the time was guarding a bridge in eastern Ukraine, brought into greater focus for us the impact of the war on normal, everyday Ukrainians.

I want to recognize in particular Altona-area resident Callum Morrison, who organized this successful event, and applaud his thoughtfulness and determination to step up and bring the community together to support Ukrainians through MCC's Ukraine emergency response. Over \$19,000 has been raised so far as a result of this local event.

As Callum pointed out, Altona's symbol is the sunflower, and the national symbol of Ukraine is the sunflower; 90 per cent of Canada's sunflower production comes from Manitoba, and it was the Ukrainians who brought with them the sunflower seeds that yield these beautiful crops in our province today.

This connection is an illustration of the everlasting ties that bind Manitobans and Ukrainians, and as they fight for their homes, their families and all that



they love and hold dear, may we do all we can to support them, to welcome them here as they seek refuge and to help them rebuild when that time comes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### Introduction of Guests

**Madam Speaker:** We have some guests with us today that I would like to introduce to you.

I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery, where we have with us, celebrating Tartan Day—which is today—members of the St. Andrews Society, including Ms. Evelyn Mitchell, president of the St. Andrews Society of Winnipeg, who is also the first female president of the society in its 150-year history; Ms. Pam Simmons, first vice-president; Mr. Peter Heavysege, second vice-president; and Dwight MacAulay, chair of the St. Andrew's Society Culture & Heritage Committee.

I would like to also thank them for the society eyeglass cleaners that they have provided to all members on their desk today.

Also in the Speaker's Gallery today, we have with us Mr. Bryan Koontz, consul general of the United States in Winnipeg and Brad Robertson, the Chief of Protocol.

And on behalf of all members, we welcome you all to the Manitoba Legislature.

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Death of Krystal Mousseau Request for Public Inquiry

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, Krystal Mousseau's life mattered.

She is dearly missed by her children, her family and her friends. Last May, as our intensive-care units were overwhelmed, Krystal died during a failed attempt to transport her to Ontario. We have been calling for an inquiry, an independent investigation into this case.

Today, one of the most respected critical-care physicians in Manitoba said the government's reasons for not calling an inquiry are wrong, and I quote: I believe that the government's and medical examiner's assertions are incorrect. End quote.

Will the government reconsider in light of Dr. Roberts' second opinion and call an inquiry today?

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Deputy Premier):** Clearly, our thoughts and prayers are with the family under this extreme situation.

Clearly, there was a critical incident report done by the RHA and with—the Prairie Mountain regional health authority did a critical incident review of this situation. I think there was systemic issues that they realized had to be addressed.

There was a number of recommendations put forward by the Prairie Mountain Health authority, in terms of this situation. It's our understanding those outstanding issues have been addressed with—and will be addressed in the near future.

And, certainly, we think that that critical incident report is a very positive step forward in dealing with this really tragic incident.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, Dr. Dan Roberts laid the foundation for critical-care medical transportation in Manitoba.

He is an expert in the field, and his view, and I quote here: Krystal's death was unexpected and should not have occurred. End quote.

We have showed in this House the company contracted to transport Ms. Mousseau lacked staff with proper training and did not have the right equipment. Experts are now saying that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the government are, quote, incorrect for the reasons that they will not call an inquiry.

Manitobans deserve to hear answers about what took place. We deserve to have confidence in our patient transportation system.

Will the government reconsider, in light of Dr. Roberts' second opinion, and call an inquiry into Krystal Mousseau's death today?

**Mr. Cullen:** Well, again, Madam Speaker, a very tragic situation. And with—when these situations do occur, it is important that these critical incidents are reviewed.

In this case, that is what the Prairie Mountain regional health authority did. There is a number of recommendations that have come forward. Prairie Mountain Health will be dealing with those recommendations.

I will say, furthermore, the Chief Medical Examiner also reviewed this particular file. They reviewed the actions and recommendations of the Prairie Mountain Health authority. The Chief Medical Examiner believed that the issues in that report had been addressed. He is not calling for an inquiry.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, Dr. Roberts is the expert in the field in Manitoba, and he says, and I quote, Krystal Mousseau's death should not have occurred. End quote.

He writes, and I quote: Such catastrophes almost invariably involve multiple system failures, such as communication breakdowns, equipment failures and deficiencies in safety procedures and training. End quote.

These are unanswered questions. They are unanswered questions that persist at the provincial level, not merely in the Prairie Mountain Health region. They are problems that an inquiry could help fix. An inquiry under statute is to investigate and rectify systemic failures, systemic failures such as the one that Dr. Roberts has articulated today.

The government should call an inquiry into Krystal Mousseau's death. Will they do so?

**Mr. Cullen:** When these tragic situations do arise, I'm sure there is lots of re-evaluation done. There will be lots of opinions put forward.

In this case, there is a process that has been undertaken. Prairie Mountain Health authority undertook that critical incident review. Recommendations were made as a result of that particular review. In this case, again, the Chief Medical Examiner reviewed the situation as it pertains to this case.

They also—he also reviewed the recommendations being put forward by the Prairie Mountain regional health authority, and he has deemed no inquiry is necessary.

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

#### **Lifeflight Air Ambulance Privatization Request to Reinstate Service**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** The expert in the field in our province is calling for an inquiry today. We'll leave that on the record.

The Lifeflight Air Ambulance program in Manitoba was born out of a tragedy some 30 years ago that is similar to what occurred to Krystal Mousseau. According to Dr. Roberts, and I quote: During the 30 years preceding this—meaning Krystal's death—we are unaware of any stable patient having died as a consequence of undergoing air transport from a Manitoba ICU to another Canadian facility. End quote.

\* (14:10)

That was because of Lifeflight.

The current government privatized Lifeflight a number of years ago.

Will the government reconsider its decision and reverse the privatization of Lifeflight Air Ambulance?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I first want to extend my deepest condolences to all the families from the Humboldt Broncos, who are still grieving the loss of their loved ones. It's a very sad day today. Four years later, I'm sure they're still feeling the effects of the loss as if it had happened just today. So my condolences to the family members.

And my condolences as well to Krystal Mousseau's family. It's a very tragic incident. Shared Health and all of the health system continues to learn from incidents such as this, and to put in place measures to ensure that it never happens again.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question—pardon me, on a supplementary question.

#### **Expiry of Medical Transportation Contracts Patient Safety Concerns**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** We ask the government to reconsider and reverse the privatization of Lifeflight in the following context.

We know that the government is looking at other private medical transportation companies, and the existing contracts will expire relatively soon, including the contract for medical transportation currently held by STARS.

Now, when it comes to medical transportation, safety has to be the top consideration. Above anything else, we must ensure that patients are transported safely and that they get the medical care that they need.

Will the government assure this House that any of these outstanding concerns around patient safety

during transportation will be addressed before any of these patient transportation contracts will be awarded?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this forward in the Chamber today.

And as a health system, we're always evolving, Madam Speaker, always doing continuous improvement and ensuring that we get better and we continue to provide better services for Manitobans, whether it's air ambulance, STARS, Lifeflight.

So we will continue to work with our service delivery organizations to ensure that Manitobans receive top-quality care wherever they may be receiving that care: in the air, on the ground, at our health-care facilities. We will continue to work in partnership with them.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Medical transportation is complex. It's a challenging form of health care and lives are at stake. Safety always has to be paramount. It should be the top consideration. In light of Dr. Roberts' comments today, there are persistent concerns around patient transportation with the existing arrangement that the provincial government has entered into.

We know that more contracts will be entered into relatively shortly when it comes to the transportation of patients in Manitoba's health-care system.

Will the government, then, assure this House that safety concerns which persist to this day will be addressed before any medical transportation contracts are awarded?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, I certainly don't want the Leader of the Opposition to mislead Manitobans into thinking that their safety is not No. 1 for our health-care system, because it is. Whether the individual is receiving care in a helicopter, whether they are in a health-care facility, a personal-care home, a clinic, their safety is No. 1.

We will continue to make Manitoba's safety our No. 1 priority and work with our service delivery organizations to ensure they meet the standards of care that are applicable for that type of service.

#### **Thompson General Hospital Loss of Hot Water Service**

**MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** I've recently learned about an urgent problem at the Thompson General

Hospital—seems there's no hot water in some patient areas.

It's unthinkable that a large hospital like Thompson would be left without hot water for any length of time.

Is the minister aware of this situation, and what has she done to rectify it?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this forward to the Chamber.

I will certainly look into this situation, and I am sure it's being rectified. I have full faith in the staff at the Thompson General Hospital. The regional health authority has a strong leadership team, and I'm sure it's being looked into as we speak.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

**MLA Lindsey:** I wrote to the minister about this situation yesterday and I left messages with the CEO of the Northern Health Region earlier.

Hot water is essential for hygiene for patients and for medical staff doing procedures.

How is it that the hot water is off in parts of the Thompson General Hospital for any length of time, and what has this minister done and what is she going to do to rectify the situation today?

**Ms. Gordon:** Again, this is a situation that needs to be rectified, and I will work with the northern regional health authority to address the issue and ensure that Manitobans in the North have hot water for bathing and for all the other purposes it's used for as soon as possible.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

**MLA Lindsey:** Imagine the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg trying to operate with no hot water. What makes Thompson General Hospital any less important to this minister and this government?

This problem has been going on for at least a week this time, and apparently it's not the first time it's happened. And yet this minister knows nothing about it. There's been no response.

So, why has the minister allowed the situation in Thompson to get to this point, and what is she going to do to ensure that it doesn't happen again?  
*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** It is a serious issue.

We want to ensure that the services that are provided to Manitobans here in Winnipeg and across the rural areas is also provided to individuals who are in care in the North, and so I will connect with—  
[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** —the northern regional health authority on the issue, and I'm sure their mechanical team has been working on it since this issue came to light and is doing their very best to resolve the issues.

Plumbers, I'm sure, are working on it at this very moment, and so I will ensure that this situation is rectified as soon as possible.

Thank you. [interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

#### **Personal-Care Homes Need for New Beds**

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, earlier this week I was contacted by management at Parkview Place personal-care home in Union Station. The facility no longer has any residents.

With these beds now removed, Manitoba has 200 fewer personal-care-home beds than when the PCs took office.

Will the minister for seniors care explain why there are 200 less personal-care-home beds in Manitoba than when they took office?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Acting Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Madam Speaker, Budget 2021—and very soon we will be celebrating many announcements under Budget 2022—but in 2021, invested over \$653 million in personal-care homes. That's more than the NDP ever spent

More beds since we took office: we've built 506 personal-care-home beds and even more are coming online, Madam Speaker. And I'm happy to stand in the House today to remind members that we have invested \$653 million in personal-care homes.

\* (14:20)

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, the PCs promised 1,200 new personal-care-home beds in 2016. Government documents, which I table, show they did not do

that. In fact, now that the 277 beds at Parkview are gone, there are 200 less personal-care home beds in the province than when this government took office.

Will the minister for seniors care explain why their government has not kept their promise to seniors and Manitobans?

**Ms. Gordon:** We are—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** —as a government are committed to ensuring that Manitobans receive the care in the right facilities, including personal-care homes in—I do want to point out as well, today, that in 2020 we announced a historic \$280-million investment in safety upgrades to personal-care homes and our government has—  
[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** —committed to implementing all 17 recommendations of Dr. Stevenson's report, and the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care (Mr. Johnston) was out today announcing \$15 million to strengthen long-term-care homes and personal-care homes.

We will continue to do more to ensure individuals who need personal-care-home settings have that available to them.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, while the minister stands up and repeats old announcements and broken promises, hundreds of patients—hundreds of patients—are waiting for personal-care-home beds right now. Hundreds of patients are being transferred far from home because there's no space for them.

The PCs broke their promise for 1,200 new personal-care-home beds and there's now 200 less beds in our system today. That's a failure and it's another broken promise.

Will the minister for seniors care explain why their government has broken their promise to Manitobans?

**Ms. Gordon:** Perhaps the member for Union Station missed the news release. I will update them on that new news release, and the announcement was today.

Madam Speaker, \$50 million initial funding will support enhancing infection prevention and control within the long-term-care sector. More than 200 full-time equivalent—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** –housekeeping staff, improvements to information and communication technology to better support operations and patient care—those are investments we're making in personal-care homes and long-term—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** –care today, Madam Speaker, not in the past.

### **Seniors Advocate Office Request to Establish**

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madam Speaker, seniors need supports now. Action is needed to ensure that our seniors are protected. After the tragic loss of life at private personal-care homes, now is the time to establish a seniors advocate and for comprehensive reform of the systems that care for our seniors.

Will the minister commit today to the establishment of a seniors advocate?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Acting Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care):** What we do commit to do—to doing for Manitobans is ensuring that they receive the care and the services that they need at a very delicate time in their lives as seniors, whether it's personal-care homes, whether it's health-care services. And we also commit to Manitobans that we will implement all 17 recommendations in Dr. Stevenson's report.

That is our commitment, we stand by that commitment and we will fulfill that promise.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a supplementary question.

**MLA Marcelino:** Madam Speaker, the toll COVID-19 has taken on our care homes is tragic. Outbreaks continue to this day. Unfortunately, many centres didn't have proper staffing before the pandemic and staffing shortages continue to this day due to low wages, dangerous working conditions and very poor benefits.

This government's cuts hurt, and the result of mismanagement was that lives were lost.

I ask the minister for seniors care: Will they support our call for a seniors advocate today?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, our government has shown our commitment to seniors. We established the first-ever Ministry of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

We are looking specifically at the needs of our senior population, Madam Speaker. We are preparing to roll out a very comprehensive seniors strategy that will look at a range of services for seniors across the continuum of care that they need, and we've also committed to fulfilling the 17 recommendations of Dr. Stevenson's report as well as today's \$15-million investment.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a final supplementary.

**MLA Marcelino:** Madam Speaker, the former Health minister believed that deaths at personal-care homes were unavoidable and that he questioned the motivations of health staff who were fighting for their patients.

We can do better. We need to lift the voices and concerns of seniors, not try to stifle them.

Will the minister take action today and support our call for a seniors advocate?

**Ms. Gordon:** It's so unfortunate and very sad that the member opposite is attempting to politicize the tragic deaths of individuals during—seniors during the pandemic, Madam Speaker.

We have learned many important lessons that will inform how we respond to the needs of seniors during a pandemic or another severe situation in this province, and we are taking steps, Madam Speaker, establishing a new ministry, a new minister, staff under that minister, dollars going into this work. And we will continue to do more to support our seniors.

### **Supports for Ukrainian Refugees Funding for Settlement Services**

**Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry):** Madam Speaker, it's been 42 days since the Russians invaded Ukraine, 42 days for thousands of parents and children looking for a safe place to call home. And what has this government done to help our Ukrainian relatives settle in Manitoba? Nothing.

I've asked this before and didn't get an answer, so I'll give the minister another opportunity today: Will the minister and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) announce increased funding for resettlement services today?

**Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** December 2019, when the member got elected, and continues to politicize all the good work that we're doing as a PC government.

Madam Speaker, our government will welcome and assist as many Ukrainian citizens as possible, as our province is the home of hope. But in order to do that, the federal government needs to determine and tell us how many Ukrainians may be coming to Canada. Through the Ukrainian Refugee Task Force and the deputy ministers' steering committee, we have a dedicated team and are ready to provide a full range of provincial support services that will be provided to Ukrainian families forced to leave their homes.

We are taking action and ready to help those displaced Ukrainians come safely to Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Madam Speaker, that was shameful. That's a government that is avoiding leadership and avoiding responsibility and hiding behind the federal government for their inaction.

Now, yesterday, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress was forced to cancel an information session in Manitoba because, I quote, a lack of clarity about government programming.

This government has not stepped up. They have not provided the supports needed for newcomers from Ukraine to help them settle here.

Why has this government failed this moment?

**Mr. Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I'm proud to say that this government has worked with our immigration partners, such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Ukrainian-Canadian foundation, to help plan for the arrival of Ukrainian citizens to our province, a province full of hope.

\* (14:30)

We are taking a whole-of-government approach in providing settlement services to those Ukrainians who need it most, such as child care, housing, K-to-12 education, assistance with employment and access to mental health care and more. Our government has been responsive, taking action with the Ukrainian situation and we'll be ready when the first arrivals come to Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a final supplementary.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Madam Speaker, Manitobans have been stepping up and it has really been something to

see. What we haven't seen is that commitment from Manitobans reflected back to them by government action.

Madam Speaker, 700 families have offered their homes. Communities are hosting fundraisers. I was in Gimli recently; they raised \$19,000 there. Brandon University is waiving tuition. Yet, this government can't clarify what programs and what money they're going to give for settlement services.

Why won't this government step up and provide new settlement services to newcomers for Ukrainians today?

**Mr. Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I know the member continues to politicize the situation. That's unfortunate. It's shameful. But now is a time to put some facts on the record.

I must remind him of what our government is taking action on—action. In addition to providing \$2 million to support various newcomer integration support projects, we have provided \$800,000 in humanitarian aid and grant relief.

We've waived the \$500 application fee for Ukrainians applying through our Provincial Nominee Program, prioritized all Ukrainian MPNP applications through special draws, set up a Ukrainian Refugee Task Force with dedicated staff to handle the day-to-day operations in how to safely bring Ukrainian citizens to—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Reyes:** —Manitoba.

Manitoba's support needs to be an—immediate, strong and unwavering as we prepare for large-scale arrivals to deliver on a wide range of provincial settlement supports.

Thank—

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

### COVID-19 Case Numbers Government Response

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** We're seeing Omicron BA.2 cases rise across Canada, and it is even more infectious than the last variant. It can spread faster and farther, and the basic math is undeniable. More cases means more people in hospital, ICUs and lives lost.

Dr. Tara Moriarty of U of—of the U of Toronto is estimating that Manitoba had over 4,200 cases

yesterday and rising. The only way to protect the vulnerable is to make sure that they and the people around them are vaccinated, boosted and masked, but that's not happening enough.

Manitoba Liberals believe that, to avoid restrictions, we need to keep protections—testing, tracing, updates, boosters and masks—the fundamentals.

Is the PC strategy to just let COVID rip through the population? Because Manitobans deserve to know.

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I thank the member from St. Boniface for the question.

We're continuing to closely monitor the BA.2 variant and we're working very closely with Public Health. I continue to get regular briefings from Public Health related to the epidemiology and the modelling, and we're tracking it very, very closely.

Based on what the member has said, it makes it even more important that Manitobans remember to follow the fundamentals: washing their hands, staying home if they're sick and continuing to get vaccinated. We're certainly not out of the woods yet, and I want to remind Manitobans to get vaccinated if they haven't been yet.

And I think we're all very pleased to hear that the National Advisory Committee on Immunization has recommended—

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

The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a supplemental question.

### **Long-Haul COVID Patients Request for Treatment Plan**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Madam Speaker, the COVID dashboard has been wiped from the government website. It's as if the pandemic never happened and that more than 1,700 people did not die. That's quite something to sweep under the rug. We've replaced a state of emergency with a state of denial.

And what's horrifying about the complacency is it's not just COVID deaths: it's long-haul COVID, long-term physical and mental system—symptoms. It's even been linked to type 1 diabetes in children, which is definitely not easy to live with.

What is this government's plan to treat all the Manitobans who are being disabled by long-haul COVID?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** COVID data, contrary to what the member has said, continues to be reported and is available weekly from Public Health. Public Health also continues to share its data federally with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

We are all, as Manitobans, excited to hear that the National Advisory Committee on Immunization is recommending a fourth booster dose. And that announcement came out on the 5th. And we will continue to ensure Manitobans have access to get vaccinated, whether it's one, two, three or the upcoming fourth dose.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary.

### **Individuals with Autism Support Services Criteria**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, I have written to the Minister of Families about an 18-year-old with autism who clearly needs supports which are being denied them.

Because their IQ is above 80, they do not fit the minister's category for support, yet the 18-year-old's learning, processing, planning and functional deficits are such that they desperately need the support in order to have the best chance of success.

I ask the minister whether she will do what Newfoundland and Labrador are doing, which is to eliminate the IQ criteria for support for autism, and instead base the support on functional needs.

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families):** I thank the member for the question, and I'm always happy to talk about casework—preferably outside of the Chamber. But since he's raised it in the House, I'm certainly happy to respond to him about our government's approach to helping all Manitobans with disabilities and lifting all Manitobans who are afflicted with disabilities up and making sure that they get their diagnostics and that they get their proper treatments.

We've made some investments in building more diagnostics and assessments tools and treatments for people afflicted with autism and certainly invested more in children with disabilities. And there'll be more to come on April the 12th when our Finance Minister tables the budget, which will be good news for people with disabilities in the province of Manitoba.

### Immigration Advisory Council Appointment Announcement

**Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today as the new MLA for Fort Whyte.

The Immigration Advisory Council was announced on February 14th by the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and co-chairs Dr. Lloyd Axworthy and the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

Can the minister please update the House on the composition of the Immigration Advisory Council, and what the outcomes will be over the next eight to 10 months?

**Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** Great first question from the new MLA for Fort Whyte.

On March 28th, I was pleased to announce the 20 Manitobans who will be members of the Immigration Advisory Council to serve as an expert panel to improve and enhance the current Provincial Nominee Program, which was introduced by a PC government back in 1998.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, immigrants were neglected for years under the previous NDP government. Applicants had to wait for three years to process their applications and faced significant hurdles once they arrived in Manitoba. Processing times have now been six months or less under our government.

Madam Speaker, our vibrant immigrant community knows that they can rely on our PC government when it comes to modernizing the Provincial Nominee Program and seeking good employment once they arrive in Manitoba, the home of hope.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### Manitoba Public Insurance Diversion of Revenue

**Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples):** The PC government has transferred \$125 million from MPI to pay for this government's responsibilities. That's \$12 million more than previously disclosed.

The Premier says she forgot about \$30 million in real estate sales, but for regular Manitobans \$12 million is lots of money.

Will the minister reverse this move and stop taking money from MPI ratepayers today?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation):** Madam Speaker, when the NDP put driver's licences onto MPI, they failed to actually fund it properly. They attached it to MPI but didn't provide the proper funding for it to succeed.

That is something that we inherited, Madam Deputy—or, Madam Speaker. We've already indicated that that practice needs to stop. We put a freeze on it for two years, because we do need to fix what the NDP broke.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for the Maples, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Madam Speaker, the Public Utilities Board says of these transfers that, I quote, MPI ratepayers are effectively subsidizing what once was a government responsibility. End quote. That's not right.

\* (14:40)

This government's decisions are costing all of us \$125 million more.

Our request is simple: Will the minister ensure MPI ratepayers get the money that they belong to them, yes or no?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I know that the member opposite is relatively new to the House, but I can provide him with a little bit of a history on this program.

The NDP put DVA—the drivers and vehicles—onto MPI but didn't give it funding. And then the NDP transferred \$134 million from MPI to DVA. They transferred money in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Did he think it was right during all of those years?

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Madam Speaker, \$125 million has been taken from MPI to pay for this government's responsibilities; \$12 million of that was only recently disclosed. MPI is not the minister's piggy bank.

Madam Speaker, this is a bright—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Sandhu:** —daytime highway robbery of MPI by the Stefanson government. This decision needs to be reversed. The money needs to be returned to ratepayers.



Will the minister do so today?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Member opposite wants the money returned. I wonder if he's spoken to Gary Doer, who raided the piggy bank in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010.

And he could also, I suppose, then write to Greg Selinger, who raided the piggy bank in 2011, 2012, 2014, Madam Speaker.

The piggy bank got broken because the NDP, while they were raiding everybody's pockets by raising the PST, set up this system so they raided it from MPI. They raided it for more than a decade.

They broke it; we'll fix it, Madam Speaker.

### **Agricultural Crown Land Leasing Beef Producer Concerns**

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** The PC government have made a mess of Crown lands.

Carson Callum, general manager of Manitoba Beef Producers, says that they have, and I quote, many concerns that a lot of changes to the Crown lands program did not—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Brar:** —line up with what we had recommended in our consultation. End quote.

What does the minister say to Carson Callum and the concerns of hundreds of beef producers around this province?

**Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture):** I want to thank my critic for the question and to bring to light of—all the great work that we're doing for Manitoba farmers

Just recently, we've announced—and I want to make sure everybody that's watching is aware—we've announced that we're increasing the funding from \$250 a head to \$270 a head for beef producers.

And we've also extended the deadline for people to apply to April 13th for the programming. And why did we extend the deadline? Because we also extended the program.

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

**Mr. Brar:** I'll give another try to bring the minister to the subject of Crown lands.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to keep bringing forward the concerns of beef producers until this minister gives them an answer.

Matthew Atkinson, chair of Beef Producers' Crown lands committee, says he is a young producer but, and I quote, the chances of being able to outbid a more established producer are slim. The benefit for a young producer is certainly not there. End quote.

And I ask again: What does the minister says to Matthew Atkinson and the many young producers who aren't being given a chance?

**Mr. Johnson:** I want to thank the critic for coming to Brandon at the ag fair.

And speaking of the ag fair and young farmers, a lot of our young farmers come through the 4-H program. And we were proud to announce \$900,000 funding for 4-H over three years—\$300,000 a year—\$900,000.

And over and above that, Madam Speaker, we also funded Clover the cow. Clover is a life-size replica of a cow where you can actually go inside the cow and feel the calf and deliver a calf. It was an enlightening experience, exciting, and I'd like to thank the member for bringing this to light.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** The time for oral questions has expired.

## **PETITIONS**

### **Foot-Care Services**

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

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** 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)—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, 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 now 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 provider—service provider, rather—and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes can—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.

\* (14:50)

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health 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.

And this petition, Madam Speaker, has been signed by Jorja Spence, Kia Beardry [*phonetic*] and David Long and many other Manitobans.

### **Scrap Metal Legislation—Consumer Protection**

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

The background to the petition—to this petition is as follows:

(1) The spike in catalytic converter thefts occurring across North America has hit Winnipeg. The price of precious metals in catalytic converters, like rhodium, palladium and platinum, are worth thousands of dollars an ounce. Scrap-metal recyclers have catalytic converters priced to the vehicle, with some catalytic converters worth \$800.

(2) Organized groups of criminals are claim—climbing under vehicles and cutting catalytic

converters and selling them to scrap-metal recyclers for cash, without any record of these transactions.

(3) Catalytic converter thefts cost consumers about \$2,000 for each replacement. Manitoba Public Insurance charges a betterment fee for new replacements, so insurance doesn't cover the full cost.

(4) Currently, sellers do not have to provide government-issued photo ID and recyclers do not need to record and retain this information, or record details of the transaction.

(5) Scrap-metal recyclers do not report to police any transactions involving catalytic converters.

(6) Provinces like BC and Alberta have scrap-metal-recycler legislation requiring businesses to keep proper records.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to bring in consumer protection legislation requiring scrap-metal recyclers to keep proper records so only legitimate sales are allowed and criminals can be caught.

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

#### Foot-Care Services

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** 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 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-care centres—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 exceeds beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this is signed by many, many Manitobans.

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** Madam Speaker, 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, 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 Cora Flett, Sandra Cameron, Leon Gillis, Candace Clemons, Robert Charchet [*phonetic*] and many, many other Manitobans.

**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, the N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and to 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, 2022.

And this petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

### Lead in Soils

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

\* (15:00)

In December of 2019, the provincial government's commissioned report on lead concentrations in soil in Winnipeg was completed.

The report found that 10 neighbourhoods had concerning levels of lead concentration in their soil, including Centennial, Daniel McIntyre, Glenelm-Chalmers, north Point Douglas, River Osborne, Sargent Park, St. Boniface, West End, Weston and Wolseley-Minto.

In particular, the predicted blood lead levels for children in north Point Douglas, Weston and Daniel McIntyre were above the level of concern.

The Weston Elementary School field has been forced to close down many times because of concerns of lead in soil and the provincial government's inaction to improve the situation.

Lead exposure especially affects children aged seven years and under, as their nervous system is still developing.

The effects of lead exposure are irreversible and include impacts on learning, behaviour and intelligence.

For adults, long-term lead exposure can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney problems and reproductive effects.

The provincial government currently has no comprehensive plan in place to deal with lead in soil, nor is there a broad advertising campaign educating residents on how they can reduce their risks of lead exposure.

Instead, people in these areas continue to garden and work in the soil and children continue to play in the dirt, often without any knowledge of the associated risks.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take action to reduce people's exposure to lead in Winnipeg, and to implement the recommendations proposed by the provincial government's independent review, including the creation of an action plan for the Weston neighbourhood, developing a lead awareness communications and outreach program, requisitioning a more in-depth study, and creating a tracking program for those tested for blood lead levels so that medical professionals can follow up with them.

This has been signed by Gloria J. Araboy, Rico Manaloto and Antonio Pangan and many other Manitobans.

### **Eating Disorders Awareness Week**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by many 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.

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.

**Madam Speaker:** Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Could you please call for second reading this afternoon Bill 36, Bill 15, Bill 13 and Bill 23.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the House will consider second readings of bills 36, 15, 13 and 23.

## SECOND READINGS

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

**Madam Speaker:** I will therefore call second reading of Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act.

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act, 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 Finance (Mr. Friesen), seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act, 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. Friesen:** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and to put some comments on the record in respect of Bill 36: The Manitoba Hydro Act, the utilities board act, Crown Corporations Governance and Accountability Act—all amended in this bill.

The primary objectives of this bill are to enhance the oversight of major capital spending by Manitoba Hydro to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the regulatory process itself and to create role clarity for the government, for the Public Utilities Board as the regulator and for Manitoba Hydro.

There are some significant amendments to The Manitoba Hydro Act. I would like to overview those.

A multi-year rate-setting process of three years will be implemented. That is new, Madam Speaker, as Manitobans know now. In Manitoba, we are the outlier and we do a rate application each and every time, and this would set a rate for multiple years.

*Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

I would note, three years, not five, as in a previous bill. So the PUB would be required to approve and set the rates for a three-year period.

And, of course, as we've noted already in debate, these orders can be revisited if there's a material change in the forecast used to set those rates.

\* (15:10)

So it doesn't mean it cannot change, it means that if there are exigent circumstances, unusual circumstances, something materially changes, that can be amended through a truncated process where the PUB would essentially reconvene and hear this new evidence and make decisions and determinations on the basis of that new evidence.

It also includes financial targets to be set to measure and monitor the utility's debt level. That debt now stands at over \$20 billion. The Public Accounts of this year will update that debt number but, last reported, north of \$20 billion—a tripling of the debt under the previous NDP government because of significant project mismanagement that I've continued to say in this place is the economic scandal of the 20th century in Manitoba. The financial mismanagement by NDP: the financial scandal of the 20th century.

Essentially, a \$4-billion overprice, Manitoba ratepayers sold a bill of goods, the true cost escalations of those dams and transmission lines hidden from Manitobans, misreported in the 2011 budget by the NDP and, three years later, a sudden and shocking 40 per cent increase to the cost of those dams.

The expert report on Keeyask and bipole continue to say that there were management problems. There were problems with the actual way the project was undertaken. There were important safeguards that were gone around deliberately by the previous government. They spent \$1.2 billion before they had approval to build the assets.

So, in many cases, with those sunk costs, the PUB had a skewed look at the projects and they had to consider and say, what do we do now that our government has inappropriately spent \$1.2 billion without authority, without approval and without what's called the NFAT process, the needs-for-and-alternatives-to.

So this bill addresses that by setting financial targets over time to say, look, the financial performance and the financial position of a major energy utility matters very much. In Manitoba, we know that the debt equity of Manitoba Hydro is worse than that of Quebec hydro, it is worse than that of BC Hydro. Other energy utilities have taken steps to be able to stabilize their debt and Manitoba Hydro has a lot of ground to cover. It's important to encapsulate that intent in legislation.

Manitoba Hydro long-term plans and major investment decisions, though, in this bill now will also be approved by government with stakeholder input. This includes the development of an integrated resource plan. I know we use this term, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, we use this term. The IRP, or integrated resource plan, refers to that measurement of your load and the measurement of capacity over a longer term, so a 10-year term, to determine what are we generating, what are we using and what will we need in future, and, more importantly, when will we need that additional load?

So this would undertake to require that approval by government. It would also require the PUB review of major capital investments. That could be dams, that could be transmission lines, and it sets a threshold above which a project would need to be reviewed by PUB, an important safeguard for Manitoba ratepayers against the previous government's type of reckless and unconstrained spending and hiding. And also, it would include Treasury Board approval of Manitoba Hydro's capital spend as part of the annual budget review process.

So those are important protections for Hydro. They're important expansions to the role of the Public Utilities Board. And they're important protections to the ratepayers themselves, who were not protected but were threatened by the previous NDP's reckless actions.

Now, I want to be very clear on something. I would appreciate if the critic would listen very hard to this part—that Manitoba Hydro rates continue to be set by the Public Utilities Board in the interim and the long term. There is no mechanism in this bill for what that member in question period has said is the ability for government to set rates.

The government is not setting rates. The rate-setting function is the regulator's requirement. We are the government, the PUB is the regulator. The regulator works for the government. The regulator sets the rates for Manitoba Hydro.

And it's important to note, as well, that in respect of Manitoba Hydro's most recent rate application—which was received, measured and adjudicated, and a decision just came out earlier this year by the PUB—essentially, that we have now the conditions in which that will be sufficient to guide this process right to that multi-year rate application in future, because Manitoba Hydro has certainty now in terms of this year's rate. They have the ability to extend that to a second and a third year and that will see us through to

a period of time in which rate applications—new rate applications can be made on a three-year basis.

The PUB retains the right to approve rates approved by Hydro. They can vary rates as the PUB considers just and reasonable. This would be a good time to mention also to the critic—he had made some kind of comment yesterday about surge pricing—I would remind that member that our rates in Manitoba go by classes, and all residential users are one class of hydro. And the rules in this bill and the rules for Hydro make it very clear that they cannot differentiate rules between classes. So there's no ability to provide surge rates to customers. It's not a feature in this bill in any way, shape or form.

The legislation doesn't just set out rules and new specifications for Hydro. It sets out factors that the PUB is to consider when setting hydro rates. Rates are to be based on the revenue requirements of the utility. Rates approved must be sufficient to allow the corporation to achieve those debt-to-capitalization targets by specified dates so that the health of the utility, the health of the corporation itself, cannot be factored out entirely.

The PUB's responsibility must be affordability of Manitobans, but they cannot do it with blinders on, to say we don't care at all what happens to Manitoba Hydro. We, as Manitobans, as taxpayers and rate-payers, we must care about the health of Manitoba Hydro. It's been a source of Manitoba's growth. It's been an important job creator. It's been an important means by which families and businesses can have among the lowest hydro and electrical rates in all of North America, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

I did a quick scan just days ago to check major jurisdictions; it was Houston, New York, Indiana, Vancouver, it was Montreal and Toronto. And wherever you looked in North America, Manitoba continues to have the lowest rates or the second lowest rates in all of North America. That is no small thing. It is an advantage that we must protect. It is an advantage that the NDP put into peril.

And I would also add that decisions that need—any decisions made by the PUB will need to consider the policies set by governments as well as directives issued to the corporation by government.

Now, some changes to the PUB, The Public Utilities Board Act, I want to emphasize these. So, every year the PUB now will submit a business plan for approval by the minister. That's to include their goals, their strategies and their performance measures.

If they have hearings in that year, the PUB would want to submit and say, look, this is a year where we're going to see a rate application for this entity or that entity, and they will bill those costs within their budget. The PUB is the regulator. The PUB will build that budget. The PUB will deliver their services according to that budget.

Regulations under The Manitoba Hydro Act will clarify the future oversight model for Manitoba Hydro's gas utility subsidiary, which, in broad terms, is expected to become more consistent with the model that applies to electricity. The PUB's board selection's based on merit. That means that board members can't be dismissed, except by cause, before their terms end.

And the PUB's enforcement powers are enhanced because it's important that if the PUB is to make some enforcement measures or those enforcement measures have to make sense, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker—I think for right now if there was an applicant for a rate hike and they were in breach of something they had to do, I think the maximum fine or penalty that the PUB could enforce was \$100 a day.

And you'd say, well, for a major corporation, that wouldn't be material. So there is a mechanism in here to enhance those enforcement penalties to ensure compliance. To be clear, this bill ensures the PUB's role of approving electricity rates is continued.

And some other changes, then, to The Crown Corporations Governance and Accountability Act, just a few things here. This section deals with the rate-setting process for Manitoba Hydro. Bill 36 puts the regulatory framework for Manitoba Hydro's rate-setting process into its own act.

\* (15:20)

Mr. Deputy—Acting Deputy Speaker, protecting Manitoba's future means addressing today's priorities with an eye on tomorrow. This bill ensures Manitoba Hydro is on a sustainable track for Manitobans today, and for future generations. It creates greater accountability and transparency between Hydro and the government and the Public Utilities Board.

And today's second reading of this act allows us to continue making progress on striking the right balance, and that's what this is. This is a balancing act between protecting Manitobans' low rates. It is a balancing act between recognizing that this utility itself is not in great shape after 17 years of the NDP.

They've threatened Manitoba Hydro. It's up to a responsible government to stabilize Hydro so that its



future is not called into jeopardy. And it protects Manitobans with these multi-rate–multi-year rate applications from energy shocks while maintaining the independence and effectiveness of the Public Utilities Board.

So I recommend it to the House. I do want to say though, Mr. Acting Deputy 'speaver'–Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not also state that the context for this bill is very clear. And while the NDP is working very, very hard to try to change the narrative and try to distance themselves from the things they did when they were in government, Manitobans know that the record is clear that Keeyask and Bipole III were promised to Manitobans to be essentially rate-neutral.

I can recall NDP ministers standing on this side—and so can you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, because you and I came to this Legislature in the same year in 2011—and those ministers crowed from their seats in 2011, '12 and '13. They used terms like Manitoba's oil and they had swagger and they said Manitobans won't pay a nickel, they won't pay a penny for these large infrastructure projects because Americans were going to pay for them and Ontarians were going to pay for them and people from Saskatchewan were going to pay for them.

And then, at the same time, we know now they knew about cost escalation. They knew about the erosion of their original business plan. They knew about the discovery and the practice of fracturing that was happening in the US. They knew about horizontal drilling that was making new natural gas deposits more attractive to US users and making Manitoba Hydro export contracts less appealing to those users.

So we know that the NDP budget in 2011 promised Bipole III at \$3.28 billion, but the actual price came in under \$5 billion. We know that the NDP promised that Keeyask would be budgeted at \$6 billion and it came in at \$8.7 billion. *[interjection]*

It resulted in an almost \$4-billion cost escalation over planned cost, but if—*[interjection]* But there's more.

**An Honourable Member:** But there's more.

**Mr. Friesen:** But there's more. *[interjection]* But there's more—*[interjection]*

**The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook):** Order.

**Mr. Friesen:** But there's more, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

Because the NDP actually spent \$1.2 billion of that cost before they got approval to spend it. They got \$1.2 billion of costs spent before they actually went and did a needs-for-and-alternatives-to. And so there's a principle of sunk cost in capital projects.

And so when any evaluator later on looks at that project, they have to measure the cost to complete, they have to measure the overruns, but they must measure the sunk cost. In other words, is this thing now too big to fail?

What's happened, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, is that Manitobans have ended up with power they didn't require at the time, with promises that were hollow and false made by a previous government, with a process that they ignored and defied. And there's a need to stabilize Hydro because the extent of this—the end result of this is that Hydro's debt has tripled, but that the principal promise made by the NDP that Manitobans wouldn't pay a dime—

**An Honourable Member:** Not a nickel.

**Mr. Friesen:** —not a nickel, not a penny—now Manitobans know they were lied to. They know they were lied to, and those lies come at great cost.

So I want to end with this imperfect analogy. Manitobans know that they've been deceived, but Manitobans also know now that the NDP are saying there shouldn't be any rate increases in future, even though the NDP raised rates every single year when they were in government. Some years, they raised rates by 5 per cent, 4 per cent.

And remember that principle of compounding interest, that when you raise rates one year 5 per cent and then you apply a 5 per cent rate hike the next year, it's a rate hike on the already increased value. *[interjection]*

So there's a 36 per cent overall increase, but that doesn't reflect the compounding. *[interjection]*

So I will be sure to bring that mathematics back for the member from Point Douglas who continues to chirp, even not from her chair. But, in any case, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, here is my imperfect analogy—

**The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook):** Order.

Things were getting a little bit better during question period, but we're starting to get chirping going on, and I will start naming some people here. So I would appreciate everybody's co-operation and be respectful when somebody has the floor. I mean,

chirping is always part of the thing, but I think it's getting a little bit carried away.

So, the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen).

**Mr. Friesen:** I'll try again, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. I know my colleagues will like to hear this.

Here's my imperfect analogy, but I think it makes sense for Manitobans. It's like the NDP owned a house and then they decided to build an addition, but it was a massive addition. And then they decided to actually be the project manager and do all that project management themselves. And they told the family, don't worry, we're going to get this huge new addition but the family doesn't have to pay for this house because the neighbours are going to pay for this house. And then when the thing was actually built—and probably the family and the neighbours saw it being built and they probably thought, I don't know, this price seems like it's really—don't worry, the price is not going up, they told the neighbours, they told the family, nothing to see here.

Well, when the cost was finally in and when the addition was finally made—I guess you'd also say, they didn't actually occupy the addition. They didn't need the addition. The family said, we didn't actually need this addition for 10 years. Well, don't worry, we got the addition. But then he said, we've got bad news for you, and the NDP who owned this house said, we have bad news. The neighbours have decided that they're not going to pay for the house, so all of you are.

And then, to make it worse, the NDP who owned this house said, but one more thing, and it is an outrage that we just contacted the bank and they said that our mortgage is going up because of this massive, massive addition to the house, so we're deciding that we're not going to pay the mortgage.

Well, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that would be absurd. If you buy a new car, you have to meet your obligations in terms of your monthly payments and your amortization. If you build a house, you must meet your obligations and respect your amortization and monthly payments. If you build a new business—any asset that you built must be paid for. What is it in the basic principles of finance that the NDP failed to grasp about this?

So they are trying to somehow distance themselves now in a hurried way from their legacy, which is a tripling of the debt that Manitobans are responsible for.

We have three responsibilities that this bill deals with, and here they are one last time: (1) stabilize Manitoba Hydro; (2) protect ratepayers through a cap—a ceiling above which a rate increase cannot go; and (3) give the PUB the ability to protect ratepayers in future from the NDP by making them responsible to review any project that an NDP future government—God forbid—would describe back to Manitobans and say, hey, we've got a great deal for you this time.

Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, we commend this bill to the House. It's the right bill at the right time to protect Manitoba Hydro, to protect ratepayers and to give Manitobans certainty when it comes to low energy rates in the future.

### Questions

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

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** The minister stated that rates are not going to be set by his government, but this bill explicitly states that rates are tied to debt-to-equity ratios that are set by his government. That's the key driver of rate increases according to this bill. So it explicitly states that his government is ultimately determining debt-to-equity targets that are going to be used to determine rate increases.

\* (15:30)

Can the minister describe why he thinks his government is better positioned to determine what's needed for rate increases versus having them be set through an independent process at the Public Utilities Board?

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro):** The member was wrong on this issue before. He continues to be wrong.

What he is forgetting is that this bill contains a mechanism whereby any rate application, any new rate hike, cannot be above 5 per cent. It is either a consumer price index increase or 5 per cent, whichever is the lesser. Rates cannot go above that so there is no sense in which government is setting rates.

**Mr. Sala:** The minister didn't respond to the question, and the question was: If his government is determining the debt-to-equity ratios by—that we're tying to rate setting, that is exactly—that is the same thing as essentially government setting rates. So, he's denying that. He's continuing to deny that.

I'd like him to answer why he thinks his government is better positioned to know what rate increases are needed versus having them be set through the Public Utilities Board, through an independent process?

**Mr. Friesen:** The member seems not to have heard my second reading speech. It is exactly the Public Utilities Board who continues to be responsible for rate setting on a multiple-year basis.

We're moving to a three-year rate application process but the PUB is the regulator. The PUB hears testimony, gathers evidence, has expert evidence, makes determinations. That's not the government's role. That's the PUB's role.

**The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook):** The honourable member for River Heights, my apologies. I missed him on the last question.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** My question to the minister is this: What is the current debt-to-equity or debt-to-capitalization ratio and why is the government not putting a target before 2035?

It would probably be better to have a target that is sooner, because by 2035, the minister is probably not going to be in this Chamber to be held accountable.

**Mr. Friesen:** So it's interesting that we have one party who seems to say we're going too fast and one party who says we're going too slow, in respect of debt-equity ratios. So that might mean we're getting it just right.

I can tell that member that where BC Hydro has a debt-equity ratio of closer to probably 80-20 and I think that Quebec hydro is even better. Ours, of course, is sliding very near to 87-13. I can verify that number for him, but it's clearly not a—it's not a place that any energy utility wants to be.

**Mr. Sala:** How did the minister and his government come to determine the debt-to-equity targets outlined in the bill?

**Mr. Friesen:** Well, we did our homework. We looked at utilities across North America, but, of course, we would make that distinction between government-owned utilities and private utilities; very different

principles at play, very different stakeholders, if you use that term, because, of course, it is the ratepayers who are the stakeholders in respect of a publicly owned utility.

We looked at best practice. We looked at the analysis from the Boston Consulting report and other expert reports, including the expert report on Keeyask and bipole, and those things led us to the determinations of what a more proper and equitable equity-debt ratio looks like.

**Mr. Gerrard:** The minister shouldn't interpret my last question as implying that it should be faster but just that there should be more accountability with whatever the target would be sooner.

In the bill, there is a reference to an integrated resource plan and major new facilities. And I'm interested in what the definition of major new facilities is because we could be talking about significant new facilities in wind or solar, which might be significantly less costly than a facility in the North on hydro or—

**The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook):** The honourable member's time has expired.

**Mr. Friesen:** Yes, I understand the member's question.

This is actually indicated in the bill itself. A major new facility for generator transmitting power is defined as a generating station with a peak capacity of 200 megawatts of power, a new transmission line with a voltage higher than 230 kilovolts, and that would require an investment by the corporation of \$200 million or more.

And there's definitions as well as to major power purchases and export contracts, which could also be reviewed.

**Mr. Sala:** I'd like to ask the minister how the elimination of the role of the PUB as an independent determiner of rates helps to protect Manitobans? How does that serve Manitoban consumers?

**Mr. Friesen:** I would need the critic to clarify his comments. I'm unsure of what he's saying is taking place. So perhaps if he'd like to rephrase his question, I could understand what he's getting at.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, I would ask the minister, what is meant by an integrated resource plan?

I mean, we understand that hydroelectricity may be produced from hydroelectric or solar or wind or gas. But if you're looking at Lake Winnipeg and the

management of Lake Winnipeg, an integrated resource plan might include fishing and recreation and various other things.

So what is an integrated resource plan? Can we have a clear definition?

**Mr. Friesen:** The member's very demanding because he's demanding a definition of IRP in 30 seconds.

Here it goes: an IRP is a long-term plan that meets the future energy needs of Manitobans which considers all potential alternatives. Development of an IRP is a best practice in other jurisdictions, and it plans for energy needs, market risks and prudent investments.

**Mr. Sala:** Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, the role of the PUB is weakened and undermined by this bill. And that's not just our opinion as the opposition, that's the opinion that was expressed by Public Interest Law Centre recently in a news article quoting Byron Williams, representing the consumers advocate Manitoba.

They are, with this bill, undermining the role of the Public Utilities Board and they're supplanting that with government-determined debt-to-equity ratios that will drive rate setting higher and higher and higher. So, effectively, they are undermining the role of the PUB.

How does that serve the interests of Manitobans?

**Mr. Friesen:** Now I understand the question. I can say, definitively, the member is wrong. What we're actually doing is strengthening the PUB.

As I mentioned in my speaking notes, the PUB's mandate is strengthened greatly with the generation of an annual budget. With the expansion of their role to look at future energy projects—bipole-type of projects, transmission projects, energy generation dams, any kind of project like that—they will have that authority to look at, adjudicate and make determinations of that, which will be an important protection for Manitobans against an NDP future raid on Hydro's profitability or stability.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, I was surprised that the integrated resource plan, that the description that the minister gave had absolutely no reference to environmental issues. These are very important, of course, dealing with Lake Winnipeg. Natural gas produces carbon emissions. There are significant environmental impacts, as we know, of hydroelectric dams.

Why was environmental issues not included at all in an integrated resource plan?

**Mr. Friesen:** Integrated resource plan is best practice across utilities. It's not been done in Manitoba for years. The PUB's actually been calling on the—Manitoba Hydro to undertake an IRP-based process. So this legislation would bake in that requirement for an IRP.

Yes, I actually believe that the process does include consideration of environmental factors. It also includes things like that ratio of your utilization and your demand—sorry, and your capacity. So you have capacity on one side, demand on the other. And over a 10-year period this requires—it's complex work—it then creates a better lens through which to view potential new projects in future and determine when they should be built, how they should be built and if they should be built.

**Mr. Sala:** Manitobans are struggling right now in an—affordability crisis; costs are going up all over the place. And yet this government is choosing, instead of working to help Manitobans, to introduce a hydro bill that will serve to increase costs for all Manitobans and, in fact, raise hydro rates as quickly as possible.

\* (15:40)

Can the minister explain why he thinks that's an appropriate piece of legislation to bring forward when we're in the midst of an affordability crisis?

**Mr. Friesen:** This is where Manitobans get confused, because the NDP raised by 5 per cent the hydro rates in 2005. They raised them by almost 3 per cent in 2006 and '07. They raised by 5 per cent in 2008 and '09. They raised them by 4 per cent in 2015. They raised rates on Manitobans by 35 per cent. But that doesn't tell the whole picture because that's of course not telling the picture of compounding rate increases.

So, it'd be interesting if that member would take the time to tell us: Why is it that the NDP raised hydro rates every single year?

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, my question to the minister is, what is the process—if the government wants a specific approach to Manitoba Hydro, what is the approach of government, or how does the government provide directions to the PUB?

**Mr. Friesen:** Yes, directives by government are not new in terms of legislation. That member will remember the NDP government gave a directive to Manitoba Hydro back in about 2013, I think, in

respect of the Clean Environment Commission study. There was a directive given then.

But, essentially, this clarifies that the PUB can't override government directives and that all government directives and orders would be public, of course. There's no hear-hidden agendas. Hearings would be held accordingly. So it would be very much future practice will reflect past practice.

**Mr. Sala:** This bill opens the door to the private resale of energy here in Manitoba and fundamentally changes The Manitoba Hydro Act in that respect. That's a real concern because opening that door would potentially open the door to the privatization and the private reselling of energy and could create a significant threat to the health of Manitoba Hydro.

Can the minister explain why he believes it's necessary that we open the door to the private resale of energy in Manitoba?

**Mr. Friesen:** Well, maybe it's time for another bill briefing.

My government is dedicated to a strong and continuing-to-be-public-owned Manitoba Hydro. I want to make that clear. But what we need is for that utility to be strong, to be independent, to be able to deliver those low rates to Manitobans that their government threatened. There is no back door to privatization in this bill.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, I asked the Finance Minister about government instructions to PUB. Let me give an example. You know, we have electric vehicles coming on strong. We're going to be charging a lot of electric vehicles.

Would the government—for example, if it gave instructions that the rates could be lower when there is a low load capacity, the middle of the night for instance—can the government do that in terms of a recommendation, and how would it do it?

**Mr. Friesen:** Note to my esteemed colleague: it is the PUB that sets rates. The government does not interfere with the PUB. The PUB gathers evidence. The PUB sets rates. And they set rates according to classes, as the member knows. So residential would be a class, corporations like business would be a class, large businesses would be a separate classification, and then that's how rates are set.

However, to his question, very important that looking to the future, thinking about those energy needs as they evolve through electric vehicles, charging stations—those are opportunities for the

future, and this bill will facilitate those future opportunities.

**Mr. Sala:** Yes, I'd like to ask the minister how he came to the 5 per cent cap every year.

Why 5 per cent? Was it selected out of thin air or was there some analysis that led to that number being chosen?

**Mr. Friesen:** Well, 5 per cent is no higher than any previous NDP rate hike, but that wasn't the calculus. We needed to set a rate that we thought would be a ceiling, a protection for ratepayers, a level beyond which rates couldn't go.

Now, two years ago, had we set that at inflation, that would have been reasonable. But right now, with hyperinflation going on, setting that by the rate of inflation could mean a 10 per cent rate hike. We're saying no to 10 per cent rate hikes. If that member is saying he supports 10 per cent rate hikes, he should put those comments on the record today.

**The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook):** Time for questions has expired.

### Debate

**The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook):** The floor is now open for debate.

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** You know, it is great to have an opportunity to discuss this Hydro legislation today and it is, of course, always interesting to listen to this minister speak about Hydro and to listen to the doublespeak that is common from him and this government. It's pretty instructive to hear him talk about this bill and to speak about it as though this is legislation that will protect Manitobans from rate increases or protect Manitobans somehow when this bill serves one purpose and one purpose alone, which is to ultimately raise hydro rates as quickly as possible, among other rates, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

We've heard a lot of spin from this government today and we're going to continue to hear it around this bill, but they're not fooling anyone. No one trusts this government on Hydro or Health or any file, for that matter, and for good reason. We've seen them over and over attack Hydro, interfere with Hydro, undermine Hydro, cut Hydro. There's no trust between Manitobans and this government when it comes to Hydro.

Now, I want to say, off the top, one thing that's really important here that's worth identifying, which

is there are certainly opportunities to look at improving rate-setting processes in Manitoba, and we do, as we look forward to a cleaner energy future, have to re-examine the role of the Public Utilities Board and we do have to re-examine the Hydro act in light of the changes that we can expect to come in the years ahead. There's no question about that.

But that is not what this bill is about. That is not what this bill is about at all. This bill is actually about rehashing their failed bill 35, which they abandoned very recently—

**An Honourable Member:** New and improved.

**Mr. Sala:** Well, according to some. And this bill is fundamentally about continuing their ongoing attempts at raising hydro rates as quickly as possible and hiding behind a veneer of debt-to-equity ratios.

Again, we heard the minister over and over there refuse to answer the question, refuse to take ownership over the fact that it's his government that is setting the debt-to-equity targets that are driving the rate increases.

So he can continue to try to externalize it, put it over there. His government is determining the debt-to-equity ratios that will drive hydro rate increases, and that is guaranteed to drive hydro rates up as quickly as possible and we can bet, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that Manitobans will be staring down the barrel, after 2025, of 5 per cent rate increases year after year. And we know that, again, the consumers advocate of Manitoba expressed those very same concerns with this bill.

We also know that this bill is about weakening the role of the Public Utilities Board. It's about undermining that incredibly important role that the PUB plays in advocating for every single person in this province, including the members opposite. It's about undermining their role as an advocate because this government doesn't like the fact that the PUB has gotten in their way over and over and over again and refused to jack up rates as high as they would have liked.

And we know that, in 2017, they sought a 7.9 per cent hydro rate increase and they only got half of that. And that is thanks, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, to our advocate, the Public Utilities Board, serving our interests, saying no, we do not need a 7.9 per cent rate increase. That highlights just how important the role of the PUB is and just why this bill is such a grave threat to the affordability of life in this province.

This bill is also about opening the door to privatization. We know we heard the minister talk about—the sort of dismissed this: it's not a concern, there's nothing to see here.

And we've heard him in discussions or in media, when asked about this aspect of the bill, that it's to facilitate the expansion of on-roof solar and other behind-the-meter generation strategies, completely ignoring the fact that those things are already happening. Apparently they're happening right now without needing to open the door to the private resale of energy in Manitoba.

\* (15:50)

So, again, we have a real concern with this government and their track record with their intentions with that particular provision.

And then, lastly, this bill is about increasing their interference in our Crown corporations. We've seen, with this government, over the last several years, whether it be in Hydro or whether it be in MPI, across the board, a pattern of interference that hasn't served Manitobans well, a pattern of interference that has led to worse outcomes for Manitobans, worse services and higher rates. This government does not have a positive track record of making decisions that have served Manitobans well. No matter how much spin we try to put on this bill and the intentions of this bill, Manitobans know what has happened over the last seven years of this government being in power, and it's not a pretty record, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

You know, right now, as we discussed already, Manitobans are facing an affordability crisis. They're struggling to keep up with increasing costs. We've got fuel costs that are ballooning, I think, 35 per cent when we last checked. We've got food costs that are, again, skyrocketing; milk costs, skyrocketing. All over the board, our costs of living are skyrocketing. We also have the costs of rental housing in this province that are skyrocketing, due in large part to this government's failure to do what's necessary to prevent those rent increases from continuing to skyrocket due to their unwillingness to do anything about an out-of-control, above-guideline rent-increase issue. We've got tuition rates that have skyrocketed over the last several years under this government.

Affordability is becoming a bigger and bigger issue for families in this province. But instead of helping, this government is seeking, with this bill, to continue to make things worse. And they've been made worse in large part due to this government's role

in increasing hydro rates over the last seven years that they've been in government.

Over the last five years, we've seen a 16 per cent overall increase in hydro rates for Manitobans. One of those hydro rate increases—and we're lucky that it was only one because we know that they wanted to do it a second time—one of those increases was legislated. That was the very first time that that's ever happened in this province's history.

And every single member opposite should be ashamed of the fact that they legislated a hydro rate increase on Manitobans in the middle of a pandemic when families were struggling to get by. That is an absolute embarrassment, and it shows how little concern this government has for regular families, never mind families that are struggling or people who are on fixed incomes or seniors with limited incomes who are forced to make hard choices as a result of this government legislating a hydro rate increase in the middle of a pandemic.

And we can see now the effects of that. Recently, over the last few months we've heard that we've had an additional 2,000 Hydro customers who've been forced into arrears, driven by this government's hydro rate increases, their legislation of hydro rate increases. And, again, they almost legislated a second increase. Fortunately, they abandoned that at the last second, probably out of terror that Manitobans were going to rise up and remove them from government physically because they're absolutely dissatisfied with the continuous rate increases that they faced under this government.

So we know that, you know—and beyond just simply raising hydro rates through legislation and continuing to try to jack them up as much as they can, that they've also continued to create upward rate pressure for Manitobans through their work of privatization. They've privatized Teshmont Consultants; they had a 40 per cent stake in that. That was a profit-earning subsidiary of Hydro that helped to contribute to keep rates low for Manitobans, and they sold that off. And what happened to all the professionals, the hard-working professionals that were earning good wages? Those professionals were out of jobs here in Manitoba; they probably went to other provinces, went to places like Toronto and Vancouver, gutting our economy, which is what this government does very well.

They also contributed to increasing hydro rates through winding down Manitoba Hydro International.

This government took a golden goose that was producing millions of dollars in profits, which, again, helped to keep hydro rates low, and they wound it down. And what happened to all those contract opportunities? Well, those contracts, those opportunities, have gone off to their friends in the private sector. Again, a golden goose that helped to keep rates low for Manitobans.

So this bill, again, will serve to increase rates further, and yet, in addition to that, they've contributed to that problem, made it far worse through their work of privatization, of cuts, of shrinking and of winding down.

And this government, everyone on this other side of the House, should be really ashamed and they should take a close look at what they've done to Manitoba Hydro International. I don't know that all the members opposite have actually taken time to familiarize themselves with the good work of that Hydro subsidiary and exactly what we've lost as a result of their government's action.

They've also contributed to the rising of—to the raising of hydro rates through their handing over of our fibre-optic assets to Xplornet. We've taken hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of fibre-optic assets and we've given them over to a private company owned by an international hedge fund. That is not the action of a government that cares about the best interests of Manitobans. We made profits off of those fibre-optic assets. We've now handed that over to a private company, again, serving to increase rate pressures that are being faced by Manitobans and ultimately driving rates further and further up in addition to what this bill will serve to do and will—and that is bad news for the average Manitoban.

And lastly, they've contributed to increasing hydro rates through wasteful spending on things like unnecessary attempts at freezing IBEW worker wages.

And we know what happened there. They forced—again, in the middle of a pandemic—hundreds of workers out onto the street, forced to fight for negotiated wage increases, and what happened? Government lost that battle in court, and now Manitoba Hydro ratepayers and all Manitobans are on the hook for an \$18-million bill. Again, that \$18 million gets applied towards our rates. We're all paying for this government's mistakes. We're going to continue paying for them with what this bill implies.

And now we have Bill 36. Just like bill 35, this bill seeks to move rate setting from an independently managed process through the Public Utilities Board to the Cabinet table.

Manitobans don't want this, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Go out and speak to people in the public, speak to constituents. I encourage the minister to speak to people in his constituency and really ask them. Say, how do you feel about idea of us moving rate setting from an independently managed process to one that's set by myself and my fellow Cabinet members?

I think, and I can almost guarantee you, that he's not going to get a positive response to that question. I really challenge the minister to go out and have a couple conversations with folks in his constituency to understand where they stand on that question. I can guarantee you that the response will not be positive.

People do not want this. The Public Utilities Board as it's currently operates has been in place for a very long time. At one point, their role and the importance of their function was there was bipartisan agreement. It wasn't in question whether or not the Public Utilities Board served us positively. It wasn't in question that the Public Utilities Board played an important role advocating for all of us in helping to keep our rates low, but now with this government, we see with this bill that they disagree with that.

They disagree. They clearly do not think that Manitobans should benefit from having an advocate fighting for them to make sure that hydro rate setting is done in a manner that's fair, that's in their best interests and that ensures we're not overpaying, that this generation of Manitobans isn't being shouldered with overpaying when that should be spread over multiple, multiple years.

Instead, this government is seeking to undermine the role of the PUB, and what they're saying is, trust us, trust us that we know what's best. This is the same government that sought a 7.9 per cent rate increase that was refused by the PUB, and they got half of that.

This government is telling Manitobans to trust them, that they're going to set rates in a fair manner, and Manitobans have very little reason, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, to trust them. The PUB plays an incredibly important role; we should not be undermining it. This bill serves to do just that.

You know, post-2025 in this bill, we see that rate setting in this province will be tied to debt-to-equity targets that are determined by this government. And

those debt-to-equity targets are very hard to reach. And, ultimately, what this sets up is a situation, a scenario where, ultimately, Hydro has to massively increase their revenues in order to meet those debt-to-equity targets.

\* (16:00)

And what that does is it sets up a situation where Hydro will need to increase rates in order to meet those targets—targets that were set by this government. It's important to put on the record because again, the minister's very slippery and was—intentionally avoided at all costs trying to take any ownership over what's in this bill. Trying to take—he avoided taking any ownership over the debt-to-equity targets outlined in Bill 36.

But we know that his government set these targets. By the way, I don't think the minister would even be capable of articulating why they set those particular targets. We just know that they've set these incredibly aggressive targets and that, ultimately, that is going to lead to huge rate increases over time because Hydro will need to massively increase their revenues to meet them and, in order to do that, they will need to raise rates.

Now, it's nice, I guess, that they've set this cap of 5 per cent, but we can be pretty much guaranteed, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that we're going to be hitting those caps every single year.

So, to recap, you know, right now it's—the current situation is that Manitobans can rely on the PUB independently reviewing a rate increase request, ensuring that that rate increase is fair, that it's manageable, that it's actually set in a way that is—will serve to allow Hydro to meet its costs of doing business.

And the alternative that's being presented to us, that's being served up to Manitobans in this bill, is to rip that away and to replace it with rates that are set at the Cabinet table.

That should give every single Manitoban pause. We are losing our advocate in rate-setting. We're losing that protective mechanism and, essentially, the fox is telling us, I'll guard the henhouse, don't worry about it. We're taking care of it.

Manitobans know they cannot trust this government, especially when it comes to Hydro.

As I've already mentioned, another significant concern here is that this bill opens the door to the



private resale of electricity. And that's incredibly concerning because it's being advanced by a PC government that has a long record of privatization.

So, you know, the question is, why does this need to be included? I asked the minister during the question period of today, and he was unable to provide an answer. In fact, he conveniently avoided responding to my question. But it's for good reason: I don't think he has an answer to that.

We've heard in media, when he was asked by journalists who were probably equally concerned about that provision in the bill why it's been included, and the language that he offered was that we need this to somehow support more solar on roofs, more behind-the-meter generation strategies, et cetera, but that ignores the fact that those things are already happening.

We've seen incredible solar projects, for example, with the Fisher River Cree Nation solar project, an amazing project led by an Indigenous committee; shining example of how Indigenous communities can take charge—take control of their own energy. And we've seen that happen without this bill needing to be in place, without that provision that will allow for the private resale of energy. It's not clear why that's needed, and we need to be very suspicious with this government.

There are arguments that could be made in relation to allowing the private resale of electricity. For example, there are certain limited circumstances where we might consider that, specifically relating to the charging of electric vehicles. But, even there, it's not clear that we need to be going down this path.

So, this particular aspect of the bill needs to be examined very closely, especially in light of the fact that it's this government bringing it forward.

What happens when a small company wants to start a micro-utility, wants to start putting solar arrays close to smaller communities in rural areas? Do they get to then start selling that energy and undermining Hydro? What happens when property owners or a business owner decides that they want to be in a position to resell energy to their tenants?

All of these are really important questions, again, that need to be examined very closely in light of the government that is bringing this forward. It has huge implications for the future of Hydro, for the future financial health of Hydro and Manitobans need to be really worried and we need clearer answers from this government.

Instead of bringing forward a bill that will serve only to rapidly increase Hydro rates for Manitobans, among other rates, this government should instead have brought forward a bill that would focus on improving affordability; reducing energy costs for Manitobans.

For example, investing in things like home energy retrofits that would significantly reduce costs for Manitobans—demand-side-management investments. Why are we not exploring those types of legislative changes, or those types of government investments instead of a bill that will serve to increase Hydro rates as quickly as possible? That's what we need to be looking at.

Why are we not looking at how we can invest in our energy transition and help to electrify certain aspects of our life in Manitoba because—where we know electrification will reduce energy costs for Manitobans. There's a huge opportunity there. And yet instead, what we get is a bill that serves to raise rates.

Manitobans should be very nervous about this bill, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. This is not a bill that Manitobans need to see coming forward at this time. It does not serve our interests. There are a huge number of outstanding questions that we did not see answered today by the minister. And we absolutely need to see this bill put in the garbage bin.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak. Thank you very much, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin):** It is a honour to stand and speak on Bill 36.

It's an important bill and, you know, I got to thank the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) for bringing this bill, to making the changes that are required to make our government departments and our spending more accountable and more transparent.

And then just reading some of the background on this bill, it's concerning to say the least how this project, bipole and Keeyask, progressed, what state they were in, how much money was spent even before work was done, and essentially how this project was going ahead no matter what with a blank cheque.

Anybody, any government, that stands and watches that—again, it's ironic when the members opposite talk about affordability and rate hikes, and when they stand and allow that to happen and—nearly \$6 billion over budget? And a blank cheque, really, to

get this project going. Almost unforgiveable what the NDP did in this file.

And it's great that our PC government is, again, taking another responsible step. This is what they've been doing for five years now—over five years: bringing responsible government, responsible legislation, to this House. And they're making things more affordable, transparent, for all of Manitobans. And this is just—Bill 36 is just another example of good legislation by a smart and responsible PC government.

Again, I will—I'll just say that Bill 36 does move towards a higher level of accountability and transparency. These are expected nowadays. And maybe it wasn't so much an expectation or much of a bar for the NDP to jump over, but I know now that people are demanding that. People are demanding it, they are expecting it of government, and I know this PC government has taken steps all the way along now to bring responsible legislation, in fact, to meet that need that the people are—the people that are expecting.

And it's important. Important never—like never before, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

\* (16:10)

You know, we've just come through COVID, a period where, you know, there was a significant disruption in everybody's lives. And I'll say the PC government did an outstanding job, really, at managing that with the Manitoba Public Health officials, and I know it was talked about, Dr. Reimer, here today about the great work she did. So we've come out of this pandemic situation in pretty good shape. And, again, we'll commend the government of the day.

I just can't imagine what it would be like if the opposition was in power through this. It would have been—I just shudder to think—absolutely shudder to think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what it would have been like if opposition was in power and they had the—and they had to hold the steering wheel here and guide us through because, quite likely, we would have been in the ditch and through the bush and lost, you know. And even—that's just—seems to be—and if the way they handled bipole and Keeyask is any example, that's for sure where we would've hand this. So, again, I'm very thankful that the PC government was—guided us through COVID, and they continue to bring good legislation here into this House.

So just for, yes, nearly—oh, \$6 billion over budget. That's unbelievable, really, it's—but it's not hard to believe when you see how the NDP set it up. They

absolutely set it up to fail and absolutely set it up with a blank cheque. If you read the—like, how this thing was contracted out, there was no ceiling. There was no ceilings anywhere—above ground, below ground, there was nothing. So it—and from somebody that's worked in construction and tendered before, to have a blank cheque, I'm telling you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, you can really, really be taken advantage of, and NDP just allowed this thing to happen. Unbelievable, unbelievable.

But Bill 36 does set Hydro on a path towards stability, without question. The bill does protect the ratepayers by setting a ceiling for annual rate increases. This is important for users—the predictability of rate increases, of rates in general, right? And it doesn't need—especially we're going through some pretty turbulent times when it comes to energy and energy costs, and I think everybody around the world, really, is feeling the effects of that. You know, to have a stable—somewhat more stable, three-year rate increase, you know, that's—again, that's reasonable—and business and everybody, it's much more predictable for everybody, and this is, again, good legislation in that regard.

And the bill does expand the role of the PUB in spite of what opposition has said. It absolutely does help for them to oversee and advise on future large infrastructure projects. And, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, again, if we look at this thing, how this whole thing evolved for how many years, it can absolutely cripple generations of Manitobans for years and years, just the way this thing was managed when the NDP was in power and how this thing was set up. And, again, this is not—this is something, again, it can cripple the Manitoba economy, 'Manitobies' for generations to come. So it's important that we get things under control. It's important that we have effective oversight. And the Public Utilities Board—it does increase the ability to oversee and advise on very large projects.

And, again, our bill additionally establishes reasonable debt-to-equity targets—again, part of a predictability. And—but our advantage was Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, and if anything, you know, when we looked at the debt aspect of Manitoba Hydro, like, we—you know, it's arguably we went from an advantaged Manitoba to a huge disadvantage that the previous government put us in, and it has to be something that we manage our way out smartly.

Again—and I'll refer back to the current government that is doing everything right to fix the finances, repair services and grow our economy. And these are very important things, and when it comes to effective, responsible management, it—you know, attracting investment into our province is a major, important aspect of growth for the future.

And I know this government has been doing a lot to encourage people to have a look and spend money in Manitoba, and that's great. And we're going to need that now, especially with what the NDP had done with—NDP when they were in power.

*Madam Speaker in the Chair*

So, there's three aspects of the bill, and it does—again, the bill strengthens the PUB and expands its functions. As an independent organization, it will be rightsized and budgeted and its role expanded to review and make recommendations of any proposals to develop new power-generating and transmission facilities in respecting export contracts.

As mentioned by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), electricity rates will be set for three-year periods. Again—and this is—you know, this is a reasonable approach to rate setting. This will better align with business plans and allow for informed investment decisions instead of having a very volatile process that—and unpredictable. This does bring a measure of predictability to the process of rate setting.

In order to stabilize Hydro, this integrated resource plan is part of this bill, and it's a best practice that will require reasonable approval of major new facilities and contracts. Manitoba Hydro—again, back to the integrated resource plan—Manitoba Hydro must develop, for the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council approval, an integrated resource plan setting out Hydro's load forecast for at least 10 years, and its supply-side option recommendations.

And, Madam Speaker, we're entering a time where the energy market is entering a period of incredible development, and competition as well. So it's—there's a lot of—we'll say it's the holy grail nowadays, and will be for quite some time.

The amount of energy that's being directed towards energy and the efficiencies of the location, of how it's generated, it's quite an exciting time for energy development. And, of course, we hear all the sorts of—from biofuels to hydrogen to electric bio-diesels. But there's so many different options now, or people striving to capture part of the energy market like never before.

It is quite a remarkable time where people all over the world are chasing this. And it is—it's extremely, extremely important for countries around the world, in provinces and countries and, you know, in terms of trade and business development and all those things. So it's an interesting time.

And so it's important, then. But we're looking, it's—you know, how much money we're sinking into Hydro, that we're actually doing it—very responsible job of investing those infrastructure dollars, because a lot of things like a hydro project, when—like, if you talk about the \$6 billion over; that's not small change, mister—Madam Speaker. It's not small change at all. And it's something we need to be responsible about.

\* (16:20)

And I—again, this—what this bill speaks to is about putting more checks and balances in The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act. This is all about putting in proper checks and balances so that we're making the right decisions and the analysis that goes into these major expenditures, major long-term infrastructure is done properly and it's vetted.

You know, you can't have departments, you know, without approval of Treasury Board or without the approval of government just going and spending and doing whatever they want, and taking projects to a certain point where it's almost too far—you can't do anything about it. It's gone too far, you know, and it essentially poisons the environment for the sitting government or the next government because it's gone so far you can't do anything about it.

And, you know, that's the legacy of what we inherited this government and things we've been fixing for five years now. But this one in particular, you know, when it comes to what the high—what NDP did in this regard is something of concern. I think Mr. Wall, who did his report, highlighted a lot of discrepancies in the whole bipole and Keeyask projects—questioning the demand, questioning the man load, the anticipated loads—credible that it went and it went so far that we just couldn't really do much and, essentially, we were committed to contracts and also contracts to build with a blank cheque. Unbelievable.

So anyway, the integrated resource plan is an improvement in Bill 36. And then the proposed development in these integrated plans—any proposed development of any major new facility within the next 20 years—needs to be evaluated and reports provided to government, and the decision-making process is

made effective and there's checks and balances along the way. Because, again, we can't be going off and spending unapproved money on projects and get so far down the rabbit hole that it's just impossible to back up.

So, Madam Speaker, again, I would just say a few more things. We need to—Bill 36 does make adaptations to, again, greater levels of transparency and accountability, a more effective process where we're—more clear guidance is being given to—between government and departments, and those things are always better when they're clean and better defined.

So, again, I'll just say thanks again to Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and this PC government for bringing forward another smart bill, a really smart bill that works towards protecting and enhancing the, you know, the public spending and capital investments that are taken on by the government.

And then—and different layers of whether it's the Public Utilities Board or Manitoba Hydro, there's just ways of making that process more accountable, and that's important. It's something that we're going to need. Again, it's being demanded, and once we're doing it, it's actually a great selling feature for people that are looking to invest in our province, that we have our affairs in order and the processes are done very well.

So, again, I thank the minister and—taking us one step closer to a better Manitoba.

Thank you.

**MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** Certainly, I guess the—you can say here we go again.

This bill got frozen last time they introduced it. They were forced to withdraw it because of public outrage.

And just like we said with bill 64 and the rest of these bills is, keep an eye on them because they're going to bring it back. It may not look exactly the same but it's going to be the same concept; and sure enough, here we go.

So, my warning to Manitobans is, pay attention to whatever legislation this bunch is introducing because it won't be good for Manitobans. That's the history that we've seen since 2016.

You know, I've heard the member from Dauphin talk about affordability, and I think he was trying to claim, Madam Speaker, that this government had done

something to keep Manitoba affordable. Well, nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, one of the first things that this government did when they came to power in 2016 was did away with a piece of legislation that required the reporting and accountability to ensure that Manitoba was affordable for Manitobans.

These guys did away with it, so that Manitobans don't have that comparison anymore to know just how bad this PC government—I should correct myself, Madam Speaker—these PC governments, because the new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is every bit as bad as the past premier.

But Manitobans now don't have that comparison, much like, I guess, their COVID tracking information that now is convoluted, hidden, meaningless; what is there because they don't really do the testing and don't track things. They change the way they report those numbers.

Well, they've done away with—completely—tracking the affordability numbers for Manitobans. And yet, they stand here and talk about, really, how transparent they're going to be. Nothing—nothing, Madam Speaker—is further from the truth.

Everything this government does, every bill they introduce, talks about transparency at the same time that it reduces transparency, accountability and, at best, 'abusecates' information; at worst, hides it or does away with it so that Manitobans don't have the information that they need to really hold this government to account.

Because if they had even that simple accountability piece of legislation, the affordability piece, they would be well aware that, contrary to what this government says—I mean, average Manitobans already know this, right, Madam Speaker—but then there'd be the factual piece that showed that life had become so much less affordable under this government.

Well, unless you're one of the ones that forgets what you did with \$31 million, then I guess maybe life got easier for those folks.

So, it comes down to the basic question of, who's this government governing for?

**Some Honourable Members:** Manitobans.

**MLA Lindsey:** Well, I hear somebody chirping they're governing for Manitobans but clearly not for all Manitobans, Madam Speaker; a very select group

of Manitobans. A very select group that were well off. Some of them probably worked hard for that; some of them inherited it, some of them just lucked into it.

But that's the Manitobans that this government is looking after: the friends with money, the friends that contribute to leadership campaigns, I guess. That's who they look after, not Manitobans that are struggling on minimum wage.

We look at how this government has driven up hydro rates, and how they plan to drive up hydro rates with this piece of legislation that they're trying to slip in. And they've done the complete opposite with minimum wage. They've held it back so that people can't afford to pay their bills.

\* (16:30)

In fact, one of the bills I can't afford to pay is a Hydro bill, thanks to this government—not just thanks to their interference in the Public Utilities Board, not just thanks to their interference in the hydroelectric board that caused an entire board to quit in disgust, but their interference in things like the minimum wage. It ties into this, because those are the Manitobans that this government doesn't look after. Those are the Manitobans that are falling further behind every day, thanks to this government.

You know, the member from Dauphin talked about exciting time for electricity development projects, and he's right. *[interjection]* I knew one of them would want to cheer for that. He's right in the sense that it is an exciting time and could be so much more exciting for Manitobans with a properly run public entity looking after affordable rates for Manitobans.

But that's, again, not what this bunch is doing. They're going to create privatized parts of any kind of electricity system. We've seen that already, right? They can jump up and down and say we're not privatizing Hydro—they're just going to privatize all the parts that make money, all the parts that make life less affordable for Manitobans, as we've seen other right-wing regimes do in other provinces in this country—BC, under what claimed to be a Liberal government, but may very well have been a Conservative government in disguise, not that there's that much difference between the two. *[interjection]* You knew you weren't going to get away with that one.

They sold off parts like the billing part of hydro in BC. They sold off parts. They kept the basic infrastructure that hard-working BC taxpayers paid for, but they sold off the parts that would make money for the

hydro entity in BC to keep rates low. And guess what? Rates didn't stay low once they did that.

But they sold it off to their friends with money, much like this government plans to do, to give their friends with money a break to get more money—kind of like, well, I guess what they did with Lifeflight: give it away to their friends at EIC that, you know, contribute heavily to a premier's campaign. So I guess it's scratching each others back. I guess that would be the polite term for it. There's probably other terms.

But—so why would this government, this Stefanson government, repeat the mistakes of the Pallister government? Well, the answer's simple: because it's the same bunch following the same path, just somebody new supposedly in charge. They're making the same mistakes for Manitobans, for average Manitobans, for hard-working Manitobans, that need a government on their side.

We've talked a little bit, Madam Speaker, about what they haven't done for folks on minimum wage, and we look now at the cost of everything. And as this government is mandating raises to Hydro outside of a public utilities process, it's also affecting rents because landlords aren't real big on losing money, so they're going to put the rent up. So how do low-income earners now afford to pay the rent and the hydro? Well, they can't.

So we see the compounding effect of creating the ultimate dream of right-wing regimes, which is the two-tier system, the two-tier—the rich and everybody else: nothing in between. We see the degradation of the middle class and we see the proliferation of the poor class because this government has done everything in their power to create more poor people. Even though they stand up here day after day and talk about how they're making life more affordable, that is not accurate not in any way, shape or form.

So, we've seen them talk about predictability. This bill will make Hydro rate increases predictable. Won't make them affordable. Won't necessarily make them realistic. Won't necessarily make them meet the needs of Hydro. But people will be able to predict how quickly they won't be able to afford to pay their bills. People will be able to predict how quickly they'll become homeless because they can't afford to pay the rent. People will be able to predict how quickly they'll fall from the middle class to the poor class. People will be able to predict the bad things that are going to happen to them while this government will be able to predict how their friends with money will be able to make more money.

So when this government speaks, when members speak from the government, we really need to examine the words they're using and the context behind those words and the reality of those words. And in this case, predictability is not a good thing.

The Public Utilities Board was a good thing and it was a thing that worked for Manitobans, and this government tries to say, well, it costs too much money to have Public Utilities Board hearings. And there's figures out there that show how much it cost and how much people saved, that there's been studies that have shown that. But this government never been one to really face up to facts, so they're very quickly not going to talk about those facts now, are they?

So this bill—I've talked a little bit about it already—is a retread bill that they think they can slip in and trick Manitobans. They thought they could slip it in and trick Manitobans previously. Manitobans didn't fall for it. Manitobans stood up and said no, no, no, no, no, no, no. The five bills that this bunch had frozen, they thanked us for making sure that they were frozen, that Manitobans had the chance to find out what was actually in those bills, whether it was the education bill, whether it was some of the workplace bills, some of the labour bills, whether it was the previous version of this bill.

So we know that their previous bill undermined the Public Utilities Board process and this bill does the same thing. It's mandated what the rates are going to be. It undermines the Public Utilities Board process—and for what purpose? So that this government can claim affordability while, in fact, it's less affordable.

You know, some of the things that we've talked about is Manitobans are now paying \$150 a year more for Hydro. That's not more affordable. Did their minimum wage go up that much? How about the public servants that this government laid off, downsized, got rid of? Did their unemployment insurance go up enough to pay for these increases in Hydro? Well, no, they didn't. They most assuredly did not.

So while this government was busy slashing the public service—in fact, slashing some of the very people that worked for Hydro that keep the lights on. They were getting rid of those people. They were interfering in their collective bargaining agreements, which now they have to pay the piper for that because it's been shown in court that they did interfere and Hydro has to honour collective agreements.

\* (16:40)

The PC government—not big on honouring agreements. We've seen that with various agreements with the Manitoba Métis Federation where they wouldn't honour agreements that were there. And now the Métis Federation is trying to re-negotiate some agreements, but imagine trying to negotiate an agreement with this bunch that won't honour an agreement that was in place. So they also have gone out of their way to make sure they didn't honour the workers' collective agreement at Manitoba Hydro.

They hate workers. I don't know who they think is going to do the work in the province when every chance they get, they attack the working people of this province. Every chance they've got—I mean, the first few years they were in government, their whole mantra was chopping away at workers' rights. So, while they've done that—made it harder for workers to unionize, made it harder for workers to get good-paying jobs—on the other side, they've done everything in their power to crank up the hydro rates.

You know, there was things in place when we first contemplated Keeyask that had a term of how long it was going to take to pay it off that made the interest rate and the investment affordable and make sense, and that was confirmed by various bond-rating agencies and different things.

So, what did this government do? Supposedly, in the interest of transparency and—they changed that period of time, they changed how long it would take—shortened it so that then the interest rate went up. The payments had to go up because they shortened the amortization period.

How did that make life more affordable for Manitobans? Well, much like this bill, it didn't. Didn't make bills more—or, the hydro bill more affordable at all. In fact, it immediately made it look like Hydro was in serious financial trouble when it wasn't.

So then, what did they do to try and further convince Manitobans that they knew best when it came to Manitoba Hydro? Well, they foisted the bogus Brad Wall report on us. Talk about looking after your friends, Brad Wall has kind of become the hired gun to go around and tell Conservative governments whatever they want to hear.

**An Honourable Member:** For a price.

**MLA Lindsey:** For a price.

What he didn't tell them was about certain sales that were taking place to the Province of Saskatchewan, which then would have made, actually,

the bottom line of Hydro look so much better. So we wouldn't have had to be introducing these bills that the government is introducing now that talks about how we have to mandate these increases because Hydro would have been in a better financial position if it was accurately and honestly reported. Which this government did everything in their power to make sure that wasn't the case.

**An Honourable Member:** In fairness, you get what you pay for.

**MLA Lindsey:** Well, not always. In this case, I guess they did—they got the answer to the question that they told the guy they paid to come up with, and they also told the guy not to include certain information. Which, you know, Brad Wall left a certain legacy in Saskatchewan—everybody thought he was a nice guy. It turns out that he's no nicer than the rest of this bunch, that they don't care about average, hard-working people.

Friends with money; that's who they care about.

You know, we've heard the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) say that, well, mistakes were made. And they continue to make those kind of mistakes, like introducing this particular piece of legislation, the—Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act.

They didn't learn from their mistakes. The mistake that they made when they introduced—what was it last time—bill 35. Same thing, basically. Manitobans said: No, no, no, no. Once they had time to actually find out what was in that bill, the same as bill 64 and the other bills, they said, no, no, no, no, we're not falling for that.

So, at then time, the interim premier withdrew them, recognizing the writing on the wall. Not the Brad Wall, but the real wall.

So, you know, it's hard to fathom how or why this government doesn't really want to represent people in their own constituencies, because not everybody in their constituencies is well off. There are people that struggle to pay the bills, there are people that struggle to buy groceries; but they don't care about them.

You know, one of the things that I want to talk about is affordability for hydro in northern Manitoba. We don't have a choice, Madam Speaker. We can't switch to natural gas because it simply isn't there. The cost of shipping propane in to many of these communities is prohibitive.

So then, this government makes the cost of hydro even more prohibitive for people in the North.

You take a lot of the far-northern communities—the ones that have hydro—live in substandard housing that costs dramatically more to try and heat in the winter than what most houses in Winnipeg do, simply because they were never actually built to the right standards in the first place.

Add in the overcrowding and everything else that's wrong in those communities, and I'm sure if you looked, you'd find that their hydro bills are amongst some of the highest in the province while living in some of the smallest houses.

I know I'm—myself, I'm on the rate standardization package for Hydro so that it is actually predictable, to a point, what I'm going to pay every month for my hydro, which I heat my home in Flin Flon with.

And every year for the last five years, for sure, that monthly amount has gone up dramatically. And yet, my consumption has not, because I had the wherewithal to insulate and do all the things that should have been done to save me money. So, they just put the rate up higher so that they can make more money.

There needs to be a reckoning, I guess, Madam Speaker, with folks in northern Manitoba, particularly Indigenous folks. We talked the other day about reconciliation and what it really means. Well, hydro and hydro rates are part of that package of real things that a government can do towards reconciliation.

But cranking the rates up, which this bill does without justification and without being able to prove that it's required at a Public Utilities Board hearing; what this bill does is flies in the face of reconciliation, because folks in those communities are paying some of the highest Hydro bills there are, simply because they don't have a choice. That's what's there.

So, Madam Speaker, some of the best things that should come from the government is figuring out how to mitigate some of those costs that make living in certain areas of the province even less affordable than living in others.

And Hydro is one of the things that they could do something with. You know, one of the things that would make some sense, perhaps, is to allow some of those Indigenous groups to actually be on the board of Hydro so that that insight into affordability for their

folks actually gets built in to what Manitoba Hydro is doing.

\* (16:50)

But, of course, even that wouldn't work, Madam Speaker, with the auspices that are introduced with this piece of legislation because it takes even the decision making away from the board of directors of Manitoba Hydro, puts it directly on the Cabinet table. And we've seen them do 'thits' previously with other pieces of legislation where they just mandated certain increases that had to come whether anybody liked it or not, and that's what this bill does.

Madam Speaker, people in Manitoba aren't stupid and, certainly, more and more people are paying attention every day to what this government is doing to them, not for them. And that that's a very definitive distinction. It's what this government is doing to them, not what this government is doing for them. And people will remember pieces of legislation such as this when the next election comes along, and many of the members opposite will be able to go back to doing whatever it is they did before because they won't be joining us here.

We talked a little bit about some of the privatization practices and we know very well that this government has already gotten rid of parts of Hydro, parts of Manitoba Hydro that were making money. They shut them down and—or sold them off. One of the things that this government has done is given access to the Manitoba Hydro fibre—given it to a private company, Xplornet—with one of their announcements, again, about how all of a sudden through that people in northern Manitoba are going to have access to high-speed Internet.

Well that's simply not true, Madam Speaker. Speaking to Xplornet, they have no intention of doing anything in Manitoba any time—northern Manitoba any time soon. Where are they focusing on? Well, they're focusing on these guys' base of operations in rural Manitoba—which is good for rural Manitoba, don't get me wrong. But people in the North don't just have spotty reception with their cellphones, they have no reception. They don't just have intermittent low-speed Internet, they have no Internet.

So, Madam Speaker, this bill isn't going to help those folks, because once again it's allowing parts of Manitoba Hydro to be hived off, privatized so that the private entity can make more money and provide less service. That fibre line that Manitoba Hydro had

should have been available particularly for communities in the North to access so that the environmental and life issues that Hydro has created with the creation of their dams, one small part of that could have gone to make life better for northern Manitobans. But they chose their friends with money over those people yet again.

So you know what? I probably—well, apparently, I'm out of time right away. So I'm not just going to wrap up my comments because, I'm going to wrap up because I am out of time.

I just want to make sure that everybody understands this bill shouldn't pass. It should be withdrawn the same as its previous incarnation was withdrawn. The members should come to their senses and realize this is a bad piece of legislation for Manitobans and should be withdrawn and they should apologize—apologize to Manitobans and let's get actually down to making life more affordable for Manitobans.

Thank you.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** This is not—certainly not the first time that our government of Manitoba has had serious issues with the PUB or with hydro rates. There was a previous premier who became increasingly frustrated with the cost and duration of hearings at the PUB.

At one point, high—the PUB ordered Manitoba Hydro to reduce rates for some commercial customers and the response from the premier was that they thought that decision was wrong, that Hydro was having one of its worst years in 10 years and the PUB makes them go through a very expensive process just so they can order them to lower rates that are already among the lowest in North America.

That was Premier Gary Doer, Madam Speaker, in 2003, in September. It was described by the Free Press as declaring war on the PUB and other regulatory bodies because there was a complaint, essentially, that PUB was costing too much money, which is something this bill is attempting to do something about. And there were criticisms at the time from the opposition: said the PUB is expected to act independently and they expect to be treated like an independent body. That was PC MLA Glen Cummings, who actually introduced the legislation which, as they put it, was designed to be—avoid political interference in rate setting for utilities.

There's been the question about what rate—about what political interference consists of, but we've seen it and it's—has not been deemed political interference



because it's basically been so brazen, because it's simply been legislated that the PUB has been—that there's been a runaround around the Public Utilities Board.

And the idea that the cost of hearings is the biggest problem with Hydro is a canard, simply because if we're spending a decent amount of money to make sure that we're doing a proper job, we can actually save money by avoiding billions, you know, in cost overruns.

It's absolutely critical to emphasize, as well, that it's not—we haven't just been spending money on dams. With the amount of money we've spent on debt, on—that has been pulled out of Hydro just in the last 10 years, we often hear, on both sides, that—either justifications that the money has gone to be spent on—billions in dollars in infrastructure, on the one hand, or that is simply gone on debt.

The reality is that of the \$10 billion in extra debt that Hydro has taken on in the last 10 years, \$4 billion of it has come out of Hydro and has been taken by the Manitoba government; that the dead guarantee fee, the water rentals and capital tax, the—comprise \$445 million a year out of about \$2 billion in revenue. So 25 per cent, which is an extraordinary amount, and the amount taken by the NDP and the PC governments is actually comparable because the more debt we have, the more money that the government is able to take out.

So the reason that we're facing these massive increases—and they are substantial increases of 5 per cent, year over year over year, which actually are pretty much in line with what the NDP had, as well—is to pay off debt while the provincial government is continuing to take billions of dollars out of

Hydro. And as a result, Hydro is in dire financial straits. We have to be honest about this. But the reason for it is not just over-construction; it is that the Hydro itself is being used as a piggy bank.

And the change just in the last 10 years is shocking if—but I—but in 2009, Manitoba Hydro actually got to keep about 76 per cent of its revenue, but by 2020, it was only keeping about 50, and fully 33 per cent of its revenues are going to interest on debt, 8 per cent on a debt guarantee fee, 5 per cent on water rentals and assessments and 4 per cent on a capital tax. But the bigger the dams and the bigger the cost overruns on dams, the more gets paid on capital tax; and the bigger the debt, the more of the debt guarantee fee that can be pulled out.

I've recognized this as being, again, I've said this before in the House, that this is something that—what have they called—vulture capitalists do and private equity firms, which used to be called different kinds of firms—what? Different kind of firms were—would actually—they would buy companies, load them down with debt, extract as much money as they could and drive it out of existence.

That is the risk—this—that, but we've taken that model from Wall Street, and the government is now applying that to Hydro. And PUB—the PUB recommended that the government actually say, stop taking money from the government—from Hydro.

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 25 minutes remaining.

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

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Wednesday, April 6, 2022**

**CONTENTS**

<b>ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS</b>			
<b>Introduction of Bills</b>		Seniors Advocate Office	
Bill 228–The Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act		Marcelino	1177
Naylor	1167	Gordon	1177
<b>Ministerial Statements</b>		Supports for Ukrainian Refugees	
Dr. Joss Reimer		Wasyliw	1177
Gordon	1167	Reyes	1177
Asagwara	1168	COVID-19 Case Numbers	
Gerrard	1168	Lamont	1178
Anniversary of Humboldt Broncos Accident		Gordon	1179
Helwer	1169	Long-Haul COVID Patients	
Wiebe	1170	Lamont	1179
Lamont	1170	Gordon	1179
<b>Members' Statements</b>		Individuals with Autism	
Healing Community Wounds Post-Pandemic		Gerrard	1179
Pedersen	1170	Squires	1179
Support for Ukrainian Refugees		Immigration Advisory Council	
Wasyliw	1171	Khan	1180
BMO Farm Family Award Recipients		Reyes	1180
Clarke	1171	Manitoba Public Insurance	
Harjinder Kaur Brar		Sandhu	1180
Sandhu	1172	Goertzen	1180
Benefit Concert for Ukraine		Agricultural Crown Land Leasing	
Guenter	1172	Brar	1181
<b>Oral Questions</b>		Johnson	1181
Death of Krystal Mousseau		<b>Petitions</b>	
Kinew	1173	Foot-Care Services	
Cullen	1173	Asagwara	1181
Lifeflight Air Ambulance Privatization		Lindsey	1182
Kinew	1174	Scrap Metal Legislation–Consumer Protection	
Gordon	1174	Maloway	1182
Expiry of Medical Transportation Contracts		Foot-Care Services	
Kinew	1174	B. Smith	1183
Gordon	1175	Brar	1183
Thompson General Hospital		Bushie	1184
Lindsey	1175	Wiebe	1184
Gordon	1175	Lead in Soils	
Personal-Care Homes		Marcelino	1184
Asagwara	1176	Eating Disorders Awareness Week	
Gordon	1176	Naylor	1185
		Abortion Services	
		Fontaine	1185

**ORDERS OF THE DAY**  
**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

**Second Readings**

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

Friesen 1186

Questions

Sala 1190

Friesen 1190

Gerrard 1191

Debate

Sala 1193

Michaleski 1197

Lindsey 1200

Lamont 1204

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings  
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