



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike, Hon.	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Transcona	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

The House met at 10 a.m.

The 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.

We will now go on to private members'—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Good morning, Honourable Speaker. Can you please resume second reading debate of Bill 208.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 208—The Manitoba Small Business Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now resume second reading debate of Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

The debate stands in the name of the honourable member for Red River North, who has six minutes remaining.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Good morning, Honourable Speaker and colleagues.

Again, great to have the opportunity to stand in this House, as it is certainly a privilege to be here and be able to talk about Bill 208, again, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act. We—I had a few minutes to open on this bill earlier on and, again, a pleasure to get up today and speak more about the importance of Manitoba small businesses.

We know that they are truly the driver of our economy here in Manitoba, and recognition of them doesn't only fall for a month but it falls every single day. And I know everybody on this side of the House would agree that without small businesses making the sacrifices that they make every single day when they get up, go to work and put food on their table, but in turn provide opportunity for their team and their staff to put food on their tables as well; to ensure that Manitobans are strong together.

We know, however, that under the current NDP government, even though they put forward a bill that, certainly, we recognize as important, there are some areas that maybe we need to park ideology and look at, really, what will help small businesses and small and medium-sized businesses here in Manitoba continue to thrive. And again, some of the ways that the NDP are hurting small businesses, maybe they're not aware but certainly we're happy to put some scenarios on the record that they can look at.

I know a budget is coming up on Thursday and it's important that, in that budget, one of the top priorities—

An Honourable Member: Point of order. On a point of order, Honourable Speaker.

Point of Order

The Speaker: The honourable member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson), on a point of order.

Mr. Grant Jackson (Deputy Official Opposition House Leader): I'd like to request a quorum count.

The Speaker: A quorum count—order, please. Order, please.

As clearly stated in our rules, with the exception of Tuesday morning in accordance with subrule 4, if there's no quorum present at the start of a sitting day,

the Speaker is to adjourn—[*interjection*] The Speaker is still talking, by the way. So the Speaker is to adjourn the House for the sitting day.

So clearly, there is no call for a quorum count this morning.

So therefore, there is no point of order.

* * *

Mr. Wharton: Again, it gives me great privilege to stand up and talk more about small businesses on this lovely Tuesday morning where quorum counts are not relevant.

Eliminating the school tax rebate for commercial businesses and raising property taxes to the tune of over \$150 million will be one area that the NDP government should be considering come Budget 2025 when they rise in this House on Thursday to talk about how they're going to support small businesses.

Again, it's great to recognize them for a month, the month of May, and again, every single day when the folks of Manitoba get up and go to work every day to support their families, their small businesses and the people and the teams that they work with every single day.

We know that eliminating the personal basic amounts and raising income taxes on doctors and engineers and other professionals is going to be a deterrent for them to stay in this province. And, you know, they—we talk about doctors, and again, the great work that they do. Well, doctors are a small business. They essentially are small business owners. They hire their own staff, they have their own ability to rent or lease or purchase a property where they can function and serve in their practice every single day. They are a small business, Honourable Speaker, and I think the NDP needs to put a focus on this, again, when they go forward, understanding that every time you raise a tax, you're raising it on not only those small business owners, but our doctors, and we have a shortage of doctors, as the NDP knows.

We know that, so we want to make sure that we have a business environment that will be welcoming to our doctors, that are small business owners and partners in growing our economy and ensuring that we have enough services, like social services, education and, of course, health care in these very challenging times.

You know, we know that the NDP last fall essentially ran through BITSA and essentially will ban businesses from replacing workers during the

strike—during a strike to ensure business and supply chains are moving forward. Well, we know that when businesses shut down, case in point, during the pandemic, we had a serious concern with supply chain. We know that it essentially shut down the world, Honourable Speaker. We know that not being able to go to a grocery store and grab something off the shelf during that particular time was a challenge.

Well, guess what? When companies have to shut down and can't bring in support workers to ensure that Manitobans are getting the products they need every single day, this is going to be a deterrent for them as well. And again, small businesses are going to hurt for it. So I want the NDP to understand that when they come to Budget 2025 this coming week.

* (10:10)

We also know that one of the areas that came of a concern back in 2018, a Mr. Kenneth Klassen told the Legislative committee, and I quote: Manitoba has the lowest gasoline taxes in Canada. If you want to be the cleanest and greenest province, it makes no sense. We need reform on how we charge for gasoline in the province.

That's a scary, scary comment by now this individual, that's working with the NDP. As a matter of fact, he goes on to saying he's been hired as the energy advisor and he wants to charge PST on home heating, Honourable deputy Speaker. That's going to hurt businesses. I mean, business owners have to pay utilities, just like Manitoba families, every single day. They have to continue to ensure that the heat stays on, especially in an environment like Manitoba, and like Winnipeg.

So, we know that this individual, Mr. Klassen told the Legislative committee, and I quote again something that has bugged me for 30 years: the PST exemption on home heating fuels. That doesn't make sense. Why are we exempting from—tax non-renewable fossil fuels? Well, business owners are going to be standing up on Thursday saying: Why is Mr. Klassen wanting to put PST now on our home heating and our business heating, Honourable deputy Speaker.

I have a little bit of time left, so with that I will say: keep going, Manitoba businesses; keep fighting for Manitobans.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I am happy to rise this morning to put just a few words on the record with

regard to Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act, and talk a little bit about the importance of small businesses.

And coming from an area that has many, many small businesses and growing businesses, they start small, many of them do, and they become established and they become successful and they grow. And we've seen that in my constituency, in the constituency that I have the distinct honour of representing.

And so, I can think of a number of them. And you know, I think, well, one comes to mind, Elmer's Manufacturing, which is a very successful manufacturing business in Altona, just north of Altona, was started by Elmer Friesen who is a farmer, still farms, I believe, and you know, made a—and he had a need for a—I think it was a grain cart, farm implement, anyway. And they do make grain carts and among other things, harrows, and things like that.

But so he spent a winter building one. And, you know, as it goes, neighbours, other farmers said, hey, why don't you make me one? And so he started to do that, and a business was born. And started out small and now they employ hundreds of people and they contribute massively to our local economy in Altona and across the region. And so that's a success story, and there are others as well.

Icon Technologies, which employs many people from the constituency that I represent, is located in the constituency of the member for Morden-Winkler (Mrs. Hiebert). It's right on the boundary there so, you know, we can play tug of war over that. But another great story. Icon Technologies started out just as a small operation and is now a wildly successful business.

There are many others. There's Jablonski's in St. Jean which does, you know, it's an electrical, they do AC and heating and a whole bunch of things, services that they provide. And so there are many examples, many more examples that I can think of. But needless to say, you know, we've got a lot to be proud of in our province, and we have a lot to champion.

And it's important that we get behind Manitobans, families who put their savings at risk. They invest their hard-earned dollars and they'll mortgage their homes and they'll put capital at risk to strike out on an idea that they have. And of course, you know, success is not guaranteed. And—but they're willing to fight through the right—red tape, the regulations. They're willing to fight through adversity, you know,

whatever the—markets may change and they're willing to go through all of that in order to provide their product or their service to their neighbours and to their communities. And so that's—that entrepreneurial spirit is so important to our province and to our country because without that, real wealth doesn't get generated and we would all be much, much poorer for it.

So it's that entrepreneurial spirit that, really, we've got to champion. And I think a government really has to, I think more often than not, get out of the way. Let Manitobans do—they know best how to spend their money. They know best how to make decisions in their own interest, in the interest of their families and of their communities. And it's important for government just to get out of the way.

You know, yes, there's a need for a—some—you know, a base level, perhaps, of regulations, but it's important that small-business owners, those who are willing to strike out and make something of themselves and take an idea and run with it and invest in it, that government, rather than trying to stymie that effort and kill it, the government gets out of the way.

And I think of a quote by Ronald Reagan—I've shared it here in this House before—but, you know, he said that the liberal view of the economy is that if it moves, tax it; if it keeps moving, regulate it; and if it stops moving, subsidize it. And I think all too often we see in this Chamber how governments will put their foot on the brake. And then finally, when they see the damage that their regulations and tax hikes are doing to businesses, to our economy, then they open up the coffers and they want to spend hard-earned tax dollars to try to juice the economy. And that never works well, either. So just let Manitoba business owners do what they do best and we'll all be the richer for it. We'll all be the better for it.

And so, like I said, proud to come from an area with very strong entrepreneurial spirit. It's probably one of the things we're best known for in southern Manitoba, and it's something that Manitobans can be proud of. So I—and like I said, I shared some examples of successful businesses. There's more that I could provide.

And I talked about how government needs to get out of the way, and I think it's important to reflect on the last budget that the NDP brought forward. And we know that the provincial budget will be coming down, their second provincial budget will be coming down later this week and—but we know that the last one was not good, was not good for small-business owners,

and—was not good for small-business owners—and so the prognosis isn't good for this one either.

I don't think—I think people are holding onto their wallets and at a time when it's important that government champions, you know, our local businesses and gets behind them, the last thing they need is more tax hikes. The last thing they need is more regulations. And that's what we saw in the last budget.

And for instance, the last budget, which governs the current fiscal year we're in, included legislation to allow Manitoba Hydro to raise rates up to 4 per cent. That has a very real impact on small-business owners. And by the way, it's a promise broken. The NDP had said they would not be raising—they would be freezing hydro rates. Well, that didn't happen. We've now got legislation—NDP legislation in place that allows Manitoba Hydro rates to increase by 4 per cent per year. So that's just one item.

They eliminated the school tax rebate for commercial businesses, and they raised property taxes by \$150 million—

An Honourable Member: Relevance.

Mr. Guenter: It's very relevant. It's very relevant. It's very relevant. Small businesses pay property taxes, and when the NDP government—and when the member for Seine River (MLA Cross) supports these tax hikes, small-business owners suffer. And it's that member, the member for Seine River who said in debate last week that small-business owners don't pay PST. I wonder what Manitoba small-business owners think of that comment. I wonder if Manitoba small-business owners—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guenter: —some of whom—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guenter: —we have on this side of the House, Manitoba small-business owners could fill these galleries—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please. Order. Order.

Members can quit hollering back and forth across the aisle. I understand that we sometimes disagree with each other, but there's a proper way to do it and hollering back and forth is not the proper way.

* (10:20)

Mr. Guenter: As I was saying, I wonder if Manitoba small-business owners could fill these galleries today, and they're hard at work. The—many of them probably

got up at 4 o'clock this morning and went to work. So they're not able to be here. So we are here to speak for them and their interests.

And if those business owners could listen to the member for Seine River who said just last week that small-business owners don't pay PST, I beg to differ and I think they would beg to differ—they absolutely do.

And I have worked for small-business owners who have had the PST auditors come in, the tax auditors come in, and they've tried to do everything right, and those auditors will still find something, and you pay tens of thousands of dollars, and you pay interest, and—because of these arcane, complex rules with regard to PST.

So that's just one area small-business owners have to fight through. And it's important that government gets behind, rather than like this NDP government taxing them and trying to kill their dreams.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before recognizing the next speaker, I'd like to draw everyone's attention to the public gallery where we have seated from École Howden 30 grade 4 students under the direction of Janelle Gagne. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Southdale (MLA Cable).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

* * *

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I'm proud to rise today and talk about The Manitoba Small Business Month Act, particularly as small business is so integral to the economy of Manitoba.

About 90 per cent of businesses that we have within Manitoba come into that small-business area, and I know many of my colleagues on this side of the House own or operate or manage small businesses and are very aware of the challenges and the difficulties that surround small businesses.

In particular, I know farming is one of those areas that can be—start off as small businesses but grow exponentially into our medium- and large-size businesses within Manitoba. So I would like to thank all of our ag producers and farmers within Manitoba for starting these small businesses and making sure that they are contributing to our economy, making sure that Manitoba stays vibrant within our communities.

But, as I represent Brandon West, and it's divided by 18th Street between Brandon East and Brandon West, I know that many of you will be visiting Brandon in the near future for the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair, and as you bounce along 18th Street, that was scheduled to be finished last year by October but unfortunately never happened under this government, so, again, you'll be—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the member to keep his comments relevant to the bill that we're discussing.

Mr. Balcaen: I was just getting to that part.

As you're moving down 18th Street, you'll notice a number of areas on the west side that are the small businesses of Brandon. And, as a matter of fact, all along 18th Street is a number of small businesses that have been started well before I was the MLA for that area, but I'll highlight a few that have happened in the last little bit.

In the Brandon Shoppers Mall, which is in the constituency of Brandon West, they recently had the Sylvan Learning Centre open up there last year. I was happy to present them with a certificate. Again, small business that will help develop young minds, help them with their education, and I know that they opened up because they weren't seeing the same numeracy and literacy rates under this government, so they are welcome to open up and help these young minds grow.

And again, just down from my constituency office, two doors down, is the Kumon learning centre that just opened within the last very short bit. And again, surprising that the NDP government started in '23, and all of a sudden we had two learning centres that had to pop up in Brandon because of, you know, the lack of numeracy and literacy that is being offered during this government. So I would like to thank those small businesses in particular that are helping grow the minds of our future leaders and entrepreneurs where they come forward with this area.

Honourable Speaker, if I move over a little ways to 34th Street in my constituency, a little bit further west, Brandon West, we find Fun Time Pottery, and I was absolutely thrilled to present them with a 15-year certificate of being an independent, really unique business within Brandon West where there can be parties for kids. They can learn pottery; they can do the painting and the firing of all of their pottery. Not only that, it caters to adult parties as well where they

can create some really unique gifts and have that experience.

So I wanted to highlight a few of these spots that have opened up. But what I know Brandon West is lacking and there's been a challenge is daycare spots. And Brandon was slated to have two new schools built under the previous PC government that were absolutely just chopped off the education table when this government came in. And having this elimination of not only the two new schools but the hundreds of daycare spaces that this would have provided, would have allowed people to enter, work at small businesses, start small businesses or participate in the supply chain with some of the small businesses. But unfortunately, the NDP government chose to slash those programs and therefore, many of the people in Brandon West, and I'll even say in Brandon East where the minister of municipal affairs resides, suffers as well.

And if we had these daycare spaces that were provided under the PC government, we would have a number of individuals that would be able to support the local economy through that 90 per cent of small businesses. Not only that, the construction trade that would have happened for small businesses—electrical, mechanical, whether it be the concrete workers, whether it be the builders in construction—there's many, many small businesses that would have reaped the benefits of building those two new schools in Brandon and those daycare spaces.

But unfortunately, the NDP government chose to cut this, to pull the rug underneath these workers and say, you know what, we don't care about small-business workers; we don't care about the value that you bring. And then they turn around and bring up a small-business month bill to say, hey, we support you, but on the other hand, we don't. We'll do whatever we can to knock you down, but to gain a little bit of popularity, we'll bring this bill forward so that everyone can think that they're on side. But we look at—there's, as the minister may have put, 21 ways to save, there's also 21 ways that this government has cut the value of small businesses in their short time in office. And I know that will change again in the near future, and we'll get back on track with small businesses and what business is all about.

* (10:30)

One thing that I can talk about, too, is in the last budget, Honourable Speaker, \$9 million was cut from the justice system funding; \$9 million that impacted cuts to the provincial policing program, to

Victim Services, to courts and corrections, as well as the Manitoba Criminal Intelligence Centre.

And these cuts affected small business because crime is one of the leading areas that causes small businesses to shut down. I'll note, just across the way from the Legislature, here, there was a number of small businesses in Fort Rouge, that would be the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) own riding, that were shut down, because of safety concerns and because of the lack of care by this NDP government, putting people and their businesses first, allowing this proliferation of crime and of damage that happens across that area. It was shameful, quite frankly, Honourable Speaker.

So, as my colleague from Borderland said: Individuals know best how to spend their money. And how they spend their money and how they make their money shouldn't be punished. And the punishing taxes that this government, this NDP government, has put on small businesses and individuals that make more than a certain threshold—the idea getting into small businesses is to make money, to generate that income, so you can have employees, so you can pay people. But of course, whoever starts these small businesses reaps those benefits as well. And having these punishing taxes that this NDP government has introduced causes small businesses to move to other jurisdictions and, you know—Saskatchewan or Alberta, that are welcoming, although let's look at the fact that Brandon West really deserves these small businesses, and I would like to thank each and every one of them.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I am pleased to stand here today and put a few words on the record in regards to The Manitoba Small Business Month Act. And I'd also like to take a moment here to celebrate the many small businesses across rural Manitoba, specifically Agassiz.

We all know these businesses are the heart and soul of our communities, that of which, like I said, we all know. They are truly the backbones right across our province here. They're not just shops and services. They're the livelihoods of our families living in these communities and the spirit of entrepreneurship and hard work is demonstrated throughout these small businesses.

These businesses are vital for several reasons and a lot of which my colleagues here have highlighted. We all understand that they provide essential goods and services, create jobs, and again, contribute to the local economy. Each one of you, whether you run a

cozy cafe shop in Kelwood in Agassiz, or a pharmacy store in Gladstone in Agassiz, each one of these plays a crucial role in shaping the character of the area. They bring unique offerings to the table and cater to the specific needs and tastes of the community.

In Agassiz, I want to highlight just a few of our local small businesses. In MacGregor, we see businesses supporting the ag industry and again, colleagues have commented on the importance of agriculture across our province of Manitoba. And there's many small businesses, both urban and rural, that support the ag industry, providing fresh produce and goods to feed our families.

In Carberry, we have a cute little boutique, the Gull and Castle. It's got clothing and for anybody that needs a little bit of retail therapy, it's a great place to visit in rural Manitoba.

In Austin, there is a very unique new business. It's the Austin Woollen Mill. It's a new business, it was opened up in 2023, and it serves a very unique niche, where they process natural fibres like wool, alpaca fleece, create yarn, roving and other products. And it's a shop that showcases the creativity and the talent of the local artisans in that area while providing a very unique product to a specialized community.

Treherne has a great, rich history and thrives, thanks to the dedication of the small business owners in that community, who understand the importance of being connected to their community and serving that area.

Rathwell, I just visited this business not long ago. It's a—got a unique business, N3 Inc. It's—provides remote car starters, two-way radios and other security systems. And Rathwell is a very small community. They also have Real Industries. They manufacture livestock feeders.

But Rathwell is a very small community, but these small businesses are such an integral part. They have a grocery store there that is a common area for the folk to get their local—or to get goods in that rural community. I guess, what I want to highlight here, is the impact that those small businesses have in rural Manitoba, where they provide such an important, important service to the area.

Rotor's Bakery in Neepawa is a restaurant—a bakery restaurant serving Filipino food and delectables. It's recently expanded its operations and now grown so that it has seating to accommodate for those who wish to sit and order food inside, and that's, again, serving

another area when it comes to restaurants; another small business filling a community's needs.

And those are just a few examples in Agassiz, specifically. Again, I want to share with you the success of these businesses and hopefully continued success. Many have had to come over obstacles. Some maybe opened during COVID. Some maybe had to get over the hurdle of navigating through those challenging times, and for small businesses, that can be a hardship.

And we all know when we shop locally, we're not just purchasing items. We're investing in our neighbours, our friends and the future of our community. They often sponsor local events, donate to charities, support youth sports teams; we've all seen that. And this also is a sense of community. It reinforces the ties that bind us together as community.

And as we navigate the challenges of today's economy and the increasing costs of doing business, we must take an effort to shop locally and to promote these businesses and services on social media, as well as share our positive experiences as we do so.

Many of these businesses will be feeling stress and angst with the looming tariff threats that are in the air. And in addition to those threats, we also have to pay attention to what's happening here right now with this NDP government and the impact that some of these changes that this NDP government have brought in, the impact that's going to have on some of these small businesses. It can, you know, hinder the success of some of these businesses.

One thing we can talk about is the school tax rebate for commercial businesses. It's imposed a burden, raising these property taxes, and I know my colleagues have brought forward the implications that this brings to small, local businesses. They're already having to navigate tight financial margins and this, again, just imposes another complication in that.

The decision to eliminate personal—basic personal amounts to—and raise income taxes on professionals like doctors and engineers doesn't just affect the individuals; it has a ripple effect on our local economies. Like my colleague from the—Red River North mentioned, these doctors' offices and clinics are small businesses, so it does ripple down and have an effect on those businesses in our communities.

Another topic: this current government defunded The Green Team program significantly and forced non-profit organizations to make cuts and layoffs. This impacted jobs in local communities and

non-profit organizations who already have struggled to see ends meet, and that's, in turn, affecting services available to families in our towns.

* (10:40)

You know, some of the other Legislative changes that the NDP brought in were the bills buried in BITSA. They—the decision to ban the use of replacement workers during strikes disrupts the continuity of business, making it harder for them to operate during challenging times. That's another significant impact that small business can be faced with, based on some of the NDP's legislation.

Repealing the regulatory accountability act without consultation. And we hear that often. This NDP government lacks that consultation component when it comes to making some of these important decisions across our province. Manitoba small businesses are calling for a commitment to reduce red tape. The absence of accountability measures only exasperate the burden of regulation.

The cancellation of contracts for new schools—and again, my colleagues have highlighted some of that. And again, the ripple effect that this has on our local economies is significant. The cuts to parks funding and the slashing of job offers for internationally trained workers diminishes resources, again, available to our communities. Hydro rates: again, everybody here that turns the lights on, has the heat on, has a Hydro bill and this government has—going to take action to increase that.

But one thing I do want to say here, Honourable Speaker, is these aren't just shops. They are part of our identity. We need to support them, celebrate them and ensure that they flourish for many, many years. Small businesses are critical to our local economy. It's supporting giving our communities jobs and benefiting in many, many other ways.

And again, my colleagues have said Manitobans know best how to make money and let's continue to support small business.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Well, good morning, Honourable Speaker, and it's my privilege to get up today and speak on Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act, and let me first start out by indicating that, you know, on this side of the House, we fully support small businesses here in Manitoba. In fact, many, many of my colleagues have operated, or continue to operate small businesses here

in the province and I don't think the government caucus can say that. So I'm not sure they really understand the trials and tribulations that small businesses have when they come to work each and every day.

Small businesses, you know, are real drivers of the economy here in Winnipeg and especially on our main streets in rural Manitoba. Some businesses in my area have been in families for 70, 80, 90 years. They continue to be family operations. They employ many, many people in our constituencies and every two weeks, they have to meet the payroll and they're always at the whim of government regulations, of government taxes, changes to things. And I think that, like I say, I don't think the recognition of small-business owners is—they're not recognized enough.

And proclaiming a month as small business month, that's fine and dandy. It's a commemorative name. It's a special month—doesn't mean a lot to most small-business owners. I don't think so. What really means to small-business owners is how their government treats them: the amount of taxes they charge them, the amount of supports they give them, the amount of red tape that a government can eliminate to make the small-business owner's life much easier.

I think my colleague from Red River North brought up earlier about a simple thing that this government did that really affected a lot of small-business owners in Manitoba was the elimination of the small amount of commission that a small business would get for collecting the provincial sales tax. As a small-business owner for well over 40 years, monthly, you did your PST return and you remitted religiously, your money to the provincial government. But you also got a 15 per cent commission on the first \$200 of sales tax you collected and a 1 per cent commission on the balance.

Now it doesn't sound like much, but for a very small business who collected \$200 of PST in a month, they would get \$30 for filling out that paperwork and sending their money religiously into the government. For bigger businesses like car dealers, implement dealers, anything like that, it was a considerable amount they got for doing the collection.

And this government, with the swipe of a pen in last year's budget, without much fanfare and not thinking about small businesses, they cut that commission out completely. There was very little communication to small businesses, either. I think they did receive a letter from the tax department indicating on

such and such a date it was going to be taken out. No explanation.

Businesses are doing the—still doing the same amount of work, but they're not getting any commission. And that's an example of the hypocrisy of this bill for the government. They're wanting to declare small-business month and trying to tell us that they're doing good work for small businesses, but it's actions, not words. And I think that simple PST commission cut really, really affected the psyche of a lot of small businesses, thinking, does this government really appreciate us or are they just looking at this as another tax grab for doing their work? So very unfair, in my opinion.

And I think even though Bill 208 looks to recognize small-business month here in Manitoba—which, again, I think is very important—again, it's the taxation on small businesses, property tax hikes. I mean, they're going to be really affected by property tax hikes in Manitoba. They're affected by the payroll tax; I think my colleague has talked about that already. Small- to medium- to large-size businesses pay various payroll taxes depending on their payroll.

And I guess I've never understood the payroll tax. It's a penalty on businesses for hiring employees, and I don't really understand the—I understand the reason for a tax, because you need more taxes, but there must be other ways to tax profits of companies a little bit more and eliminate the incentive to hire employees.

I think all the payroll tax does here in Manitoba is encourage more and more business to go to self checkouts, perhaps more automation, eliminate employment and things like that. And I think there's a stat that shows that our unemployment rate in January is one of the highest in Canada here, and perhaps this regressive payroll tax is certainly part of that.

And I know, on this side of the House, we're calling for its elimination, and maybe in Thursday's budget the Finance Minister will stand up and tell us all that the payroll tax is being—I wouldn't say eliminated, likely phased out; maybe the thresholds will be increased. But at some point, I think a government's got to take a stand and get rid of that payroll tax. I'm not sure it'll be this government, but it will certainly be our government when we're back in power.

Again, we talked about basic personal amounts and raising income taxes and especially on doctors and professionals in our communities. That's not helping with recruitment of professionals into our

communities, and that affects small business. The less people that live in our communities, the less professionals we have in our hospitals and things like that, our small towns suffer. They don't grow. Yes, there's some small—some communities in Manitoba that are growing, but there's many that are staying stagnant or dropping. The small-business numbers are dropping on small towns in Manitoba, and I think that's a function of not having enough professionals in communities. You draw more people into a community to shop if there's a professional, if there's a hospital, things like that.

I mean—and living near the border is another problem, my colleague from Turtle Mountain just reminded me. You know, representing a border riding, there's more opportunities in Saskatchewan for people. There's—we've had businesses just move across the border. The tax regime is different. They seem to feel supported by a government. The fuel tax is different—everything. The income tax is different.

I have an accountant friend that tells me that there's a six- or seven-hundred—six- or seven-thousand-dollar difference on a \$100,000 T4 between Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Manitobans pay six or seven thousand dollars more in taxes here in Manitoba compared to Saskatchewan.

So when you're living close to the border, as people do in my constituency and the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk), there's no real reason why you can't just slip across the line and buy a house and, even though you're working in, perhaps in the potash mine in Saskatchewan, you live in Manitoba; you're starting to think, you know, \$6,000 a year, that really adds up over time.

* (10:50)

So I think our tax regime certainly has to be looked at for both small businesses and for the residents who live in our communities that support those small businesses.

Now, I have a list here of 21 ways the NDP is costing small business money, and I don't have the time to get into them all and there's so much, and I know my colleagues have talked about them as well.

I mean, even cancelling school contracts in communities. Communities in Manitoba are concerned for their schools. A school is a focal part of the community, similar to a hockey rink. If you lose the school in a community or one doesn't get built and you can't accommodate people, then they're going to move to another community.

So I think the NDP is being very short-sighted in cancelling school projects which our government had approved. Our government had nine new schools and thousands of new classroom seats and daycare spaces approved. Again, with the swipe of a pen, those were cancelled under this government.

So there's many, many more. You know, there's personal-care homes. Again, that's another reason. I mean, if your mom or dad needs to go in a personal-care home and there's no space there, they'll go to a bigger centre. In turn, that family that wants to be around their parents, if they can, move to a bigger centre as well. That hurts small businesses in communities.

Every dollar that stays in the community spins around. I know there's a stat out there somewhere about a dollar spent in a community, how many times it changes hands in the community. Unless you lived in a small community, you don't really see the result of spending local in communities. You'll always see these buy local campaigns, things like that. And similar to let's buy Canadian products, buy Manitoba products—perfect, that money spins around in the province.

So I do support Bill 208, the small business month act, and I don't think you'll find anybody on this side of the House that doesn't. Again, we're all small-business people, and if we're not small-business people, we're small-business people at heart. We represent many, many communities in the majority of rural Manitoba over here.

So again, I encourage this government to take action to support small business. Don't just talk, take action.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): You know, I just want to put a few words on Bill 208, the importance of small business in our province of Manitoba.

And I want to thank the member for Seine River (MLA Cross) who put this forward. But it's interesting; I believe that she's the only one that actually has one of the small businesses in that caucus. And it's kind of ironic that this bill has been called today, and the lack of interest on that side, where there's less members to even support this bill.

So it just shows you—our side, how many members here—there are here, how important small business is. So it just shows you the NDP, they don't

care. They really do not care when it comes to small business. They have no interest. They look after their unionized friends and making sure that they're looked after.

But when it comes to small towns, especially in rural Manitoba, especially when my colleague from Riding Mountain had indicated that we live so close to the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border, it is so important that we compete with Saskatchewan and Alberta.

And right now, way that the NDP is actually setting up their tax systems in this province—when we were in government, we tried to do everything possible to make sure that we can—are competing with our neighbours, Saskatchewan and Ontario. Because the fact is, businesses, investment—they have choices where they want to invest to.

We're finding right now, especially in the oil patch that I represent—I used to represent Arthur-Virden; that used to represent over 90 per cent—95 per cent of oil in this province—more and more of those businesses are located in Saskatchewan because of the tax rates. There's no, when it comes to—I'm surprised Tundra's still here.

When it comes to the—with this NDP government wanting not to look at—when we came in for a resolution about the payroll taxes, Tundra actually employs a lot of employees in this province, and the fact is they're talking about more of their operations are in Saskatchewan.

So this is very concerning, Honourable Speaker, when it comes to small businesses. They bring forward this small business act, and really, they're far from having any empathy on businesses.

Especially when it comes to educational taxes. Right now, in rural Manitoba, especially in Turtle Mountain School Division, Fort La Bosse School Division, and Brandon School Division and Park West. There are many, many more increases when it comes to property taxes. We're seeing a 15 per cent increase in property taxes.

And what we were doing, Honourable Speaker, in our government, we were giving rebates back to small businesses. They're going to be getting rid of those rebates and they're going to be racking up property taxes when it comes to the education side of it.

Again, they're looking after their unionized teachers. They are one of the highest paid teachers and teachers are paid the—almost the second highest in the country right now, Honourable Speaker. And I remember back

in the day of the—dark days of the Selinger government, they were—actually, they were paying teachers almost the second highest, just like they are doing right now.

And the interesting thing was we were dead last when it came to education system. The students were—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would remind the member to keep his comments relevant to the bill we're talking about.

Mr. Piwniuk: I was talking to the tax rate when it comes to not supporting small businesses. This is why I wanted to talk about the educational taxes, because the fact is, we were dead last when it came to education, for the amount of money that we put into our education system. And the fact is the funding right now, it's not—when it comes to small businesses, it is not going to be able to sustain that, Honourable Speaker.

And it's going to happen, is that more of our businesses, especially in the—that were quite close to the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border, more of those businesses are going to go to Saskatchewan. They do not have a payroll tax. Like my colleague says, from Riding Mountain, there's like—accountant said there's, like, six or seven thousand dollars' difference when it comes to \$100,000 worth of income.

I've got a brother who works at the potash mine in Esterhazy. He lives in Manitoba; he loves Manitoba, but there's going to be a time where, you know, his daughters both work in the potash mine, and they might have to make that decision because of the tax situation when it comes to Manitoba versus Saskatchewan.

And the fact is, Honourable Speaker, those people are—actually spend money in our businesses in our rural areas of western Manitoba. So it's so important that, if they're going to respect small businesses, they've got to make sure—especially now, we're looking at tariffs coming forward. In my constituency of Turtle Mountain, basically two thirds of Turtle Mountain straddles the US border. And that is a big impact.

We have many manufacturers in Turtle Mountain right now. And one is PhiBer. They make equipment for machinery for—equipment for dairy farms. They do—they have—they're actually expanding—they expanded in the last few years, and they actually are one of the biggest employers in my eastern side of the constituency. And they're looking at the way that

they've been attacked by taxes and everything that's coming at them, especially tariffs. They may now have no other choice but to, actually, if they're going to expand, is expand in the US.

Because the fact is, this is an impact to a small business in Turtle Mountain. PhiBer, who actually is located in Crystal City, Manitoba, employs a lot of people. Crystal—I would say Crystal City belongs to the RM of Louise, was the fastest growing constituency in my—in Turtle Mountain. And the fact is the population grew because of this employer and many other employees—employers around there—the spinoff effects of small businesses in the area.

And so the fact is, if this business does relocate or they expand to the south, this is a big impact for the area. This—the RM of Louise was the only municipality in my constituency that actually had a higher population than the Manitoba average, whereas my other—especially on the western side, because we compete with Saskatchewan, there's depopulation. And the depopulation is our tax system that I think that more people are setting up businesses and choosing to live into Saskatchewan.

And the fact is, right now, when it comes to doctors, and my colleague from Riding Mountain talked about doctors. The fact is we need tax revenues; we need population to keep our doctors in our rural areas. And the fact is when you don't respect small businesses and they shut down or they move elsewhere, then you have less population and less services, especially when it comes to health care and education, too, and—for that fact.

And the fact is here, is that if our population, especially around the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border, if you look at all the municipalities, most of them have dropped over the last 10 years, Honourable Speaker. That's why boundary commissions, when we do boundaries in this in—for representation in this Legislature, we're finding that in—especially in western part of Manitoba, our constituencies are getting much larger and larger. They're almost getting as large as some of the northern constituencies in the North because the fact is the competition with other—

* (11:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 5—Encouraging Manitobans to Support Local

The Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on—No. 5, Encouraging Manitobans to Support Local, brought forward by the honourable member for Seine River.

House Business

The Speaker: The honourable member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz), on House business.

MLA David Pankratz (Deputy Government House Leader): Yes, on House business; pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Radisson (MLA Dela Cruz). The title of the resolution is Homelessness.

The Speaker: It has been announced that pursuant to rule 34(7), that the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Radisson. The title of the resolution is Homelessness.

* * *

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I move, seconded by the MLA for Elmwood,

WHEREAS the looming threat of the tariffs proposed by U.S. President Trump is an attack on Canada and who we are as Manitobans and Canadians; and

WHEREAS Canadians need to be united in response to this attack; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is making life more affordable for Manitoba small business owners with a permanent 10% cut to the gas tax and rebates to homes and businesses for security upgrades so Manitobans can grow their businesses and support their family with a good quality of life; and

WHEREAS Manitoba has a rich and diverse economy, and Manitoba workers provide essential goods and services to the province and the world; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is taking immediate steps to protect Manitoba jobs and safeguard the economy; and

WHEREAS Manitobans are being encouraged to buy local and buy Canadian because where that money is spent matters; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is leading by example and reviewing all government procurement policies and contracts; and

WHEREAS by prioritizing Manitoban and Canadian products and services the Provincial Government is supporting the farmers, producers, businesses and workers who are the backbone of the economy here at home.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to continue its efforts to protect Manitoba jobs and the provincial economy by encouraging Manitobans to buy local and buy Canadian.

Motion presented.

MLA Cross: With over 40,000 small businesses that make up 95 per cent of the business sector here in Manitoba, small businesses are the backbone of our economy, Honourable Speaker. However, they have not always been treated with the respect and support that they deserve.

The previous government underfunded business support programs while writing cheques to corporate giants. In fact, during the pandemic, one of their members received a \$500,000 grant that was supposed to help local small businesses, but instead, it resulted in many women-owned businesses in the Exchange District shutting down completely because there were no supports.

We need to stand together as one Manitoba as we prepare for the incoming Trump tariffs on April 2nd, and that includes supporting small businesses and our small business community all across our province. The imposition of these tariffs has provided many Manitobans with a lot of uncertainty and anxiety as they are trying to figure out how this tariff war will affect them, their families and their businesses.

I've heard and seen first-hand the concerns and impacts the potential tariffs have been having on our small businesses community. Many members of my community and my own family are small business owners, so I know from personal experience just how hard small business owners work to do good and to give back to their communities.

Manitoba small businesses drive our economy. They create jobs, helping to support you and your family in your efforts to build a good life. They

support our producers, helping to distribute their goods for the whole community to enjoy. They build up our community by reinvesting their earnings right here in Manitoba.

Supporting local has never been more important. Small businesses are going to be some of the first to feel the impacts of a tariff tax, which is why we need to make sure they have the necessary tools to prepare for the economic difficulties ahead.

They already face a multitude of barriers outside of these looming tariffs, struggling to compete with corporate giants. Whether small businesses are in the retail, agriculture or tourism industries, they need to know that we all have their backs.

Honourable Speaker, our NDP government has been working tirelessly to weatherproof our provincial economy and make sure that we keep it strong during this economic storm. We created a US Trade Council made up of representatives from various industries and sectors across our province to prepare for the tariffs and to make the case that Manitoba has what Americans need.

We have also been encouraging Manitobans to buy local, because where we spend our money matters. When we buy local, we're supporting our fellow community members, people that we know share the same values, interests and desire to see our communities succeed.

Buying local means that we are reinvesting in our communities, which means that we, as community members, directly reap the benefits of the purchases that we make. This is because two-thirds of every dollar we spend at a small retail business recirculates in our local economy, as opposed to only 6 cents of every dollar spent at an online giant.

So shopping local reinvests eight times the amount into our province than supporting a giant chain does. Buying local is the most ethical way to shop because we know how the products we make and how they are prepared. Small businesses often buy their ingredients and decor from other local small businesses. This then means that supporting small local businesses can help lower your carbon footprint.

Small businesses are leaders in our communities. They sponsor community events, sports teams and donate their time and money to local organizations. Because of this, we also know exactly who will profit from our hard-earned dollars: other hard-working Manitobans.

Small businesses are grand community hubs. We are so lucky to live in such a diverse province with incredibly vibrant communities. However, not all communities are equally represented in the small business community. Only 12 per cent of small businesses in Manitoba are owned by women. With programs that support aspiring young Indigenous and gender-diverse entrepreneurs, we are not only helping Manitoba thrive, we're also helping more diverse communities thrive.

Found in the heart of Seine River and just a few steps from my constituency office is the St. Norbert Farmers' Market. It's open all year round for community members to come together, support local farmers, abattoirs and food processors. Even on cold winter days, the market has seen bustling crowds of people walking through the aisles of pop-up tents, getting to know the vendors and enjoying the goods that they are selling.

The vendors of the St. Norbert Farmers' Market and small businesses all across the province are seeing an increase in customers because of the media attention surrounding buying local. It's been heartwarming to see everybody rally together in this uncertain and difficult time. And it is only solidified that we are all truly, one Manitoba, with one future.

These tariffs are not a party issue; they concern us all. It is important that we all come together to make sure that Manitoba jobs are protected so that they can continue to support their families. Small businesses are still struggling to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. This is part of the reason why it is so important for all of us in this Chamber to support them so that they can continue to do the good work they do for their communities across this great province. No matter your background, we're in this together, as Manitobans and as Canadians.

Honourable Speaker, small-business owners are strong and resilient. Even so, protecting our jobs and safeguarding our economy is a collective responsibility. Small businesses can't do this alone and we as consumers play a very important role in this. I encourage every Manitoban to go to local farmers' markets, try out a new restaurant, walk into that small retail business you've been wanting to check out, because when you do, you are helping create a stronger and much more resilient Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held and questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another party; any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): The local and small business community is—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): It's very important that we do support our small businesses.

Can the member for Seine River explain why her NDP government is making life more expensive for Manitoba small businesses by eliminating the school tax rebates for commercial property owners?

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): You know, today we're talking about buying local, supporting local, buying Canadian, and so, in doing that, I think the most important thing to remember is that when we support the citizens around us, we are making life more affordable for everyone.

* (11:10)

We're increasing competition against those online giants, against those great, big conglomerates that seem to try and take over all of our industries. And so it's really important that, as consumers, we buy local, we buy Canadian. Buy Manitoba-made products as much as you can.

MLA Pankratz: The local and small-business community is so varied. They're hard-working, strong, you know, here in Manitoba, and their goods and services range from ag to retail to food, beverages and they employ so many folks in our province.

So my question to my colleague is: What are some of the small and local businesses that you frequent?

MLA Cross: That's a great question, honestly.

I've always been a consumer that is very concerned who I'm buying from. I check labels. I make sure that when I'm going to a restaurant, I want to know what—a little bit about that restaurant.

There's a local restaurant that just opened not far from me; it's called Dave and LaVerne's. It's a

brand-new place in Southdale, it's a fantastic restaurant. Great atmosphere, kind of has a '50s-style vibe. That's one of my favourite restaurants to go to.

Bakeries—I can't say enough about Le Croissant in St. Boniface. I love their croissants and their baguettes, it's one of my favourite places to go. There's also Bothwell—Fromagerie Bothwell on Provencher that I go get local cheese and make sure that I buy Bothwell Cheese instead of buying Kraft at the grocery store.

So buy local, support local—

The Speaker: Time has expired.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Has the member spoken to small-business associations, chambers of commerce, et cetera about what we can do to remove regulations and make it easier for small businesses to prosper?

MLA Cross: Yes, great question, thank you for the question.

I have actually done a lot of those consultations, and I'm constantly talking to small-business owners. Because my office is located next to the St. Norbert Farmers' Market, I make it a point of going there once a month to talk to all the vendors and small-business owners. I've taken trips outside of the city to visit their different locations when they're not set up at the farmers' market.

They're all saying the same thing: It is so important for the people here in Manitoba to support them, whether it be when I'm having a conversation with Chuck Davidson, when we're talking about my small business month bill. He's thrilled with the idea of having a marketing campaign that can be structured around supporting our local Manitoba businesses.

MLA Pankratz: So Manitoba has tens of thousands of small and local businesses, and, you know, these businesses survived tough times under the former failed PC government. And while our government is focused on supporting small businesses, we continue to hear divisive comments from the opposition, specifically from Turtle Mountain, for example, taking shots at firefighters and teachers, some of whom are actually small-business owners as well.

So my question is: How did the former failed PC governments let down small businesses while they were in power?

MLA Cross: I can tell you, as a small-business owner, as a family—coming from a family of small-

business owners; my sister owns a business, my father owns a business, my aunt owns businesses. We're entrepreneurial people. We didn't feel any support coming from the former PC government—nothing.

When the pandemic hit, we were waiting to see what kind of supports there would be provincially—nothing. What did they do? They put forward \$500,000 to support the MLA for Fort Whyte, where he created a company to take in goods from local businesses to make his money on their goods by tacking on, you know, a little extra for himself.

The support was not there. I watched women-owned businesses in the Exchange District close down while that member opened his shop right across the street. It is one hundred per cent accurate what I'm saying.

The support was simply not there.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): It's disappointing to hear what we're hearing here from the other side right now. We're here to support small businesses and that's what our focus should be today.

Can the member from Seine River tell us what the current government is doing specifically, other than advertising on social media and billboards?

MLA Cross: You know, it's interesting that this member is disappointed because another member and I went out and supported her local small business in her community, made a point of doing that, because we believe in it so much.

Our government is doing everything we can to ensure that small businesses don't feel the negative effects of the imposing tariffs. We've created a trade council made up of members right across this province, to represent all sectors, to represent all workers, to represent all business owners. We are listening. We constantly listen and communicate with our constituents—I—on a regular basis. As I said, I am talking to small-business owners. I am trying to meet their needs as best I can.

I mean, governments, we do as much as we can. We can't do everything; we all know that that's—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Pankratz: Our NDP team is taking action to help small and local businesses after so many years of rising costs. You know, we started this by cutting the provincial gas tax for one year, and then extended that into a permanent 10 per cent reduction in gas tax,

which ensures it will never be as high as it was under the former PC government.

You know, my question for my colleague is: What can Manitobans do to continue supporting small and local business?

MLA Cross: Thank you for that question.

They can shop local. Go to the local butcher; go to the local bakery. Go to the produce stands and farmers' markets. Buy local eggs. Buy direct from a farmer. Support the people that are producing things in our province. That is the best thing that anybody can do.

That—the gas tax cut that we made last year had a huge impact on businesses in my community. I represent a great number of greenhouses down St. Mary's Road, and I can tell you every single one of those owners and all the people that do business with them, landscapers, were thrilled with the gas tax. They knew that it was going to come back, but us cutting it by another 10 per cent and keeping it down was a huge win. And when we—as we're freezing hydro rates, I know they're equally excited for that.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): A C-F-I report of small businesses has shown that the highest tax burden that small businesses face is actually the payroll tax.

So can the member please explain why her government refuses to phase out the job-killing payroll tax at a time when businesses are struggling the most?

MLA Cross: It's ironic that the questions coming at me are simple fixes that they could have done while they were in government but choose—chose not to. Always pointing the blame. Members opposite take no accountability for their actions while they were in government, none whatsoever. It's like they've forgotten what's happened. It's so interesting.

I was a small-business owner. I felt no support. I can tell you members of my family felt no support either. They're just upset right now that we are a government that talks about small businesses, that we want to support them. They feel like they've cornered the market on small business because they own businesses. That's not the case.

MLA Pankratz: You know, Honourable Speaker, the hypocrisy coming from the other side today, again, is hilarious, to be honest. They kept a payroll tax in for seven years, every year they were in government, when they could have gotten rid of it, and then they choose to argue with us about it. You know, we'll keep

working on that, having those conversations, but I just want to give my colleague one more opportunity, because I think this is a really important resolution today.

So just expand on why it is so important that we support local businesses here in Manitoba, specifically. And just some of the great work, maybe, that is being done across her constituency, with small businesses as well.

Thank you.

MLA Cross: Thank you. Great question.

Small businesses are so generous in their time and the way that they give back to community. We know that when we go to local sporting events, tournaments, you're often going to see donations made by small business to help that team, to help that organization raise a little bit of money for—maybe they want to buy sweatshirts or maybe they want to buy sweatpants for their team.

I know that my husband and my daughter, who run a small butcher shop, they offer fundraising opportunities whereby we cut the amount of profit we might make on something so that that team, that organization can make a little bit of money to help their group out.

Small businesses do so very much to help our communities. They are here; they listen. They are members of our community. They sit in this Chamber. We're all in this together. And so—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Perchotte: Other than a slogan to buy local and support local, what plan is in place to help the small businesses? What actual plan?

MLA Cross: Well, I mean, we've been working really hard to support small businesses. Last year it was removing the fuel tax. That was huge for small businesses.

We've maintained a 10 per cent cut off the amount that they were charging small businesses. We are freezing hydro rates this year. That is huge for small businesses, whether they understand that or not, especially for industrial businesses or businesses that are producers. We have a trade council, where we have people from small businesses working toward solutions to make sure that our economy is strong, here in Manitoba.

* (11:20)

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

The honourable member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler).

Mr. Schuler: When the member suggested she spoke to business associations and chambers about regulations that could be removed, could she tell us—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

The member for Springfield-Ritchot possibly didn't hear when I said the time for questions had expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate. [*interjection*] Order.

The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): As I mentioned in this Chamber several times, I am a small-business owner and have been since the age of 16. Having the ability to be supported by people in my local constituency and my local area within the province, and even within Canada, is very important to the survival of businesses. In particular, the current business that we have or—has been impacted by tariffs over the number of years.

When Donald Trump came to office in the last term, he imposed a tariff on US steel that was purchased from China. That—you wouldn't think that would impact a small company in Selkirk, Manitoba, but it has a great impact and that's why we need people to support locally. When he put that tariff on Chinese steel, the American market looked over at their existing suppliers and said, we need to buy locally, and they bought from the US steel companies.

Unfortunately in Canada, the steel that we buy, our mechanical tubing, there is no manufacturers of that in Canada so we're forced to buy in the US. When we looked to the US to buy and place an order, they came and said, well, our mills are now at capacity because everybody is buying US steel instead of Chinese steel now, and because of that, we have to run extra shifts and we have a great demand on our facility, we have tremendous extra costs and our input costs have jumped up dramatically, so your pricing has gone up.

And it takes a little while to understand the true economics of what just happened there, but the result is our raw costs went up 40 per cent. And we had orders in place at the time, orders that we had to supply, were waiting for the material to come from the

US, and with the 40 per cent increase in our raw costs of our raw steel, we didn't have any profit left.

So we did not have the opportunity to go back to the customer, or we chose not to go back to the customer and say, we're going against our word. And luckily, these were people that were local, supporting us. We explained to them, they—we have an issue; we have pricing here, after looking to buy our product in the future, it's going to be a tremendous cost. And they understand that and they recognized us as being respectful, to being honest and being true to our word to deliver the product.

Now, when we come to 2025, we have, again, tremendous economic uncertainty from the US: tariffs on, tariffs off, tariffs on, tariffs off, we're doubling them, we're not doubling them, it's 25, it's 50. And we don't know what's going on. But prior to this, I hedged a bet and I bought two truckloads of steel and had them come to the plant for my son to manufacture buildings with, so we're able to hold product for the near future.

And we're able to say to the people who come locally to buy our product how much we appreciate them. And there's—they would be an opportunity if we were a little greedy to say, the price is now here; we can make a better margin. But we choose to keep the price that we reflect to the customer based on what we paid for the steel and not try to take advantage of a situation, and people appreciate that. And that's what you get when you shop local. You shop local with your friends, your neighbours, colleagues in your community.

And I know the member for Seine River (MLA Cross) has spoken many times about restaurants and bakery shops and, you know, fromageries, but small business is a little bit more than that as well. We have manufacturers of product. We have welding shops. We have machine shops. We have places that manufacture zero-turn mowers. We have foundries throughout our province. We have these small companies employing thousands and thousands and hundreds of thousands of people every day that depend on their livelihood from that company.

And these small-business owners, they put their financial dollars at risk every day. And some days it's not pretty.

When we looked at when COVID hit, my little company in Selkirk was on a banner year to do the greatest sales we ever had. We had orders all through-

out the US, orders in California, Salt Lake City and even Boston University was going to be purchasing from us.

But when COVID hit, we had materials in place, we had the manpower in place but we were not allowed to go and install our product. And we had great customers that we've done work with in the past and they said, Richard, we'll wait. We know this is going to be temporary, we'll wait.

Well, the waiting got a little longer and a little longer and a little longer. And they came back and they said, unfortunately, we're going to have to cancel the contract and we expect you to refund us our deposits. That year was a \$400,000 loss for this little company in Selkirk that employs about 10 people.

As a business owner, we could have done many things. We could've said, sorry, we're going to cut our losses, we're going to liquidate, we're going to turn around and see what we can recapture, sell off our equipment and materials, lay these people off.

Or do we do a reset? Keep the employees at work. Their families depend on it. The community depends on it. Their futures depend on having the ability to pay their mortgages, to pay their automobile payments and to be able to come together as a community. And we made a conscious decision at that point that we need to focus more on local business.

Even though the US market's attractive and we can do a great job down there because we've got the skill and the know-how and we're priced competitively, better advantage because of the dollar, we made a conscious decision to focus within Canada, to reach out to the people who've purchased from us before and say, how is it going in your industry, is there anything we can do to help you, is there any upgrades that you need on your buildings? Please let us know we can do.

And they came to the call. They chose to support once again. And, in 2024, we had our banner year with zero sales in the US. We didn't make back profitability where we were, we know that's going to take a long time, but it's a shop local, buy local, support local mentality that we have.

And the small-business owner isn't just the mom-and-pop shop that you go in there and the guy is slaving over a hot grill and getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning to make sure that he's prepping for the day, or the bakery that is showing up at 3 o'clock in the morning to make sure that fresh bread is ready when you're—when the store opens at 9 o'clock; it's

everybody in our community, all the manufacturers. It's even the accountants, the lawyers, the doctors that we have, that's all small businesses that count on red tape being reduced, count on the government of the day to make sure things are better for them.

Many years ago, when I had a machine shop, we'd go on trade missions down into the US, and we'd go to Minneapolis, Chicago, Las Vegas, and we'd set up a wing, we'd call it the Canadian aisle, and there'd be a lot of manufacturers from Manitoba that were there. It was a great trip.

Very rarely did I ever pick up a sale from any other entity other than the people that came with us. I would come back and just about every company that was represented from Manitoba became a customer of mine.

* (11:30)

If we could invest time and energy and to grow our economy by showing the small businesses who is available in the area, develop trade shows within our own province that show the capabilities of each of the organizations that choose to be a part of that, we have an opportunity to really support local.

Countless hours are spent by the owners sacrificing every day from their family, from their friends, from their vacation properties, if they have them, to make sure their businesses are functioning, and we need to recognize that. We need to support that every single day to make sure that these business owners are valued and valued by this government.

On that note, I thank everybody in the Chamber for listening.

Thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Well, I'd like to add my voice to this debate. Surprising whether a New Democrat wants to speak to this, but I guess the only small-business owner on their side has already spoken and the rest have really very little to say on this.

So, first of all, I would like to say that I'm perturbed that in her first sentence of her speech, the member for Seine River (MLA Cross) attacks her opponents, real or imaginary. I'm not too sure that that is how you help shop local.

This is a very important issue, and I was listening intently to the member for Selkirk (Mr. Perchotte) and it's interesting. He goes to a trade show in the United

States and picks up most of his business from other Canadians, rather than from Americans walking by.

I had the opportunity to be in business. I had some retail here in the city. And again, we really appreciated when American tourists came and they shopped, and they were very good shoppers in the summer. But I also started a catalogue sale business and I had a Canadian division and a US division, which I ran out of an office in Edina, which is a suburb of Minneapolis. And that's where we had our PO box, and we had someone open up the mail and they would do our banking for us there.

After 9/11, I became aware that—and again, this isn't to disparage the United States. They're our neighbours; we share a big border. But business is business and I realized quickly that the United States will always be for free and open commerce, as long as it benefits them. And if it doesn't benefit them, they then change the rules to benefit them and that's their idea of a free and open system.

I realized very quickly that I could not compete against competitors in the United States. They would go to the parent company and anything and everything, whether real or imagined, they would criticize what I was doing and finally, I drove down to Detroit and I walked in on my competitor and I said, why don't you just buy me out? And I sold them the whole US side of my operation. Actually, it was the best thing I ever did. And then I focused on catalogue sales within Canada.

Interestingly enough, many, many, many of my clients from the United States wrote back and said, why are you not sending us your catalogue anymore? Why are you not doing business in the United States? And I said, I've divested. And they indicated that as soon as I was out of the market, the prices went up 50 per cent; they doubled.

And that is how the United States does business. And I think we have to be aware of that. And I think we have to be cognizant of the fact that we now have a sense within the United States—and we pinned it all on one individual, but I believe there is a sense in the United States that the world has taken advantage of the US, that any kind of economic failing is not because of their business practices or the way that they are doing things; it is everybody else's fault.

So what are we going to do to help our local businesses? And I asked the member for Seine River (MLA Cross), whose only thing she seemed to be

interested in was attacking members in this Chamber. And that was very unfortunate.

There are—and the reason why I—Mr. Speaker, I couldn't hear you previously was the member for Point Douglas (Ms. Smith) was heckling so much, and now she's starting it again. And may—the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine), who just heckles the whole time. She just heckles members, and this should be a bill that we should be agreeing on, because this is important; we're facing some very, very difficult times. And the member for St. Johns just wants to divide people.

So I would suggest that I ask the member for Seine River about regulations that hamper small business. Like, how can we help small business grow? And there are a lot of things—and I will concede that many of these are municipal regulations. I do believe, however, that the Province has a role.

The Province of Manitoba, under the leadership of Brian Pallister, signed on to the New West Partnership, something that Gary Doer and Greg Selinger were not prepared to do for whatever reasons and one would have to ask them why not. But we signed on with the New West Partnership.

In fact, we had the least amount of exemptions or carve-outs of anybody in the New West Partnership. Fact, when trade negotiations were taking place, long before any of the conversations taking place today—that Manitoba had the least amount of carve-outs in the country under the Pallister government.

And I would suggest to all provinces that if we want to help local business, if we want to help shop local, the best place to start is in Canada by tearing down tariffs, by tearing down barriers, by tearing down walls that prohibit us from doing trade across this great country of ours. That's where we should be starting.

Because of Manitoba having a—I believe, a good story to tell, I believe we have credibility when it comes to tearing down barriers to small business, to do business across this country, to shop local, not just within Manitoba, not just within western Canada, but across this country. I would suggest to the government, sit down with AMM and business groups, and let's talk about ways that we could enhance doing business. And there are just fundamentally basic things.

I happened to be on Henderson Highway, and I don't know if we should single out some businesses, but there's a bakery very close to the MLA for Rossmere,

her constituency office—it might even be the member for River East, I'm not too sure. But anyway, there's a bakery right there and I walked in and had a good chat with them. The problem is with parking.

So if we want to promote shop local, we should be talking to businesses. How can we help with where customers should park? How can we help them how they can—for instance, we have beautiful summers in Manitoba. Like, just exquisite summers, especially on the weekends or evenings, you sit outside and you have some dinner outside and sit with friends. How can we use our sidewalks? How can we use what we have in the beauty of this great province of ours to—basically, you expand; you can double or triple the size of your business for those months and it is very helpful for the business. And it's good for us to get out and support them. But then we also have to deal with the regulations that inhibit that.

I know one jurisdiction, on weekends in the evenings, they would shut down streets and—to traffic, and basically, the businesses could put their tables and chairs right into the street and people could walk through and sit on the tables and chairs, order their food, so and so forth.

There are a lot of things we can do, but we have to have the will to do it. We have to help these small business owners.

For instance, I know there's a regulation, you're only allowed so and so many seats per bathroom stall. If you exceed that, you have to take tables away. Well, maybe we can make an exemption whereby they can, just for the summer months, exceed that number.

There are a lot of ways that we could support shop local, whether it's—and it shouldn't just be restricted to food service, but also to retail. And we know that a lot of retailers do bring in product from Europe, and we should encourage to do trade. There's—it's a very good thing. But we should be looking at it locally, and how can we help local small businesses bring in product from the world, sell it here, and then we can sell our product to the world.

* (11:40)

Saskatoon berries and blueberries or—there's all kinds of product that we have here in western Canada. And there were huge barriers set against a saskatoon berry jam in Europe. And those are the kinds of things we should be working on. We should be working with other organizations.

Stop this tearing each other down. I think that's not helpful, what happens in this Chamber. This is serious. We are facing a United States that wants to take all economic opportunity and move it to the US and basically they just want our natural resources, water and natural resources, whatever else they can get, do all the manufacturing, and we would just become the drawers of water and hewers of wood. And that is a grim future.

We have to start producing; we have to start supporting, but it has to be in real terms. Start with regulations. Start with talking to our small-business owners. And that's where we would be best going, not attacking each other, but rather working together.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Just before recognizing another member, we have seated in the public gallery, from École Howden, 30 grade 4 students under the direction of Janelle Gagne. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Southdale (MLA Cable).

* * *

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): I'm happy to stand up today to support small businesses. I have a history, and I owned a small business for seven years with my son Colton and he currently is running the business now as I'm now a newly elected official.

Sitting in the chair of a small-business owner is a difficult place to be, a lot of the times, and yet so rewarding. We have to weather many storms as they come and it's important for support. It's important for us to have support as we support—or, sorry, as we contribute to our economy, support our families and support other families that work for us as well.

Supporting local business is essential for fostering a strong, vibrant community. When you buy local, you're not just investing in a product or service, you're investing in people around you. And I'd like to focus on people because people are what drive our economy, people are what run our small businesses.

Local businesses are often owned by individuals who deeply care about the community and provide unique products and reflect local culture and values.

One of the greatest benefits of shopping locally is economic impact. Money spent locally tends to stay within the community, helping to create jobs, support local workers and fund local projects.

This results in a more resilient local economy where people are more likely to reinvest in the area. I come from a amazing vibrant community of Morden-Winkler.

And we have a very, very strong value system where we give back to the community, and small businesses are one of the biggest community that give to—back to the community and it's an exciting part of our community and important for non-profits as well.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

In addition, local businesses are more likely to offer personalized service where owners and employees know their customers and can provide tailored recommendations.

For example, in my small business, we used—we always took the person's name when they would place an order and we would use their names because people need to hear their names, and it makes them feel loved and valued.

Where owners and employees know their customers and can—they can provide tailored recommendations and services for them. This leads to more meaningful and rewarding shopping experience or dining experience or whatever it is that they're using that small business for, whether they need a product or a service.

Furthermore, buying local reduces your environment footprint, as goods typically don't need to be shipped long distances.

Ultimately, by supporting a small, local business, you're contributing to the growth and success of your community while promoting sustainability and fostering a more connected society.

In some of the storms that small businesses have to weather, we went through COVID and we had a—as a small-business owner, there are a lot of programs put forward. There were some specific programs put forward by the PC government that did help support small businesses during COVID, and it was a very—it was a benefit to a many—to many.

But currently, we have the new storm of the tariffs that have been the forefront of the minds of business—small businesses and local industries. They have a negative impact on Manitoba businesses and industries by increasing costs and limiting competitiveness.

For example, agriculture. Manitoba's farmers face higher expenses when exporting grains and livestock

due to tariffs on their products, making it hard to compete in international markets. We have a lot of small agriculture businesses; we have small butcher shops, we have a lot of small businesses that really rely on other countries and other areas.

Similarly, local manufacturers, small manufacturers struggle with rising costs for importing materials and parts, which are essential for production. These higher costs often passed on to the customers, making goods more expensive.

So we need to do better, we need to provide support for our small businesses and manufacturers in our province, and in our small communities.

Recently, the imposition of tariffs by the Trump administration has created challenges for our local small businesses. But it all—but I just want to say that, by choosing Canadian, we help our businesses thrive in the face of global disruptions and reduce the impact of tariffs on our wallets.

When we choose Canadian- and Manitoba-made, we're investing in our own community. Every dollar spent on Canadian products circulates within Canada, and within Manitoba, and within our small community that we spend our dollars, stimulating innovation and fostering growth in industries and small manufacturers and small businesses across the country and around our province of Manitoba. It helps Canadian workers, Manitoba workers and small businesses that are in small rural communities. It helps farmers and manufacturers stay competitive in a challenging global marketplace.

Moreover, buying Canadian ensures that we're not just avoiding the impacts of tariffs but also supporting higher environmental standards. By keeping our locals' products local, it helps us to ensure that purchases align with sustainability goals that we have in our communities and our province. Buying Canadian, we're not just counteracting the negative effects of tariffs; we're also building a more resilient, self-sufficient economy.

So let's make the choice to support local businesses, and let's help Manitoba and Canada—Canadian workers, and strengthen our economy in a time when it matters most.

Interprovincial trading is crucial to strengthening Canada's economy and Manitoba's economy, helping support the small businesses in our communities. By reducing barriers to trade between provinces, we can foster greater collaboration and allow businesses to access larger, diverse markets.

This not only increases competitiveness, drives innovation and improving product quality, but it also lowers costs for consumers, and services flow more freely across provincial borders. It impacts us greatly when we can get something that we need in our small business, and we don't have it—access to it anymore.

When provinces trade more easily, small businesses win. We create more jobs, improve supply chains and boost productivity, while Canadian businesses and Manitoba businesses can benefit from economies of scale while consumers enjoy a wide variety of products, competitive prices.

Strengthening interprovincial trade also means that regional economies become less vulnerable to global disruptions, and that's what we want. We want to support our small businesses and our local economies. As we rely more on each other for essential goods and services, we all win. Small businesses, manufacturers win.

Diversification is also a key. By encouraging Manitoba industries to expand to new markets across different provincial lines, but also in our communities as well.

Supporting industries like agriculture, manufacturing, technology are all things that we can really, really grow on and elaborate and constantly grow and become new ideas and new things that we can do.

* (11:50)

As we support our small businesses, we need to encourage them to step out. We need to support them in whatever we can, to make sure that they have the access to the things they need and to continually encourage small businesses to keep going, as this is a difficult time.

A lot of small businesses in my community, they're closed off to a lot of the products and—that they had in the past, and they're looking for new places to find the things that they need. So we need to make sure we are flexible, we're supportive and we're looking at what they need, as government.

As legislators, we need to put aside our own issues and we need to support our communities and our province and our people in our communities and our small businesses.

Thank you.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): When seeing this resolution come forward by the member opposite, it's very telling that they're all talk and not a lot of action.

And this is what we've been hearing from small businesses and stakeholders across the province: that they are not getting the support that they need from this NDP government, especially in uncertain economic times that we are facing, currently.

Last Thursday, we spent a significant amount of time bringing forward a very meaningful solution to help support and protect small businesses, as well as Manitoba workers, and that was to move forward with the phase-out of the payroll tax. However, during that time, the members opposite didn't talk about the payroll tax at all.

They seemed to not have any understanding that this continues to be the largest tax burden that Manitoba small businesses face. In fact, they regularly put words on the record that it's just large corporations that benefit from a reduction in payroll tax, without realizing that majority of businesses in Manitoba, over 98 per cent of them, actually employ less than 99 workers. Even in the answer that the member opposite gave when I asked about the phase-out, she was unable to answer this question.

They simply do not seem to understand what types of burdens that Manitoba businesses face, day in and day out, here in this province.

Similar to my colleague, the MLA for Selkirk, I've worked in business, I've worked for small business, I've worked for large business, I've owned my own business. I fully understand the impact that high taxes have on businesses. Businesses can only absorb so much.

In addition, we're expecting these businesses to increase the number of jobs that they employ, to increase wages on workers. But the reality is, is that the NDP isn't doing anything meaningful to actually help these small businesses during difficult times.

I also find it ironic that this NDP government is talking about making life more affordable with a cut to the gas tax when, in fact, they increased it to the largest rate in Manitoba history.

And now let's just kind of go through those numbers: a 10 per cent cut; that is 90 cents every time I fill up my car. That is not even a Happy Meal in a given month. That is not saving Manitobans or Manitoba businesses any meaningful dollars, in reality.

The NDP's actions speak louder than words; or their lack of actions or the actions that they actually are taking are actually having a negative impact on

how businesses and small businesses operate. They talk a big game about the economic horse pulling the social cart.

However, what business is going to come to Manitoba and invest when we have some of the highest taxes on businesses across the country? This is just not realistic. It is just not how businesses operate. They certainly won't be growing under those types of economic conditions, and it's getting worse.

What we saw last year when the NDP government brought in BITSA—they didn't even consult with the business community about what those labour challenges were going to do to those businesses.

Again, I go back to: what business is going to come in and invest and grow jobs, here in the province, when block after block and red tape after red tape is increasing as a result of this NDP government? This does not show support for small businesses in Manitoba, whatsoever. In fact, the policy decisions that they are making is a deterrence for small businesses to continue to operate.

Now, I look at my own constituency. The largest town in my constituency is just over 3,000 people—3,500 people, give or take. My entire towns in my constituency revolve around small business.

The largest business in my constituency in terms of employment is just over 500 people. They have to bring individuals and workers in from Winnipeg. They bus them down to Rosenort, that's where they're employed—but that's the largest. The majority of businesses are under 100 workers in a given location.

The NDP's actions do not match their talk. We see a lot of fluff coming out of the members opposite. They claim to be standing up for businesses, but in reality, when you talk to the business community, they are not.

Even the fact that the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) brought in a deferral on the payroll tax for three months while small businesses actually have to apply to get the 'deferral,' what small business is going to take that time for a 90-day deferral when the government is going to come back and collect that anyway?

These are fluff policy announcements. They're trying to show they're doing something for the community, when, in reality, they're not. And businesses are taking notice that they are not getting the support from this NDP government that they expect or deserve.

I want to speak to something that I actually find quite comical, is the Manitoba government's buy local ad campaign, and it includes spending on social media of American companies.

And there's actually an article by Steve Lambert, Canadian Press, said the NDP government said the campaign would be on digital platforms, billboards and radio, and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) didn't directly answer Wednesday when asked whether some money would go to non-local media platforms such as Facebook, but yet the next day, ads were popping up on Facebook and Instagram. One third of \$140,000 costs is slated for digital advertising as a result of this buy local campaign.

This is just—this is ironic, honourable Speaker, and this is exactly what I talk about when actions speak louder than words. So, on one side, we're not getting any meaningful action to actually support small businesses, and on the other hand the action we're getting is not supporting small businesses.

I haven't seen any local advertising in my local papers, on my local radio. You know, Facebook and Instagram, Mark Zuckerberg collecting paycheques from this NDP government.

I also want to speak to what we've seen in the past year, because this does speak to the actions of this NDP government where they are not supporting Manitobans, and as a result not supporting Manitoba small businesses. They eliminated the school tax rebate for commercial businesses and raised property taxes by \$148 million in last year's budget.

I don't know of a single business owner that would say that that is a supportive tax measure for their small business in Winnipeg nor in Manitoba.

The reality is, is that the decisions that this NDP are making, they're increasing taxes on businesses. Had they actually stuck with the phase-out that the—of the payroll tax that the former PC government implemented, that would have benefited 2,750 businesses with annual tax savings for those businesses of \$35 million starting in 2024, had they continued with that phase-out.

They could increase tax—the threshold of the payroll tax. They could decrease the notch number. You know, those were questions I expected to get asked by the members opposite during last week's resolution.

But instead they didn't ask me about the payroll tax at all because they don't understand it, because most of them have never had to pay a payroll tax.

Companies in my riding are paying upwards of \$500 million in payroll taxes this year alone.

That's \$8,000 per week to the NDP coffers, and those individuals are employing under 100 people.

Like I said, honourable Speaker, actions speak louder than words. The reality is, is that these small businesses cannot absorb more taxes, especially right now, especially in uncertain economic times.

We hear the NDP, sure, they stand up and they talk about US tariffs. Well, we're also in a trade war with China—we're also in a trade war with China. We are caught in the middle of two trade wars.

We've also seen the members opposite who have done nothing but criticize Canada as a country over the years—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 12 p.m., this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

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