



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-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
CORBETT, Shannon	Transcona	NDP
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
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>	Spruce Woods	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 10, 2025

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.***The Speaker:** Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 213—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Non-Compete Agreements)

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I moved, and second by the MLA for Tyndall Park, that Bill 213, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Non-Compete Agreements), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm pleased to introduce The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, Bill 213, a bill that bans non-compete agreements for most Manitoba workers.

Right now, too many non-unionized workers, especially those with specialized skills, are forced to sign away their rights to seek better opportunities. These clauses prevent workers from switching jobs for higher wages, starting their own businesses or joining a competitor, even after their employment ends. It's just not unfair, it's bad for the economy. These agreements keep wages low, block innovation, give large corporations the power to suppress competition.

This bill bans non-compete clauses across the board with narrow exceptions for senior executives and individuals who sell a business and stay on as an employee.

We need to empower workers, not restrict them. This legislation will help create a fairer labour market, support small business growth and give Manitoba's skilled workers the freedom to thrive.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

Seeing none, committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mighty Minds Montessori & Childcare

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Mighty Minds Montessori & Childcare Inc. stands as a testament to what dedication, vision and a love for learning can

achieve. It is an example of how one person's passion can make a lasting difference in the lives of children and families.

Vanathy Shanmugam, the founder of Mighty Minds, had a dream to create a space where children could thrive, learn and grow in a nurturing environment. A woman of colour, a single mother, an immigrant and a proud resident of Fort Richmond for 17 years, Vanathy's personal journey has been a source of inspiration. With 24 years of experience in early childhood education, including her work as a Montessori teacher in Sri Lanka, she turned her dream into a reality, deeply impacting our community.

In Canada, Vanathy earned ECE II and III certificates alongside her Montessori certification. Her commitment to providing quality care and education is evident in every aspect of her work. Mighty Minds focuses on fostering curiosity, independence and confidence in children, setting them up for lifelong success.

In Fort Richmond, where more than half of the population is made up of immigrants and newcomers, Vanathy's work is especially meaningful. I had the opportunity to tour Mighty Minds Montessori and it is clear that this is more than just a child-care centre; it is a place where children are given the tools to succeed, supported by a team that genuinely cares about their future.

Honourable Speaker, I would also like to highlight that April 27 to May 3 is early childhood educator week. The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt) invites all MLAs to visit child-care centres in their ridings to celebrate the hard work and dedication of our early childhood educators.

I invite all my colleagues to congratulate Vanathy Shanmugam and extend our appreciation to all early childhood educators.

I would like to add guests' names to Hansard.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Founder: Vanathy Shanmugam

Yohan Deshapriya Adipola, Munaweera Arachchilage, Thilini Fernando, Duminda Manjula Perera Kahawakoralege, Inesh Prabuddha, Timothy Prathipati.

Decorum in the House

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Honourable Speaker, this Chamber is not a safe workspace. I once again stand with a heavy heart and a sick stomach.

Yesterday we celebrated Pink Shirt Day, a day that is to honour antibullying, and clearly, we did not hear ourselves when we stood up to talk about its importance.

There is no other workplace that I am aware of where this—where the kind of behaviours that are exhibited in here would not result in some sort of consequence. I believe we should be setting a better example for those who have elected us.

I stood in this House and shared about my mental health journey, and I was pleased to see positive outcomes and see my bill passed. Mental health continues to be a priority in my journey, and my advocacy will not stop. We have an opportunity to work in this Chamber for our constituents in a calm and constructive manner.

There are members on all sides of the House that have contributed to snowballing problems that cause decorum to break down. Having said this, there are members in this House do not—that do not engage in this kind of behaviour. The member of Tyndall Park comes to mind.

Our constituents have sent us here to represent their needs and concerns. We can all do better.

I know—I now want to speak to the new members in the Chamber. You have an opportunity to reflect on the type of environment you want to be part of. Let me suggest, like myself, if you find yourself getting sick as you come into this Chamber, then it's clear that something doesn't sit well with you, as well.

I will continue to treat everyone with dignity and respect. And when you feel you are being mistreated or attacked, I will share with you one piece of advice that I will remind myself of in these difficult situations: It is difficult to fight with someone when they don't fight back.

Let's treat each other with the respect we all deserve as human beings. And remember, a kind word could simply be enough to change someone's day, and that ripple effect can be huge and perhaps even, if we're lucky, it could change a Chamber.

Rossbrook House

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Honourable Speaker, no child who does not want to be alone should ever have to be alone. This is one of the founding principles of Rossbrook

House, and it is my honour to rise today to celebrate Rossbrook's transformational role in the life of community.

Rossbrook House was founded in 1976 by Sister Mac, a beloved educator, lawyer and inner-city activist whose spirit and legacy still live on in our community even 40 years after her death.

Since its inception, Rossbrook House has opened 365 days a year for children and youth. It is open 24 hours per day when school is not in session. Rossbrook hosts three off-campus schools in partnership with Winnipeg School Division. Rossbrook provides meals, tutoring, employment, sport, safe rides home and hosts multiple events like their 44th annual powwow coming up this June.

Rossbrook is doing the heart work of reclaiming language and cultural teachings, including sweat lodge and sweat, basic sun dance, sacred fire keeping, skirt teachings, medicine wheel, feather, male/female and two-spirit roles and responsibilities, restorative practices, traditional parenting, land-based learning, beading and leather work. Rossbrook has an Ojibwe language program and hosts a feast four times a year.

These teachings build skills and strategies that enable children and youth to lead mino-bimaadisiwin: the good life.

In 2022, Patty Mainville took on the executive director position and her leadership is a full-circle moment for Rossbrook.

Patty is a former participant, was a junior staff member, a graduate of Rising Sun school, a board member, a dance and cultural adviser. Patty is Anishinaabe, a proud mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. She had a 25-year career as a teacher and principal in the Winnipeg School Division.

As ED, Patty says, quote: My hope is to program with purpose and impact, to address the needs of our participants, while giving them a safe place to belong, learn, play and become.

I respectfully request my Chamber colleagues to rise and give thanks to Rossbrook House, to Patty, the board, staff and volunteers for all they contribute to the province.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

* (13:40)

Barry Cooper and Shaun Cameron

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, I am deeply moved rising today to celebrate two remarkable individuals from Brandon West who have been awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medals. I am proud to recognize my constituents Mr. Barry Cooper and Mr. Shaun Cameron, who join us in the gallery here today.

As the business-to-business operations manager at Heritage Co-op, Barry Cooper is a prominent figure in Brandon known for his extensive contributions to our community. He is deeply committed to Brandon, having served as the Brandon Chamber of Commerce president, on the Keystone board of directors, and most recently the 2024-2025 campaign chair of the United Way.

Barry's commitment to respect and kindness to all, in both his professional and personal life, has shaped his journey as he continues to immeasurably inspire those around him. Barry will always be the first to tell you: It's not me, it's the team; I just have the privilege of leading.

Shaun Cameron is a respected Assiniboine College communications specialist, proven community leader and city councillor. Shaun, along with his fellow filmmaking partners Gordon Goldsburg [*phonetic*] and Graham Street, have profiled more than 70 historic Manitoba locations. Through their shared work, Manitoba Heritage Minute series and the Abandoned Manitoba programs were created, placing an emphasis on preserving the important places and people of this wonderful province. Shaun's commitment to this meaningful history ensures generations to come can learn from the past and appreciate the rich heritage of Manitoba.

Barry and Shaun, you are both exceptional individuals and your achievements are a source of inspiration for us all. Your contributions have not only earned you this prestigious recognition but have also left an indelible mark on society.

Colleagues, please join me in congratulating Mr. Barry Cooper and Mr. Shaun Cameron, true Manitoba icons.

Darren and Allison Hueging

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): Honourable Speaker, I would like to recognize and pay tribute to young agriculture producers.

Young farmers are essential to the growth and success of our agriculture industry and the rural

communities. They bring innovation, forward-thinking approaches that shape the future of farming in our province.

It's important to recognize young leaders in our ag communities. One important voice is acknowledging young leaders in this industry-sponsored Manitoba outstanding young farm program. They honour young people across the province. They acknowledge and celebrate the talent and dedication of emerging leaders in agriculture in our community.

The Manitoba Outstanding Young Farmers' award this year went to Darren and Allison Hueging. Darren and Allison, along with their three energetic young children, Jocelyn, Myers and Madden, operate a successful dairy, beef and forage operation in Woodlands area.

As a licensed veterinarian, Allison brings expertise in preventative bovine medicine, and a vital component in maximizing production and maintaining a high standard of care.

Since 2011, their operation has focused on herd health, optimizing genetics and ensuring the well-being of the animals they raise. Currently, they milk 80 cows twice daily, alongside raising a herd of 300 cow-calf beef animals.

Darren and Allison's dedication to their operation represents the excellence in agriculture, and it's honour to be here to celebrate the contributions that you make to our agriculture society in the province of Manitoba.

Congratulations, Allison and Darren. Thank you so much for being here.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Order, please.

There's some guests in the gallery that I'd like to introduce at this point in time.

We have seated in the public gallery, from Landmark Collegiate, 30 grade 9 students under the direction of John Mullin, honourable member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé).

And we welcome you here today.

Further, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, from Rossbrook House, Patty Mainville; Brenda Hasiuk, past-president of the board; Justine Carandang, manager of programs and operations; Sheila Chippenstance [*phonetic*], co-ordinator, volunteers, junior staff and Learning Always; Michelle Boulet,

Indigenous way of life co-ordinator; who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration and the honourable member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino).

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

Further, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today Barry Cooper, Don and Calla Cooper, Shaun Cameron and Hannah Cameron, who are guests of the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen).

And we welcome you here today, as well.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Singing of O Canada in the Chamber Premier's Comments—Apology Request

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, and to all those in the gallery—and I'm not looking up—congratulations on all your awards.

Yesterday, the Premier seemed to have difficulty in answering a straightforward question on whether he would support the singing of O Canada, part of our daily traditions here in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

But the Premier described this as a wedge issue and a, I quote, mess that should not be brought into this, I quote, hallowed Chamber, end quote.

On our side, we were not sure why the Premier would become so angry at the idea of singing O Canada. I extend this opportunity to the Premier to fix the record, join with the MLAs from this morning, who want us to unite as Canadians to strengthen our nation.

So will the Premier apologize for comments yesterday about singing O Canada right here in this great Chamber, Honourable Speaker?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I love this country. I love singing O Canada. And I look forward to singing it through four rounds of the playoffs as the Winnipeg Jets bring the Stanley Cup home to its rightful place right here in the 'centry'—in the centre of the best country on Earth, Canada.

So, again, to shed some light on what exactly it is the member opposite is talking about: We love the country; we love the anthem. The part that we disagree

with the members opposite is them trying to politicize issues and try to divide Manitobans.

The comments that he's reciting here today refer to me chastising them for targeting the murder victims of a serial killer during their 2023 election campaign. That was absolutely shameful. He should never try to conflate these two issues.

Everyone's so proud of this country. We have so many great patriots. Let's keep working together to build this place up, rather than try to tear it down.

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

Passing of Resolution—Timeline for Rules Committee

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, Honourable Speaker, Premier stands up, puts misinformation on the record.

This morning, we debated a very patriotic resolution to ensure the singing of O Canada every day in this Legislature. This is a unifying initiative to bring us all together as patriotic Canadians.

But only yesterday, NDP Cabinet ministers and the Premier himself seemed to prefer toxicity and 'animisity' in our debates and question period instead of unity, refusing to answer even the most basic question about supporting the singing of O Canada.

The Premier was so angry about the idea of singing O Canada in our Legislature that he refused to even debate the resolution this morning.

Now that the MLA for Swan River has received support for his resolution, can the Premier commit to stand by me and make sure that this fast-tracks to the Rules committee and gets done ASAP in this Manitoba Chamber, Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Kinew: You know, we've been working hard to stand up for our province's economy and to push back against the threat presented by the Trump administration's tariffs, as well as the tariffs from China.

Earlier today, I was proud to be with the minister of business development, as well as the Minister of Ag, to announce a \$13-million investment into the Gate project to make sure that our ag producers and our ag exporters can reach more international markets.

Member opposite wants to talk about question period yesterday, I'll happily remind him.

* (13:50)

Answer No. 1: I said thank you to our veterans for protecting our freedom. Answer No. 2: I said thank

you to Canada for giving us the opportunity to serve. And answer No. 3: I said, don't try to play wedge politics at a time where national unity is essential to standing up for our economy.

I'll keep repeating my admonitions to the member, and I expect next time we have a rally for this country—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Singing of God Save the King Option to Sing in Manitoba Schools

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): I appreciate the Premier agreeing that I do show up to various events, unlike the Premier does, Honourable Speaker.

Yesterday, the Education Minister moved forward with a Bill 40—with Bill 40, that would abandon the Royal Anthem as part of our school system's traditions. Ironically, they did that just prior to heading down the hall to witness the presentation of the King's coronation medals to deserving Manitobans, in the presence of our Lieutenant Governor of—and the Crown's representative.

It appears from this bill, some of the members and ministers on that side are conflicted.

So again, I extend the opportunity to the Premier to support the singing of not only O Canada in our Legislature, but for all Manitoba students to have the option to be able to learn to sing God Save the King in our schools.

The Speaker: Just before I recognize the next speaker, I have to correct myself. That was the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition's second supplementary question, not a new question as I indicated.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): So every one of us swore an oath to the King, okay? And the reason why we swore an oath to the King is because the people of Manitoba elected our team to form your government. Each and every day, we show up here to work hard for you.

Now, why did Manitobans choose to support us? I think they supported our plan to fix health care. They supported our plan to make life more affordable. But I think one of the reasons many people voted for us is they were very turned off by the PCs who ran ads attacking the families of murder victims.

And now the member opposite wants to get credit in the media for saying sorry for some things—maybe not the ads but some things, perhaps. But he still comes in here with this approach to politics, trying to cast aspersions and, without saying the thing out loud, blow a dog whistle to question the patriotism of people on this side of the House.

No. Never. We are Canadians. We are proud. We are patriots. And we are humble servants of you, the great people of Manitoba.

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

Manitoba Housing Kennedy Street Units Living Conditions and Safety Concerns

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Once again, Honourable Speaker, I'll put my record up against that Premier's record any day of the week. If we had to stand here for all his apologies, we'd be here for the next few months.

Yesterday, the Premier's Housing Minister told Manitobans that in relation to Manitoba Housing on Kennedy Street, she had made all the necessary repairs and that tenants were happy.

To quote one tenant who watched question period, he said the minister, and I quote, straight up—and, Honourable Speaker, I can't use the next set of words because it's unparliamentary, so I'll substitute it as: misrepresented the truth.

The minister claims she paints the walls every second day, and I table what the residents saw roughly six hours ago, Honourable Speaker. This photo was taken this morning: violent graffiti and plywood doors.

According to the tenants, the Minister of Housing, and I quote, gave up covering graffiti over a year ago.

Will the Premier replace this failed minister who can't even be bothered to provide accurate information to the Manitoba Legislature, Honourable Speaker?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): You know, every day we show up here and it's the same thing from the PCs: Why aren't you fixing the damage we caused to this province faster?

Well, the reality is these complex issues like housing and homelessness take years to fix. They take years to fix at the best of times, never mind when you're coming and cleaning up the mess of a failed administration that not only didn't build any housing in Manitoba, they actively lost housing units during their two terms in government.

This Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith) is doing an amazing job. People are being moved out of tents. People are being moved out of tents and into housing. But I hope the automatic reply that the PC caucus has set up to anyone who emails them about caucus issues or housing issues immediately responds with: We apologize for the seven and a half years where maintenance, housing construction or even compassion were completely absent from the governing agenda.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, I can't answer why the Premier can't fix what they've caused—the messes—fast enough. His words, not mine.

I am unsure if this is another case of the Minister of Housing hiding information from her boss, again, like she did before about the rent top-up program. Again, from a resident who watched the minister's failed performance in the House yesterday, and I quote: She is the one in charge and the one enabling the problems with her bad management and poor policies. End quote.

The minister cannot be trusted to even provide accurate information to this House, Honourable Speaker. The minister—why does the Premier keep a minister who has given up on protecting tenants of Manitoba Housing, Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Kinew: You know what? I don't mind when he attacks me, like he did in the first set of questions, but don't attack my ministers. Each and every one of these ministers of the Crown is doing an amazing job and is doing wonderful work on behalf of you, the people of Manitoba.

When it comes to housing issues, again, everybody in this province deserves to have a roof over their heads. Everybody who lives in Manitoba Housing should have safety. These are things that we agree on a hundred per cent. But coming into office, we were dealt a very challenging hand. When we talk about units that were lost, when we talk about maintenance that never got done, these things are important priorities, but they are taking years to fix because the damage was implemented over seven and a half years in office.

Again, I would remind the members opposite they were never talking about Manitoba Housing when they were in government. Now, all of a sudden, they've been sent to the opposition benches and they grow a conscience? I think everybody in the province

sees through that, and I hope that people in the province understand that when it comes to complex issues—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

And just before the next question I would ask the honourable Leader of the Opposition if he was quoting from a public document.

Mr. Ewasko: No, I was not, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Then I would request that you table the document.

Mr. Ewasko: I'll definitely table the document right now.

Honourable Speaker, it's the minister's words that she paints the walls every second day. Obviously, to those photos taken earlier this morning that's not the case.

So the Premier likes to look backwards. He spends more time blaming others than taking responsibility, not only for his only—own government's failings, but his own failings. Tenants in Manitoba Housing have to barricade themselves from the violence just outside their doors. A tenant shared, and I quote: I've lived here for 15 years. The past two is when things started to decay and rot in a seriously noticeable way. End quote.

Will the Premier direct his minister to clean up this graffiti today, or is he satisfied with her, and, again, I quote a tenant: empty words with dishonest vagueness, Honourable Speaker?

The Speaker: Once again, I would ask the honourable leader if that was the same document that he tabled already.

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, yes it is.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Kinew: Our Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness is somebody who had to use that service when they were coming up. They know what it's like. They come from a place of compassion, and that's why I support the minister.

And when it comes to maintenance and buildings it is a priority for us. We are working on it. It takes time to be able to improve the housing stock across the province, particularly after the PCs neglected this for year after year after year. They never did the maintenance; they never added units, not a single one; they sold off units.

In fact, we see that they continue to run away from their record. That's why Grant Jackson left their caucus. That's why many of the MLAs in the back row are not rallying around the establishment candidate who, by the way, never asks a question in question period.

Hey, somebody said it once: you don't get a promotion when you don't show up for work.

Surgical and Diagnostic Services Wait Time Concerns

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): We all know surgical and diagnostic waits have skyrocketed under this NDP government. We see the stories on the front pages of our newspapers, and my colleagues and I hear from struggling Manitobans all the time.

That's what happens when the NDP cuts surgical options for patients, cancels contracts with providers, and fires the doctors in charge of reducing the backlog.

A recent Fraser Institute report shows the reality of the damage the NDP have done to wait times in Manitoba since taking office. I will table that report.

The median waits for GP referral to treatment increased from 29 weeks in 2023 to 38 weeks in 2024—a 30 per cent total increase in wait time.

Can the minister explain why they let wait times climb up nearly two months longer under their watch?

* (14:00)

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): You know, it's interesting, because that member opposite is well aware of the approach of the previous PC administration that spent millions upon millions of dollars, sent it outside of Manitoba, outside of our country, to not clear any backlogs. To not clear any wait-lists.

On this side of the House, Honourable Speaker, I continue to hear from Manitobans who, under the failed PC government, couldn't even get their names onto a wait-list, but under our administration are finally being connected to the care they deserve. We are investing in making care better in this province, and we're doing more surgeries as a result of those efforts, and we're going to continue to do just that for Manitobans.

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

Mrs. Cook: The data in that report doesn't lie. MRI median waits increased to 22 weeks in 2024. That's an 83 per cent increase from the previous year. Under

this NDP government, surgical specialties are even worse off: ophthalmology waits are up 229 per cent from 2023; ear, nose and throat surgeries are up 39 per cent; neurosurgery, 49 per cent; and medical oncology waits are up 1,016 per cent.

Most distressing of all, urgent cardiac surgery waits were up 140 per cent, and elective cardiac surgeries were up by 72 per cent. These are year-over-year numbers, all of which happened under this NDP government. With life-saving cataract–cardiac surgeries, pardon me, facing a 140 per cent increase in wait times—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, our government believes that if you need care, essential care surgeries, you should get it in your own province. The previous PC government spent \$40 million in America. We spent \$4 million to add nearly 1,000 additional surgeries right here in our own province, using our own capacity, by working with our own experts.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans deserve to get care in their own province, and Manitobans deserve to know when they're going to get it. Under the previous PC administration, that member was in full support of Manitobans not even being able to get their names on a list for care. We are finally making sure people who are waiting for years have their names on a list, are connected to a surgeon and getting—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Roblin, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Cook: The minister is just wrong. The DSRTF connected over 85,000 Manitobans with their surgeries and diagnostic testing, most of them right here in Manitoba.

Instead, the NDP just wants to deny and deflect and try to discredit a respected independent research group. But this data does not lie, Honourable Speaker. And data like this is exactly why Manitobans deserve more transparency from their government. But the NDP continues to reject our patients-first, common sense health-care reform policies, like the surgical wait times reporting act.

To Manitobans: We will continue bringing forward legislation that puts you and your family first when it comes to accessing health care. The question is, will the NDP ever actually support it?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, that very member goes door to door in Manitoba, campaigning for a

leadership candidate who wants to privatize health care. That member has no credibility. If it were up to her, Manitobans would have a two-tiered private health care, American-style health-care system. She has zero credibility. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: On this side of the House, we stand proud as Canadians.

An Honourable Member: You remember the Canada Health Act?

MLA Asagwara: We protect public health care. Yes, we believe in the Canada Health Act. I can't believe she's heckling me about the Canada Health Act, Honourable Speaker. It is shameful what's happening on that side of the House. She supports Trump; we support Manitobans and all Canadians.

Renegotiation of CUSMA Trade Agreement Minister of Agriculture–Trade Mission Attendance

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, the renegotiation of CUSMA is on the horizon. This is a critical moment for Manitoba producers who 'redlie' on fair access to international markets. But while provinces like Saskatchewan are ensuring agriculture has a strong voice at the table, here in Manitoba the Minister of Agriculture has been excluded from his own government's trade missions.

Honourable Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture have a seat at the table when CUSMA talks begin, or will he once again be sidelined while Manitoba farmers pay the price?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): I want to assure member opposite they don't have to worry me standing up, talking at CUSMA negotiations for the betterment of agriculture producers not only in Manitoba but in Canada for what they bring forward in all provinces across Canada. And I won.

As the member opposite, you know, had the opportunity to be elected in the last election but, unfortunately, he wasn't part of the previous government that chose to make decisions to the value of young agriculture producers in the province of Manitoba.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Agriculture Industry Output-Based Pricing–Exemption Request

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, farmers across Manitoba are bracing for the

impact of the NDP's output-based pricing system, otherwise known as a commercial carbon tax.

Governments across the country have recognized the need for agriculture exemptions, but this Premier's (Mr. Kinew) carbon tax pricing scheme remains murky, at best.

Honourable Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture confirm that agriculture will be excluded from any new output-based pricing systems or carbon tax?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): Honourable Speaker, it's no doubt agriculture's in a bit of a challenge throughout Canada, not only because of the opportunity of CUSMA negotiations, but the biggest challenge is the tariffs of negotiation that we take place.

I want to complement our government; I want to complement the governments that need to work together as a united front as far as Canada goes. Maybe some of members opposite thought the MLA for Portage would sooner go there in a battleship and create chaos between the negotiations.

That is not our government's style. We talk about sitting at the table, discussing as a team Canada approach, and that will be a model we will continue to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a final supplementary question.

Legislation Affecting Hog Producers Future Implementation Inquiry

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, Manitoba farmers remember the dark days of the NDP. They brought in the de facto ban on hog barn construction, crippling growth in one of our province's most vital sectors through regulatory back doors. It was the policy by stealth then and we're seeing it again now.

Honourable Speaker, with a new Environment Minister, I feel that it's prudent to ask again: Will this government be bringing in environmental legislation that results in hog barn operations being shut down?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): Honourable minister—or Honourable Speaker, the fact that that government, when they were in power, when you get to a hall where you have 250 producers screaming about the decision that that government took out of the young opportunities of beef producers

in the province of Manitoba, and chose to sell the opportunity by the size of a cheque for the benefit of young agriculture—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kostyshyn:—producers of this province of Manitoba. I ask the critic: would you have agreed—would you have agreed—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I once again must remind members that they have to address their comments and questions through the Chair, not directly opposite to another member.

Mr. Kostyshyn: But I would ask the member opposite, if he had the opportunity to be sitting there, would he agree with the last time that government made that—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Child Welfare System Transparency Concerns

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Earlier this week, Grand Chief Kyra Wilson expressed frustration over this NDP government's lack of transparency on child welfare in Manitoba, stating she was, and I quote, not hearing anything from this government.

In response, the minister outright dismissed her concerns, telling reporters that Wilson's statement was, quote, not true.

Why is this minister of the Crown accusing a grand chief of misleading the public?

* (14:10)

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): In the last 18 years months since I assumed role as the Minister of Families, I've had the great honour and privilege of working with a team in the Department of Families that is actively decolonizing child welfare, which includes leaning into and supporting kinship and customary care agreements, something that members opposite never did in their seven and a half years.

Kinship and customary care agreements are transformative in the lives of Manitoba families and Manitoba children. It will keep children with their families, in their communities, on their lands, immersed in their culture and in their Nations. We are doing transformative—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Agassiz, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Byram: And there was no answer there. This minister insists she's been transparent and working collaboratively with First Nation leaders, yet organizations like the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, still say they feel unheard.

This is a clear pattern with this NDP government: when a legitimate organization speaks out about their failures, they deny, deflect and discredit. They've done it with unions; they've done it with striking CFS workers, homelessness advocates, health-care workers and now a grand chief.

Is this just another case of the NDP discrediting community leaders when their experiences and opinions don't align with this government's narrative?

MLA Fontaine: The other thing that I have the enormous privilege in this role is to regularly meet with MKO, SCO and MMF leadership in respect of decolonizing child welfare. That is work that we're doing together. Of course, MKO and SCO, as folks opposite may know—I'm not sure—they are the political representative body for the Northern Authority and the southern authority.

Collectively, with our team in Families, we are working together with leadership, with authorities, with agencies and with our amazing team at decolonizing child welfare; again, something that members opposite never did, couldn't even comprehend on how to even tackle that.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Agassiz, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Byram: This is not the first time this minister has failed to be transparent with communities about the decisions she makes.

Last year, she was publicly criticized for failing to consult the community before appointing her hand-picked special adviser. An MMIWG advocate told the media, and again I quote: Why did we have to find out from family member to another family member to another family member? I wouldn't have known if one family of the members didn't reach out to me.

Why does this minister continue to refuse transparency with very communities that impact her decisions?

MLA Fontaine: It gives me enormous pride to be able to then actually acknowledge Cora Morgan, who is our special adviser on Indigenous women's issues. I'll remind members opposite, because I know that they would remember that Cora Morgan was the AMC First Nations family advocate under their horrible,

failed reign, when they took Indigenous children's rights away in legislation.

And what did Cora Morgan do? Hmm, she set up a camp here where many of us actually fasted in response to the horrible, horrible, disgusting legislation that members opposite brought forward. They literally don't have a leg to stand on in respect of anything for decolonizing child welfare or—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired. The—
[interjection]

Order.

Cleft Lip/Dysplasia Dental Program Treatment Delays Due to Staffing Vacancy

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I sent a letter to the Minister of Health a year ago, which I table, about 16-year-old Ashton, who is your typical teenager in my Borderland constituency. He loves all things motocross, camping, fishing and playing video games. Since his childhood, Ashton has been living with dental dysplasia, a condition where his teeth don't have any enamel. It causes extreme sensitivity and discomfort.

Thankfully, there's a treatment program here in Manitoba and Ashton is in the final steps of his treatment. But for more than a year, Ashton and his mom and dad have been told that the Manitoba cleft and dysplasia program can't provide funding approval for the final stage of his treatment because of a long-standing vacancy at the program.

Will the Health Minister fill the vacant position so Ashton can have his smile back?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I really appreciate that question from the member for Borderland.

You know, on this side of the House, we're focused on making sure that Manitobans can get access to the care that they need. I'm always more than happy and willing to take a look at any piece of casework and see how we can support Manitobans in having their needs met.

This particular issue is something that I believe was brought forward, as that member said, previously. Sometimes things don't move as quickly as we would like, but I'm always happy to revisit an issue and make sure that it's addressed appropriately.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Borderland on a supplementary question.

Mr. Guenter: A 16-year-old boy in southern Manitoba is suffering needlessly. The Manitoba cleft and dysplasia program at Children's Hospital can provide life-changing surgery, but for over a year, Ashton and his family have been left in limbo because of a staffing vacancy.

But Ashton is far from alone. According to staff, hundreds of kids facing time-sensitive cleft palate and dental surgeries are being forced to wait for their funding to be approved from the Manitoba cleft and dysplasia program.

When can Ashton and hundreds of other children expect the Health Minister to fill this vacancy and make it a priority?

MLA Asagwara: First and foremost, I want to acknowledge the incredible work being done at Children's Hospital by all of their teams.

And I also want to recognize the advocates in this particular area of health care, folks in the community, some really visible folks, some Blue Bombers folks, as well, who advocate for this area because it is very, very important, and we know how it affects kids and their families and communities.

Our government is working very hard to make sure that we have every position that is vacant filled. We've hired a net-new 1,255 health-care workers and we're filling positions that were cut—folks that were fired by the previous government. That does take time.

We recognize things aren't moving as quickly as we would like, but we're going to keep doing that work of fixing the damage and the firings and closures by the previous government, make sure kids like this young person get the care that they need.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Borderland, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Guenter: Ashton and his parents and hundreds of other Manitoba families have had their treatment at the Manitoba cleft and dysplasia program put on hold because of a staffing vacancy.

This is often time-sensitive surgery and dental treatment that's being held up, in many cases for more than a year.

So it's a simple ask, really: Will the Health Minister fill the vacancy that's putting these families' lives on hold?

MLA Asagwara: I want to reassure that member that our government has been laser-focused and tirelessly

working to address the staffing challenges in our health-care system.

Yes, we've hired a net-new over 1,255 health-care workers, including at the Children's Hospital, but there's much more work to do. Our priority is making sure that every single area where we need expertise has that expertise.

I want to reassure that member and Ashton's family that we are working as hard as we can to fill those vacancies, and I want to thank the folks at HSC and at Shared Health who we've been working with directly to take unique approaches to addressing those vacancies and positions.

And we're going to keep doing that to make sure that we have more expertise on the front lines and in this area in particular, not less.

Manitoba Hydro—Infrastructure Upgrade Costs Impact of Rate Freeze on Hydro Rates

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Manitoba Hydro is navigating serious challenges.

Ongoing droughts brought on by climate change have diminished its ability to generate electricity efficiently, and infrastructure along the Bipole I and II transmission lines are over five decades old and have been flagged for billions of dollars in upgrades.

Honourable Speaker, there's a coalition of consumer groups that have warned that this government's rate freeze might only delay higher rate hikes in future years.

Can the government elaborate on what the future of hydro rates might look like considering the current freezes?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Honourable Speaker, for many years, Manitobans saw their hydro rates go up and up and up because the former government focused on that alone when it came to hydro: raising rates on Manitobans.

We're doing really important work, of course, of not only keeping rates affordable, but also investing in the energy infrastructure Manitobans rely on.

When it comes to reliability, we've announced investments in bipole, which will help to ensure that energy from northern Manitoba can get down to southern Manitoba to support businesses and Manitoban homeowners.

And, of course, we've also announced 600 megawatts of new wind energy to make sure we have the power we need to keep our province moving forward.

We're building Manitoba. We're building our energy supplies. And we're doing it while we keep energy affordable.

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

MLA Lamoureux: Manitobans are feeling the pressure of rising costs and we want to encourage every effort to support affordability; however, we need to make sure that public policy is sustainable.

* (14:20)

Freezing rates reduces Hydro's revenue, yet the cost of operation and capital investment continues to rise. According to its submission, Hydro must invest \$31 billion over the next 20 years to upgrade critical infrastructure and boost capacity.

Can this government outline what financial modelling was done to assess the impact of the rate freeze?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, this government supports the Public Utilities Board. We know that they do important work in helping to keep rates low along with government.

Under the previous government that was in power, what did they do? They sought to kneecap the Public Utilities Board in their role. What they did is they sought to have the government and politicians set hydro rates. We know that the best way to do this to ensure affordability is to work to support the work of the PUB to ensure as government we ensure energy affordability by supporting their important work. And we're going to do that, keep that affordability in place, while we build out the energy infrastructure we need.

Again, under them, they didn't build one single megawatt in seven and a half years, and while they didn't—they failed to do anything, they continued to jack up rates on Manitobans.

We're going to keep rates affordable. We're going to respect the role of the PUB. And we're going to build the energy we need to keep powering our businesses and Manitoba homes.

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

MLA Lamoureux: Manitobans are counting on leadership that balances compassion with long-term planning. While the hydro rate freeze might provide short-term

relief, we know the risks of policies that aren't grounded in sound economics.

Hydro's current debt is approximately \$24.6 billion, and this shortfall is primarily attributed to drought and reduced water levels, which have impacted revenue over the past two years.

Is this government prepared to release a transparent plan showing how this rate freeze will be managed without pushing the burden onto future generations or onto those who can least afford it once the freeze ends?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, I appreciate the important question, and I would say that we have brought forward a transparent plan in the form of a GRA to the Public Utilities Board. It's about a 1,000-page-plus document that outlines the path forward for Hydro and how we're going to ensure they have the resources they need to do their important work.

Now, under the members opposite for many years, what did we see? Did we see a government respecting the role of the PUB and keeping rates affordable? No. What we saw was a government that actually did unbelievably unusual things like legislate hydro rate increases on Manitobans for the first time in our province's history.

And I remember that they did—along with my colleagues here, that they did that in the midst of COVID during an affordability crisis. Their record is legislating hydro rates on Manitobans, doing everything they could to jack them up as quickly as possible.

That's contrasted with our work, keeping rates—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Melita Health Centre's Operating Funding Extended Hours and New Positions

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Honourable Speaker, unlike the previous government, when communities come forward with ideas, our team listens and acts.

For two terms of a PC government, rural Manitobans fought tooth and nail to keep front-line workers and emergency rooms in their communities, but their pleas and efforts were ignored by an indifferent and callous Conservative Cabinet.

But things couldn't be more different today, Honourable Speaker. We have a government and Health Minister that listens to—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Brar:—Manitobans in every corner of this province.

Can the Minister of Health tell the House more about the work they're doing alongside rural communities in Manitoba?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I want to thank my dear friend and colleague, who could not be more right.

We are a listening government, and that's why, when the Municipality of Two Borders and the Town of Melita brought forward a proposal, I said, let's work together on this. We listened, and now we're investing in new front-line staff positions and extended hours of service at the Melita Health Centre.

These positions will help deliver more front-line care to the area and surrounding communities. I want to thank their communities. I want to thank their representatives and Prairie Mountain Health for coming forward to work with our government.

We're going to keep delivering better care for rural Manitoba, and working together is how we get great things done.

Manitoba Hydro Rate Increase Concerns

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, the hypocrisy coming from this Minister of Finance and Manitoba Hydro is completely outstanding.

In the past 18 months since he took office, he interfered with Manitoba Hydro and the Public Utilities Board by announcing a phony rate freeze, and then he himself passed legislation to allow himself and his Cabinet colleagues to raise rates by 4 per cent, despite the fact that three years ago he wrote articles, and I quote: We don't need Cabinet setting our Hydro rates. Oh, how the tides have turned in the past three years, Honourable Speaker.

These 11 per cent rate increases, when compounded, will be close to 20 per cent increases. The NDP continues to spend Manitoba Hydro further and further in dollar and debt with 40 per—40 cents of every dollar going to interest payments. Now they're citing aging infrastructure and expanded capacity requirements to raising rates without—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Honourable Speaker, we respect the PUB and we're keeping rates affordable, and again, that's right.

The member opposite may not have been there at the moment that this was done, but I will remind her

that that team across the way tried to legislate Hydro rate increases set at the Cabinet table. They sat around, they determined what financial targets they thought Hydro should have to meet, which would be a vehicle for having them jack up their rates as quickly as possible, because they wanted to undermine the PUB.

They didn't trust in the PUB and their important role as a protector for Manitobans. That's their record: undermining the PUB and jacking up rates in every new and novel, creative way possible.

What is our government doing? We're doing the important work of building out Manitoba Hydro. Six hundred new megawatts of wind. We're going to invest in reliability—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

And the time for question period has also expired.

* * *

Mrs. Stone: House business.

The Speaker: On House business.

Mrs. Stone: In my remarks I was tabling an article for a trip down memory lane, where this minister said we don't need Cabinet setting our Hydro rates, but he himself has done it—

The Speaker: If the member would table it then, please.

And as I said, the time for question period has expired. So now, petitions.

PETITIONS

Child Welfare System—Call for Inquiry

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order, please.

It's awfully loud in here. If members would take their conversations to the loge or out in the hall. I can't hear the member, and he's sitting about as close to me as he can get.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Honourable Speaker; I appreciate that.

I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On Sunday, February 11, 2024, Manitobans witnessed an unimaginable tragedy when five individuals were murdered.

(2) The victims ranged in ages from two months to 30 years.

(3) Manitoba has the second highest rate of intimate partner violence among Canadian provinces, at a rate of 633 per 100,000 people, according to the report—reported data from Statistics Canada.

(4) Public reporting indicates that on December 9, 2023, Myah-Lee left a voicemail for her Child and Family Services worker in which she pleaded to be moved out of her home in Carman.

(5) Manitoba's Advocate for Children and Youth noted: This case highlights the failures of the government to respond to our recommendations.

(6) On March 6, 2024, the Minister of Families, the MLA for St. Johns, indicated on the public record that she was too busy to discuss issues surrounding children in care, including calling a public inquiry into this unprecedented tragedy.

* (14:30)

(7) The last inquiry held in Manitoba was for the death of five-year-old Phoenix Sinclair in 2008.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

First—(1) To urge the Minister of Families to develop better policies to protect youth in care from potential physical or psychological abuse.

(2) To urge the provincial government to immediately establish a public inquiry to identify the failing of the child-welfare system and ensure that no call from a child ever goes unanswered or ignored again.

This petition is signed by Kaylie Specula, Julianna Roberts, Brett Johnson and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Breast Screening

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Due to evolving scientific evidence, the Canadian Cancer Society is now urging all provinces and territories to lower the starting age for breast cancer screening to 40.

(2) Based off 2023 treatment standards, it is estimated that screening women annually for breast cancer starting at age 40 will save the Canadian health-care system \$460 million annually.

(3) After non-melanoma skin cancers, breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among Canadian women. One in eight Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime, and one in 36 will die from it. This is 30,500 diagnoses and 5,500 deaths every year, and 84 diagnoses and 15 deaths every day.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

(4) Early detection of breast cancer will lead to better outcomes in patients, with better odds of survival and less severe cases. Women in their 40s who have access to mammograms have a 44 per cent lower mortality rate from breast cancer than those who don't receive screening.

(5) Every other province and territory in Canada has already lowered the breast cancer screening age, or announced their intentions to do so. Other provinces in Canada have already commenced the work of expanding screening programs and hiring additional technologists into their public health-care system.

(6) Manitoba is currently behind the rest of the country and has no formal plan to increase its screening capacity or lower the breast cancer screening age.

Lowering the breast cancer screening age to 40 in Manitoba will reduce long-term costs to the health-care system because cancers that are caught earlier are typically less complicated to treat.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately put forward a plan to increase breast cancer screening capacity and lower the breast cancer screening age to 40.

This is signed by Leta Maksymyk, Jodi Sparrow, Bob [phonetic] McCulloch and many, many more Manitobans.

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a

car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeatedly violating his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets, ultimately claiming Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

(3) While the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction, responsibility for the administration of justice has been given to provinces, thus allowing for meaningful provincial action on bail reform to ensure public safety.

(4) Other provinces have taken proactive steps to strengthen bail enforcement, but Manitoba has not used all the tools available to address this issue effectively.

(5) The provincial government has the ability and the responsibility to advocate for and implement measures that protect its citizens, ensuring that violent repeat offenders are not released into our communities without proper safeguards.

(6) Immediate action is required to close gaps in the justice system that allow dangerous criminals to remain free, putting innocent Manitobans at risk.

(7) This government must prioritize public safety over leniency towards repeat offenders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take immediate and decisive action on bail reform, addressing serious deficits in enforcement by utilizing all available provincial mechanisms to strengthen warrant enforcement, increase bail supervision, oppose release of offenders, thus ensuring that repeat violent offenders are held accountable and that public safety is prioritized over leniency; and

To call on the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

This has been signed by Anna Valimir [phonetic], Jochesed Banning [phonetic] and Nina Angela Valepir [phonetic].

Thank you.

New Neepawa Health Centre

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) Thanks to the investment made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction for the new Neepawa Health Centre is well under way. The facility and surrounding community would greatly benefit from added diagnostic machinery and equipment, but specifically the addition of a CT scanner.

(2) The hospital is being built east of Neepawa, on the north side of the Yellowhead Highway, PTH 16. It will be nearly double the size of the existing hospital and will better serve patients from this broader, western Manitoba geographic area.

* (14:40)

(3) CT scanners are standard equipment that combine X-ray images from several angles to create detailed, three-dimensional models of structures inside the body. They perform critical diagnostic procedures that support the diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of injuries and diseases, and the new equipment will be able to complete these important scans faster and with sharper and clearer images.

(4) The average wait times for Manitobans to receive a CT scan is currently seven weeks, and there are over 14,000 patients on the wait-list to receive the diagnostic imaging procedure.

(5) The new CT scanner will reduce these wait times as it would decrease the need for patients to travel long distances, sometimes involving overnight stays, to access the care they need.

(6) The new scanner will reduce pressure on emergency response services, who would no longer have to transport these patients, opening up appointments in other communities and allowing more people to get the care they need sooner.

(7) A CT scanner in the Neepawa Health Centre will enable further treatment and diagnosis to take place in community, reducing wait times for patients in surrounding areas and reducing the burden of travel to other facilities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support the investment and placement of a CT scanner machine in the Neepawa Health Centre in Neepawa, Manitoba.

This petition has been signed by Donna Lewis, Suzanne Nicholson [*phonetic*], Bev Davie and many, many, many more Manitobans.

Phoenix School

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I wish to present the following petition.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Phoenix School, a kindergarten to grade 5 school located in Headingley, has experienced consistent enrolment growth over the last several years. Enrolment is expected to reach 275 students in the next two years.

(2) Because the school is now over capacity, the school division has had to install portable classrooms on site as of fall 2024.

(3) For several consecutive years, the top capital priority of the St. James-Assiniboia School Division has been the renovation and expansion of Phoenix School.

(4) In 2022, the Phoenix School expansion and renovation project was approved to proceed to the design phase. The project included, among other amenities, a new gymnasium, two new classrooms, a multi-purpose room and room for 74 child-care spaces.

(5) In June 2024, the school division received notice from the provincial government that the project has been deferred. There is no guarantee if, or when, the project will move forward.

(6) There are currently hundreds of children on a wait-list for child care in Headingley. The daycare operator in Phoenix School has been told that they will continue to have space within the school for the 2024-2025 school year only, that further expansion of child-care space within the school is not possible and that space may be reduced moving forward due to the shortage of classrooms. If new space is not constructed as planned, many families may be left without child care.

(7) It is critical that the expansion and renovation of Phoenix School proceed as planned in order to support the needs of students, teachers and families in the growing community of Headingley.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to proceed with the planned renovation and expansion of Phoenix School without further delay.

And this petition is signed by Heather Freiboth, Diane Davis, Gina Fleury and many, many other Manitobans.

Removal of Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The federal government has mandated a consumption-based carbon tax, with the stated goal of financially pressuring Canadians to make decisions to reduce their carbon emissions.

(2) Manitoba Hydro estimates that, even with a high-efficiency furnace, the carbon tax is costing the average family over \$200 annually, even more for those with older furnaces.

(3) Home heating in Manitoba is not a choice or a decision for Manitobans to make; it is a necessity of life, with an average of almost 200 days below 0°C annually.

(4) The federal government has selectively removed the carbon tax off of home heating oil in the Atlantic provinces of Canada, but has indicated they have no intention to provide the same relief to Manitobans heating their homes.

(5) Manitoba Hydro indicates that natural gas heating is one of the most affordable options available to Manitobans, and it can be cost prohibitive for households to replace their heating source.

(6) Premiers across Canada, including in the Atlantic provinces that benefit from this decision, have collectively sent a letter to the federal government, calling on it to extend the carbon tax exemption to all forms of home heating, with the exception of Manitoba.

(7) Manitoba is one of the only provincial jurisdictions to have not agreed with the stance that all Canadians' home heating bills should be exempt from the carbon tax.

(8) Provincial leadership in other jurisdictions have already committed to removing the federal carbon tax from home heating bills.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the federal carbon tax on home heating bills for all Manitobans to provide them with much-needed relief.

And this petition has been signed by Helen Guenter, Barb Adair, Johan Guenter and many, many, many, many Manitobans.

Morden Waste Water Project

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

* (14:50)

(1) Between 2011 and 2021, Morden's population grew by an impressive 27 per cent, outpacing the national average by 16 per cent, according to Statistics Canada.

(2) While growth is welcome and encouraged, Morden has long faced the critical need for infrastructure upgrades to meet current demands and support future development.

(3) Morden's waste water system has operated beyond capacity for years, prompting the Province in 2019 to halt property subdivisions due to insignificant—insufficient winter waste water 'storee.'

(4) As of 2024, after exploring all options, the city announced in July estimates cost—that estimated cost for critical infrastructure upgrades has risen from \$70 million to \$88 million to \$108 million.

(6) Despite efforts to address this gap—the gap, including plans to raise utility fees for residents and businesses, such as—such increases that have been delayed since 2017 due to the lack of an approved capital project, taxation is not enough.

(7) The lack of waste water capacity has several—severely impacted economic activity and growth in Morden and surrounding communities. Without much-needed waste water infrastructure investments, growth and economic development will be hindered in all of southern Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as—of Manitoba—as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to take immediate action and recognize the critical need of

this waste water project for economic growth and environmental sustainability by committing to advocate and work for the federal government to close the gap with additional funding for Morden's waste water treatment system.

(2) To urge the provincial government to ensure all levels of government and regulatory bodies will expedite necessary funding and approvals necessary to advance the Morden waste water project with no further delay and ensure no hindrance to growth and economic development for Morden and southern Manitoba.

This petition has been signed by Maurice Butler, Dorothy Lapage, Ron Lavery. Thank—and many, many other Manitobans.

Provincial Road 227

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) As part of ongoing strategic infrastructure investments to the provincial highway network, it was announced in August of 2022 that almost \$70 million would be spent on upgrades to provincial road PR 227.

(2) Over 72 kilometres of PR 227 were to be paved along with the repair or replacement of three bridges and multiple drainage works.

(3) Reeves, mayors, councillors and residents of the surrounding municipalities, cities, towns and villages were ecstatic and overwhelmingly supportive of this plan.

(4) The planned PR 227 was to connect Highway 16 with Highway 6, thus creating an alternative route to Highway 1.

The Speaker in the Chair

(5) PR 227 was to be part of Manitoba's trade and commerce grid initiative, an expanded grid of highways that can accommodate heavy commercial loading that will attract new industrial activity, reduce transportation costs and optimize supply chain efficiency, which will benefit all Manitobans.

(6) The 2023 multi-year infrastructure investment strategy is a five-year, \$4.1-billion investment in Manitoba's roads, highways, bridges, airports and flood protection. The paving of PR 227 was part of this strategy.

(7) The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure has cut the PR 227 project, notwithstanding that the project appears in the multi-year infrastructure investment strategy and listed on the Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure website as an active project.

(8) Additional keystone projects in the 2023 multi-year infrastructure investment strategy were the Winnipeg One Million Perimeter Freeway Initiative, the Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba outlet channels and the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway to the Ontario border. The actions of the NDP government now bring into question whether any of these projects will be completed as planned.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to immediately restore funding to the PR 227 paving project; and

(2) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to commit to Manitobans to carry out all of the projects as outlined in the 2023 multi-year infrastructure investment strategy in their totality, to the same scope and in accordance with already stated timelines.

This petition has been signed by Cody Hearn, Murielle MacMillan and Jonathan Wipf.

Thank you.

Provincial Trunk Highways 12 and 210

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) The intersection of Provincial Trunk Highway 12 and 210 is known as a dangerous intersection, resulting in a safety review published in the fall of 2023.

(2) In the summer of 2024, the Province presented four options for public consultation, and area residents were promised a presentation of the final option by fall of 2024.

Delays in the—sorry, excuse me—renovation of this intersection have put Manitobans at risk, as the safety review identified that changes were needed.

(4) The provincial government failed to meet its own timeline of the fall of 2024, and, as such, area

residents are concerned that the project has not been designated a priority.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately implement work on renovating the intersection of Provincial Trunk Highway 12 and 210, to keep area residents and travellers safe.

This petition has been signed by Marc Lansard, Anessa Maize [*phonetic*] and Tracy Jackson.

* (15:00)

Provincial Road 210

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) Provincial Road 210, PR 210, is a 117.3 kilometre–72.8 mile–highway in the Eastman region of Manitoba that connects the towns and communities of Woodridge, Marchand, La Broquerie, Ste. Anne, Landmark, Linden, Île des Chênes and St. Adolphe.

(2) A significant portion of PR 210 also runs through the constituency of La Vérendrye.

(3) PR 210 is a significant commuting route for Eastman families, and it is also notably used by those in the agriculture, tourism, trade and commerce industries.

(4) The condition of PR 210 from Woodridge to Highway 12 is in an unacceptable state of disrepair.

(5) The planned pavement upgrade was promised more than 20 years ago when it was constructed with a flat surface suitable for pavement but has yet to be completed.

(6) The condition of PR 210 from Woodridge to Highway 12 is in such bad shape that firefighters, police and paramedic services are severely delayed when responding to emergencies.

(7) The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure as well as the Premier have a duty to respond to infrastructure needs identified by rural communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to prioritize the construction of Provincial Road 210.

(2) To urge the provincial government to include the stretch of Provincial Road 210 from Woodridge to Highway 12 in its reconstruction plans.

This petition has been signed by Curtis Fender, Joy Fender, Hannah Hanson and many, many other Manitobans.

MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) Thanks to the investment made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction for the new Portage regional health facility is well under way. The facility and surrounding community would greatly benefit from added diagnostic machinery and equipment, but specifically the addition of an MRI machine.

(2) An MRI machine is a non-invasive medical imaging technique that uses a magnetic field and computer-generated radio waves to create detailed images of organs and tissues in the human body. It is used for disease detection, diagnosis and treatment monitoring.

(3) Portage la Prairie is centrally located in Manitoba and is on the No. 1 Highway in the Southern Health/Santé Sud Health Authority. Currently, there is only one MRI machine in the RHA.

(4) An MRI machine located in the Portage regional health facility will reduce transportation costs for patients as well as reduce the burden on stretcher service and ambulance use. It will bring care closer to home and reduce wait times for MRI scans across the province.

* (15:10)

(5) Located around Portage la Prairie are the Dakota Tipi, Dakota Plains, Sandy Bay and Long Plain First Nations reserves. Indigenous peoples in Canada disproportionately face barriers in access to services and medical care. An MRI machine located in the Portage regional health facility will bring care closer to their home communities and provide greater access to diagnostic testing.

(6) Located in close proximity to the new Portage regional health facility is the Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services.

This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

(7) The average wait times for Manitoba–Manitobans to receive an MRI scan is currently six to eight months. Having an MRI machine in the Portage regional health facility will help reduce these wait times for patients and provide better care sooner.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support the investment and placement of an MRI machine in the Portage regional health facility in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

This petition is followed—or, is signed by Susanne Moran, Brian Miller, Bob Wood and many, many other Manitobans.

Death of Jordyn Reimer–Judicial Review Request

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from this citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service, WPS, investigation provided adequate evidence to meet charging standards and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to charge the accomplice—or to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done in the Peter Nygård file, which

ultimately led to a reversal in the decision not to prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba, and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system, and, in the absence of a prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice systems to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

* (15:20)

Honourable Speaker, this petition was signed by Gail Taylor, Alice Berchowski [*phonetic*] and Marilyn Thompson and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not yet been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from the citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service's, WPS, investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standard and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that the decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba and by Manitobans.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system, and, in the absence of a prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(8)—I apologize—(9) In December 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice systems to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review—apologize—to order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

Honourable Speaker, this petition has been signed by Marie Larsen, Ron Larsen and Megan Poitras.

Thank you, honourable Speaker—oh, Speaker—the Chair.

Green Valley School Expansion

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of La Vérendrye and other areas around Manitoba are extremely frustrated and concerned by provincial government's decision to cancel the school expansion project for Green Valley School in Grunthal.

(2) In 2021, the PC provincial government committed funding to expand Green Valley School for a new gymnasium and classrooms.

(3) The school is so crowded that three mobile classrooms were added to alleviate overcrowding in classrooms.

(4) In order for construction to begin, the school removed all three portable classrooms, leaving Green value in further critical state of overcrowding.

(5) As a result of overcrowding, parents are choosing to home-school children due to safety concerns and the challenges associated with overcrowding.

(6) The current Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning have said they are committed to investing in education.

(7) The concerns of residents of La Vérendrye and the surrounding area are being ignored by the provincial government.

(8) The lack of space in the school is affecting the quality of education and extracurricular activities for students.

(9) The minister and the Premier have a duty to respond to the educational needs of children and youth identified by rural communities.

* (15:30)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning to immediately bring back the three portable classrooms to help alleviate the stress and overcrowding classrooms.

(2) To urge the provincial government to reinstate the expansion project for Green Valley School.

This petition has been signed by Dylan Quilty, Rick Rivers, R.D. Omeniuk and many, many, many, many, many, many, many more Manitobans.

The Deputy Speaker: I will remind members that you are allowed two manys.

An Honourable Member: Sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the apology.

Louise Bridge

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Honourable Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) Over two–25,000 vehicles cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a link—a virtual link for the vehicle traffic between northeast Winnipeg and downtown for the last 113 years.

(2) The current structure will be—undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as its 'deturduration' extensively is now functionally obsolete, and therefore subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

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

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

(5) The City capital and budget plans identified replacement for the Louise Bridge on the site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side at Nair [*phonetic*] Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began to campaign to demand that the new bridge and its survey confirmed residents that wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The City—the Louise Bridge replacement issued a new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. These recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise Bridge to be placed just as—west of the current bridge, not on the east but originally proposed.

(9) The City's exploration process has begun. The two-point-six—\$6.35-million street upgrade of Nair Avenue from Watt Street to the 113-year-old bridge is complete.

(10) The new City administration has delayed the decision on the Louise Bridge for a minimum of one year, and possible up to 10 years, unless the Province steps in on behalf of northeast Winnipeg residents and complete the overdue link.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

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

This is signed by Scott Sambrook, Garry Serruys and Glenn Vercaigne and many other Manitobans.

Funding Crime Cost Mitigation for Small Businesses

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Honourable Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Small businesses are vital in supporting their local economy and the provincial government has a responsibility to act and support them.

(2) The recent increase in vigilanteism shows that Manitobans do not trust this provincial government to fulfill its responsibility.

(3) More than half—54 per cent—of small businesses in Manitoba are impacted by crime. Property damage, theft, littering and public intoxication are some of the crimes that affect most businesses, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. There has been a 44 per cent increase in shoplifting incidents over the last year.

(4) In order to combat this rise of crime, small businesses try, unaided, to implement various out-of-pocket security measures and safety training for their staff and they face increasing costs when they incur property damage or theft.

(5) Vandalism, break-ins and other senseless acts cannot be accepted as a cost of doing business for businesses throughout Manitoba, and the provincial government must do more to ease the burdens small businesses are carrying with its catch-and-release justice system.

(6) Failing to support small businesses is failing the Manitoba economy, failing Manitoba families and failing Manitobans' dreams.

(7) The security rebate program in place for homeowners and small businesses does not cover the real costs impacting businesses, such as vandalism, property damage and repairs.

We urge the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support Manitoba small businesses through specific funding to reimburse the expenses and insurance deductibles that they incur as a result of crime.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

The Deputy Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on orders of the day, apologies.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, can you please call second reading of Bill 44, The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day); followed by Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act; followed by Bill 19, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Safe Schools).

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we move to second reading of Bill 44, The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day); followed by second reading of Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act; and then followed by second reading of Bill 19, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Safe Schools).

SECOND READINGS

Bill 44—The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day)

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): I move, seconded by the member for—the Minister for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness that Bill 44, The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Her Honour, Lieutenant Governor, has been advised of the bill, and I table the message.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), seconded by the honourable Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), that Bill 44, The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and the message has been tabled.

MLA Fontaine: I'm pleased to get up in the House today and—for second reading debate of Bill 44.

Bill 44 enshrines in Manitoba law the Matriarch Circle, and also enshrines ribbon skirt day every year in—on January 4.

* (15:40)

Before I begin and talk about the bill, I want to just acknowledge the matriarchs that we have with us and, actually, the matriarchs that are part of our Matriarch Circle.

We have Dr. Tasha Spillett, Alaya McIvor, Gerri-Lee McPherson-Pangman, Kim Pangman [*phonetic*]—Kim McPherson-Pangman [*phonetic*], Jennifer Wood, Lisa Meeches, Colleen McDougall, Darlene Osborne, Tina Keeper, Sandra Delaronde, Gina Smoke, Samantha Powderhorn, Nikki Komask [*phonetic*]—I apologize, Nikki—the Minister for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, Anita Campbell, Della Herrera, Thelma Morrisseau, Karen Swain, Leslie Spillett, Brittany Lavalée and our newest member of the Matriarch Circle, Cambria Harris.

I want to acknowledge all of our matriarchs that are in the Chamber with us today.

When I was appointed Minister of Families and Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, one of the first things that I did was I appointed Cora Morgan as our special adviser on Indigenous women's issues. Cora Morgan comes from—at the time, she was at the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs First Nations Family Advocate Office. She had been there for, I believe, seven and a half years, seven years. And her mandate was to bring our children home, and so she spent many, many years operating within the child-welfare system, reunifying and—reunifying families and advocating for families to bring our children home.

And so, much of the work that we do in respect of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit is also connected to the history and the experience in the child-welfare system. And so I knew that, in my role as the minister for Women and Gender Equity, which a huge priority of that work would be the pursuit of ending the violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited and addressing the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit, I knew that Cora would be best positioned as that special adviser for us, and for her and I to be able to do this work together.

And when she came on, very, very soon, we were having a discussion on, okay, what was the vision that we wanted to be able to do in this role and in this department and in this, you know, Women and Gender Equity secretariat. And one of the things that we wanted to do and that we had discussed was that we wanted to decolonize this space. So often, I talk about that my priority as the Minister of Families is decolonizing child welfare.

But also, the other part of the work that I do is decolonizing this space: this building, the department, the way that work has traditionally been done to address or look at issues that are facing Indigenous peoples, but in this case, certainly, Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited.

And one of the ways in which we decided and envisioned that decolonizing work was the establishment of a Matriarch Circle, and we established this Matriarch Circle. And the names that I read out represent every single cultural group of Indigenous peoples in Manitoba, every single geographical region in Manitoba and come from a wide spectrum of professions: students, authors, poets, folks that are ministers in their own governments like the minister for—Anita Campbell.

We have folks like Della who are experts in health care. We have folks that are—and like Kim McPherson, who are experts in health care. We have folks that are on the front lines of two-spirited and trans rights.

Every single matriarch that we have as a part of our circle represents the beauty and the diversity of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited in our province.

And we wanted to ensure that we were doing work differently. And that is to say that often, the work of government traditionally has been work that's done to people, right, with very little engagement or consultation or real visioning. And this is the antithesis to that. And so the Matriarch Circle—we meet very often. We meet—it's structured to meet quarterly but we meet very often. They are a part of all of the announcements that we have.

But, more importantly, they were a part of the visioning and establishment and development of our provincial strategy, Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag. And they participated in a PATH session and we've had so many meetings since then to be able to engage with the matriarchs and community to be able to inform the way that our government looks to address what is a critical, urgent crisis across Canada, not only here in Manitoba.

And so we've done that in a very thoughtful way, in a very respectful way, in a very engaged way with the Matriarch Circle. It's a different way of doing government.

The Matriarch Circle also, though, is about recognizing, like, all of those—recognizing all of those women, all of those matriarchs, all of those elders, all of those youth, all of those advocates, all of those residential school survivors, all of those '60s scoop survivors who have come before us, all of those phenomenally powerful, resilient, generous, beautiful, loving women that came before us that have allowed women like myself and the Minister for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness and the member for Seine River (MLA Cross), the—all of us that are in this Chamber—we're only here because of the women that came before us, the women that survived colonization, the women that resisted colonization. We're only here because of them.

And so the Matriarch Circle is to honour that matriarchy, that ancestry that we are so blessed to be a part of.

So it's that, but it's also to recognize all of the women and the girls and the two-spirit that come after

us. The Matriarch Circle is about doing that work, and the work of our government is to ensure that we don't have to continue to do the work that we're doing, that we create a place and a space within our territories that women and girls and two-spirited are safe, that they're loved, that they're known and understood as sacred, and that they get to live their most joyous life and their most authentic life.

And so that is what the Matriarch Circle is doing. It is honouring all those that came before us, but it is also honouring those that will come after us and setting the path for those that come after us to ensure that while we're in this space, while we have the privilege of government, that we are doing everything within our power to ensure that next generation has the best possible life.

The Matriarch Circle is also about honouring our lands and our connection to our lands. It's about honouring our cultures. It's about honouring our languages. It's about honouring our traditions, which for so many generations were under attack.

* (15:50)

There was a systemic, methodical colonial attack that, actually, Indigenous women bore the brunt of, and this Matriarch Circle is a testament to that didn't work; that attack, that colonial attack, did not work. We are still here and we rise every single day.

The Matriarch Circle is about passing down that matriarchal wisdom and those teachings and, really, the beauty of who our women and our girls and our two-spirited are. Its literal existence, the existence of a matriarch circle in government, is the path and a means to our liberation. It is the antithesis to the colonial project that was done to our bodies and to our minds and to our spirit and to our children and to our families and to our lands. It is the antithesis of that. And so the very existence of the Matriarch Circle in government is decolonizing government.

You know, very often we talk about—when we talk about Indigenous women, for so, so long, the language and the discourse that surrounds Indigenous women is always about the things that are done to us or our victimhood or, you know, MMIWG2S or, you know, the sexual exploitation of our women. And, yes, all of that exists, all of it. It all exists. But, actually, Indigenous women are also so much more than just what's done to our bodies. We're all of these other things.

We are—you know, I look at Dr. Tasha Spillett; she's a poet, she's an author. She has her Ph.D. She's

an amazing mom who's raising this fierce, fierce little matriarch, Izzy. We're doctors, we're lawyers, we're on the front line of health care. Actually, today is national Indigenous Nurses Day. We're nurses. We are in corrections. We are on the front lines of tackling the issue of our unsheltered relatives. We have the first-ever Indigenous woman—Indigenous person, who happens to be an Indigenous woman, who was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

We have our women who have their Ph.D.s in clinical psychology, like my little cousin/goddaughter, Aleah Fontaine. We have in my other little cousin, Gabrielle Fontaine, who from the best that we can tell, is the only Indigenous person and certainly the only Indigenous woman, who is right now doing her Ph.D. in medical physics and who, in her crazy intelligence—she's so smart—she constructed a mobile breast screening unit that can go into our communities. We have, like, my special assistance—assistant, Jennifer Chartrand, who's doing her master's right now in jurisdiction in child welfare.

We have so many phenomenal Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited. You know, when you think of all of this next generation of these young Indigenous girls that we know in our communities who are just phenomenal, that are doing—you know, resisting colonization in their own way, be it, like, addressing climate change or looking at ensuring that First Nations communities have access to clean water—literally, clean water in 2025. You have so many young Indigenous women that are taking a lead on that. The list goes on and on.

We have, you know, this explosion of creativity and artisanship among Indigenous women across the country right now and often expressed in our ribbon skirts or in our earrings. We have one of our matriarchs—two of our matriarchs that are phenomenal bead-earring makers, who I have so many of their earrings that I often bring into this Chamber as a way to honour them and to honour their sister Jennifer, who was murdered out in BC in 2014. I wear their earrings to bring them in here.

And then we have, you know, MMIWG2S family members who every day for so many years fight for their loved ones. And, of course, I want to recognize Cambria Harris, who is small, but so mighty—so incredibly mighty. So mighty, in fact, that Cambria, with other families, helped to change a government in Manitoba.

And while that former failed government—members opposite there—chose—and still to this day, I don't

understand what kind of people would be okay and stand by their party constructing a whole political campaign on the backs of murdered Indigenous women from a serial killer. For the—for as long as I'm going to be in this space, I will never comprehend how members opposite thought that it was okay to target Indigenous women who were in a landfill. And they will never live that down.

And even though they thought that was a good idea, little Cambria thought otherwise. And she went across Canada and to every media outlet and to everybody that would listen and she fought that. She fought that narrative. She fought that disgusting approach on how to do politics. And Cambria and the other families won.

And look at us 18 months later. This government was able to stand with the families and bring Cambria's mom home.

And that's all from Indigenous women. That is how powerful Indigenous women are. Not only were Indigenous women the agents of ensuring that our culture survived, that our language survived, that our lands belonged to us, that our traditions survived, but even today, our women can topple governments.

And so I'm very honoured to be able to be the minister that will enshrine the Matriarch Circle in Manitoba law, which I will share with folks is the first time any government across Canada has done something like this. It's never been done before. In fact, our government is a government that's done many, many things that's never been done before. But the Matriarch Circle is one of those amazing things that have been done—that we're doing here that have never been done anywhere.

And so I just want to acknowledge our matriarchs. I want to say miigwech so much for the strength and agency and beauty and power that each and every one of you occupy, and I'm so blessed to be able to work with you, to sit with you in ceremony, to sit with you to discuss the things that affect our women and together to develop that plan for this government on how we move forward. It is honestly the greatest honour of my life.

The other piece to this bill is establishing here in Manitoba that January 4 is ribbon skirt day. And some folks will ask, well, January 4 is also recognized already nationally. Indeed that is true. It was important that we establish January 4 here officially as ribbon skirt day, because Manitoba is ground zero in respect of missing and murdered Indigenous women,

girls and two-spirited. That has been well established for years, that Manitoba is ground zero. Manitoba has, if not the highest right now, the second highest numbers of MMIWG2S anywhere across the country.

*(16:00)

And while it may not seem like it, our ribbon skirts are actually a means of our liberation. Our ribbon skirts are a means of our resistance to that colonial violence that's perpetrated on our bodies. If you're not an Indigenous woman or two-spirit or little girl, I'm not sure if folks can really appreciate just how powerful our ribbon skirts are. They're not just cloth. In many respects, they're our shields.

They are our shields; they are acts of resistance. And in the last many years, ribbon skirts have, themselves, gone on this amazing journey. What started out—I remember many, many years ago, I remember I had a little jean—a long, jean skirt and it had one little thin ribbon on it. I think that was my first ribbon skirt, and I bet you that if I were to ask the matriarchs that are in the Chamber or anybody watching, you'll always remember your—maybe—your first ribbon skirt.

And when you look at your first ribbon skirt to the skirts that we have now, there's been an evolution in the design of them. And so we have these phenomenal Indigenous women artisans and designers across the country that produce the most gorgeous, expressive, resistant ribbon skirts anywhere. And they are a testament to Indigenous women's strength and to our generosity and to our beauty and all of—and to our fierceness. All of those things. And so I—it was important for us as a province and as a government to be able to situate January 4 here in the province with its own law recognizing ribbon skirt day.

I want to just finalize my comments; just put a couple more things on the record. I want to acknowledge not only the matriarchs within Manitoba and the matriarchs that are not a part of the Matriarch Circle, because we have thousands of matriarchs in Manitoba. We have thousands and thousands and thousands of matriarchs across our territories, from coast to coast to coast.

I, as the Minister of Families and the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equity—but more importantly, as an Indigenous woman in this space, want to honour each and every one of our women across our territories for continuing to resist, for continuing to be courageous, for continuing to be dedicated to our women and our people and our children, for continuing to love so incredibly fiercely.

I don't know if anybody loves more fiercely or protectively than Indigenous women.

And to our Indigenous women, for continuing to rise. I have said it many, many times: gone are the days where we shrink ourselves; gone are the days where we apologize for our existence; gone are the days where we need to be shameful for who we are. Those days are gone. We are in the era of matriarchy right now; we are in the era of our liberation; we are in the era of our strength.

And my hope for everybody that sees this across our territories and in Manitoba is that—is to live your best life; to do the things that you want to do, to do them unapologetically; to command your space; to take up space where you may be the only Indigenous person, the only Indigenous woman; to never be scared to speak up, particularly in a room full of men. I encourage women to take up every single space, because our people suffered for us to be able to be in these spaces. And in order to honour their lives, we must take up our rightful place as matriarchs.

Miigwech.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: We will have a question period. But before, I'd like to encourage all honourable members to look upon the gallery.

We have 20 students from a law class from Collège Jeanne-Sauvé in the gallery, and they are the guests of the honourable member from Riel.

Questions

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

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I would first of all like to welcome some of the members from the Matriarch Circle here to the gallery today.

And I just want to ask the minister—I know there's many similarities between the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council and Bill 44, the Matriarch Circle. I know it consists of a very diverse group appointed by the minister.

Can the minister share with us how many individuals make up the circle, and is there a limit to the number of members who may participate or become involved?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): Miigwech for the question.

I believe, if I am correct, we have 19–18–20—sorry; I apologize. We have 20 members right now of the Matriarch Circle.

There's not a limit—there's not a limit. There's not a limit and there's not a limit on who can participate. What I will say is that it's very difficult to put something that is not colonial into legislation. So we've tried to keep it within the parameters, because it's very difficult to put something that's ceremonial and cultural into legal language, but it is—there is—

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

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Thank you to the member for bringing forward this bill.

Does the council completely replace the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council?

MLA Fontaine: Yes, it does.

The Manitoba—it repeals the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council, and I thank, you know, all of the hundreds of women that participated over the years on the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council. I actually was on the Women's Advisory Council, I believe, from 2000 or 1999 'til, like, 2001, I believe—no, no; gosh, maybe even 2003. I was appointed by minister Diane McGifford, and I enjoyed the work that we did while I was on that advisory council.

So I say miigwech to all of the women over the years that participated on that Manitoba Women's Advisory Council.

Ms. Byram: I know the Manitoban Women's Advisory Council was—had a requirement of how many meetings were to be held each year, and I'm just wondering if the member opposite can share with us how many meetings are required of the Matriarch Circle, and have they met thus far and how many times?

MLA Fontaine: Yes, and that's a really good question.

So we're required to meet quarterly, so on the solstices but quarterly. And we've met—I can't even—I'll get you that number, but we've well exceeded that. I would imagine that we're probably at—I can't even tell you—more than 10 times.

* (16:10)

I also think it's important that—for folks to know that every time we do something for Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag, that invitation goes out to the Matriarch Circle who also participate in all of the community events that we put on, or even the pressers that we put on. Matriarchs are always at every single event.

MLA Lagassé: Can the minister elaborate on who she consulted with for this particular bill?

MLA Fontaine: Yes. Elders, First Nation leadership, community members, those that are on the front lines of tackling the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We actually also consulted with the national inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, which the establishment of the Matriarch Circle adheres to many of the calls to justice that are in the national inquiry.

Again, the list goes on and on, in who—in respect of who we've consulted with, but I think that it's really important to understand, more importantly, that the establishment of the Matriarch Circle is community- and grass-led.

Ms. Byram: I believe that there's remuneration paid to the members who participate on the Matriarch Circle. I just want to ask the member, can the Matriarch Circle request funding from the government for a particular event or celebration I guess, so to speak? I know you have made reference to some of the things that they may participate in. I'm just wondering if they can request funding for some of those different events.

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for that question, and in respect of a remuneration, I think it's important to understand that, for the most part it's only the elders that we give an honourarium to—and tobacco, which is our protocol for our elders.

And the Matriarch Circle itself can not apply for any money for events or whatever. But it's important to recognize that of course the matriarchs belong to many different organizations. The organizations that they belong to can apply for money if they're—and again, if that's for an event or, you know, the organizations can apply for it but not the Matriarch Circle itself.

Ms. Byram: With the many organizations and, you know, some that you've mentioned—councils: I guess my question is, in the past the Women's Advisory Council had an obligation and a requirement to report financial statements, audits, different reporting back to the Assembly.

And I just want to ask the member, how is the matriarch going to do that reporting to the Assembly? Just to ensure that there is, you know, public transparency and notifying the Assembly, or—with the information, then updates of what they're doing.

MLA Fontaine: The dollars assigned to the Matriarch Circle, so to support the work of the Matriarch Circle, are from the Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag strategy, and so their—those dollars flow to our community organizations, and they're in the Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag strategy.

Ms. Byram: So with the number of members that right now currently you—I think you indicated between 18 and 20—is there a fixed term for the members to be a part of the Matriarch Circle? Is there a time frame on their appointments?

The Deputy Speaker: Just a gentle reminder to members to direct comments through the Chair.

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate that question. As I said earlier, it—once, when we attempted to try and enshrine the Matriarch Circle into law—Manitoba legislation is very colonial, obviously. It's very difficult to be able to take something that is traditional, cultural and ceremonial and fit it into a box that can fit the language of legislation.

And so, the question of, you know, terms: we don't necessarily have that. We can if we want, but how would you assign a term for an elder, let's say.

So—

The Deputy Speaker: The minister's time is expired.

Ms. Byram: Staff in the minister's department must provide the Matriarch Circle with technical and administrative support necessary to enable the Matriarch Circle to carry out this work.

I just want to ask the minister if she could elaborate on that requirement.

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable Minister of Finance—or, Families.

MLA Fontaine: Gee, no, thank you.

Also, let me just say to the member on the last question: We do have a terms of reference, so that's important to note as well. So the Matriarch Circle does have a terms of reference.

The Deputy Speaker: If the honourable member for Agassiz could repeat the question.

Ms. Byram: Yes, my question was: In the bill that you are—there's reference to the staff in the minister's department must provide the Matriarch Circle with technical and administrative support necessary to enable the Matriarch Circle to carry it out—out its work.

I'm just wondering if you would be—sorry—if the member opposite would be able to elaborate on what that is.

MLA Fontaine: I apologize for that. I got on to a terms of reference.

So, yes, women and gender equity, WAGE, which is where Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag flows through, that is the secretariat that helps us with our work for Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag. They do provide that support. That is their job as women and gender equity.

And so an example of that would be when we have—or I'll give you a better example. When we did the PATH—the all-day PATH session—that actually led to the development of Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag, we had staff that literally wrote out the discussion that matriarchs were having on all of these papers that were all over the wall.

So, our staff—my team—helps us to do that work, that visioning work, those meeting—

The Deputy Speaker: Minister's time is expired.

Ms. Byram: I'm just wanting to ask the minister if she would be able to give me a little bit further insight and elaborate on that a little bit more.

What are the technical administrative duties that they would be supporting?

MLA Fontaine: So another good example of that is when we have an announcement in respect of Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag, my team from WAGE helps us to put on the announcement. Or if there is an event that we do in community, that the Matriarch Circle is a part of, that is what my team is charged with doing, is supporting that work.

WAGE team—our amazing, amazing WAGE team—helps carry out the work and the events that I do as the minister responsible. That is their job.

MLA Lagassé: I'd just like to thank again the minister for bringing this forward.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on the ribbon skirts and their importance, as this is part of that bill as well?

MLA Fontaine: Yes, miigwech for that question.

Again, we've seen this amazing resurgence and incredible artistry on our ribbon skirts, and—you know, actually the folks that are in the—matriarchs that are in the gallery are wearing beautiful ribbon skirts. And, you know, it is an act of resistance to wear them. It is our armour as Indigenous women.

And so it was important for us here in the province of Manitoba to officially recognize January 4 as ribbon skirt day, particularly when you look at the fact that we are ground zero for MMIWG2S. It's really important for folks to understand the connection between immersing ourselves and protecting ourselves in our ribbon skirts—

The Deputy Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

* (16:20)

MLA Lagassé: As time did run out, and I am actually very interested in this particular subject, I'd appreciate if the minister could continue with her answer there.

MLA Fontaine: Yes. And I would be remiss if I didn't note that originally, January 4, nationally, was because of a little girl in Saskatchewan and who—it was supposed to be formal day, and she wore her ribbon skirt. She was so proud to wear her ribbon skirt and, again, you know, like, immersed herself in what it means to be an Indigenous little girl and that protection and all of that resistance. And she was shamed when she went to school for wearing that ribbon skirt.

And so actually, matriarchs from across the country rallied around this little Indigenous girl who was so proud of her ribbon skirt, and there were ribbon skirt, you know, dances and ceremony all across the country, and, ultimately—

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

Ms. Byram: Thank you to the member opposite for bringing this bill forward. I'm pleased to stand in this Chamber and put a few words on the record.

And my next question would be: Can you provide recommendations that this—that you would like to see come from the Matriarch Circle?

MLA Fontaine: Good question. And what I will say here is—in my final 45 seconds—is I just want to acknowledge everybody that's here. And my recommendation in respect of the Matriarch Circle is that every other government across the country do some version of this.

I mean, maybe it might not be enshrined in law for your particular government, but it is important for Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit to have a place

and a voice in government, particularly as it pertains to tackling the violence and the issues that are perpetrated against Indigenous women and girls. And we will be that light and that beacon and that best practice.

For any other government across the country, we are more than willing to chat with you; our matriarchs are more than willing to chat with you; our WAGE team is more than willing to chat with you—and hopefully that we can get this from coast to coast to coast.

Miigwech.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

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

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Apparently, I wasn't watching the clock on that last question.

I do, again, want to start off by saying thank you for bringing this bill forward. I am pleased to stand in the Chamber and put a few words on the record and speak about Bill 44, the Matriarch Circle act, ribbon skirt day. This bill, as it is, essentially replaces the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council.

And I'm going to start off today by just making a little bit of a reference and a little comparison between the two entities. I believe both these organizations or committees have played, or will play, I guess, moving forward, a vital role in advocating for equality and representation, although through very different objectives and maybe distinct structures and missions.

I believe both the Women's Advisory Council and the Matriarch Circle share some common goals, and that being equal participation, and they both seek and promote change.

To start off to compare the two, I'll mention the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council consisted of a chairperson and a minimum of eight to a maximum of 18 members, all of which were appointed by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council. The primary duties included advising the minister on matters related to women's equality, recommended policies, initiated research to advance the goal of gender equality.

The council's membership selected and emphasized on geographic, ethnic, socioeconomic representation and ensured that diverse voices were heard and all contributed to the council's mission.

What I've learned here and understand today is the Matriarch Circle will operate under slightly different framework. The circle will include women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse individuals, all appointed by the minister. The circle prioritizes a wide array of lived experiences and perspectives, specifically focusing on cultural diversity, sexual and gender identities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

It is important in addressing the unique challenges that many are faced with in each of these communities, and I believe it's important to get advice on various topics, such as education, health services and personal safety.

The Speaker in the Chair

Both entities are—both the Women's Advisory Council and the Matriarch Circle—share the common goal of promoting equality and enhancing the status of women. Their specific roles and powers might differ slightly. The Manitoba Women's Advisory have the authority to make recommendations to the government, whereas the Matriarch Circle is empowered to gather knowledge, hold public meetings, engage with specialized individuals and to—and bring forward its recommendations.

One thing I do have to question is the membership of the Matriarch Circle simply being appointed by this minister, concerns being that it can lead to political influence and potential favouritism. This sort of structure can and potentially result in the selection of members who align specifically closely with the minister's views, rather than maybe representing a truly fair and diverse range of perspectives.

Consequently, this could limit the effectiveness and the ability of the circle in advocating for all communities and providing that fair representation that the Matriarch Circle is to consist of.

I know this NDP government talks a lot about inclusive—inclusiveness—and wants to consider all people, but we see in the Chamber here in the Legislature, day in and day out, that, you know, often Honourable Speaker, we don't always see that here in the Chamber. So I sometimes question the motive behind some of that.

You know, we all have different views on many topics. It's important that we are able to respect those different views and perhaps have different opinions and still be respected when we do share those different opinions.

We see from the other side of the House, often, that the NDP are not always open to the different opinions or the views and, quite often, take personal attacks on those that might not necessarily align or share the same views and opinions of others.

I have to say, Honourable Speaker, the makeup or the structure based solely on the minister, I believe, speaks to the fact it can lead to a biased selection, I guess, so to speak. And, again, I'm going to go back that it might not always represent all views and opinions, but only those that may be aligned with a certain stream, I guess.

Furthermore, the frequency and the nature of the meetings reflects distinct difference in operational style. The Women's Advisory Council was required to meet at least six times a year. The Matriarch Circle, within the content of the bill, is required to meet only four times a year, and an obligation to engage with the minister at least once.

* (16:30)

With the limited meeting frequency and requirement for the Matriarch Circle to meet only four times a year, along with a mandatory meeting with the minister, this may pose a problem with its ability to respond promptly to emerging issues. And if the meetings don't happen often or as required in the bill, it can impede timely discussions and recommendations, potentially leaving important issues and matters unaddressed for extended periods.

Not only that, Honourable Speaker, let's talk a little bit about the scope of influence here. Although the Matriarch Circle is tasked with providing advice and recommendations, its actual power in influencing policy changes may be somewhat limited. The effectiveness of its recommendations ultimately depends on the minister's willingness to act on the advice given, which, again, raises the questions about the circle's autonomy and impact on making real significant change.

And, again, here, Honourable Speaker, all power lies in the hands of the minister, and if the proposed ideas and thoughts coming from this—the Matriarch Circle don't always align with the minister, then, you know, nothing may be considered or initiated on that front.

Let's, you know, have a moment here and look at the diversity representation. We—the intention is to include members from various geographic, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and it sounds like they—we are looking to achieve true representation, but this

can be challenging. There's maybe going to be difficulties ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly those from marginalized groups within the already diverse communities that the circle aims to serve. Again, Honourable Speaker, there'll be—will there be, actually, opportunity for those voices to be heard if they don't necessarily agree and have the same opinion with the minister's ideological thoughts or opinions. And I have to say, I don't think that that's necessarily fair representation.

Again, I want to circle back to the members of the Matriarch Circle being appointed by the minister and the emphasis on diversity and representation. I have to question whether or not, again, it's all in fairness of all communities and opens up, again, where members are appointed without genuine consideration of their experiences and capabilities.

And I must also raise the concern regarding the administrative support for the matriarch as it states. And I made reference to this in my questioning, Honourable Speaker. Staff in the minister's department must provide the Matriarch Circle with technical and administrative supportive—support necessary to enable the Matriarch Circle to carry out its work.

With the Matriarch Circle relying on administrative support and resources from the minister's department, I—it just could raise the question that it creates a dependency that may affect the independent functioning of what the Matriarch Circle is there for and the work that it should be doing. If resources are inadequate or if there's a lack of support, what happens to the Matriarch Circle's ability to carry out its duties effectively?

Bill 44 illustrates some challenges in accountability. In terms of accountability, the Women's Advisory Council was required to provide some reporting and audits to the Assembly. Having done that, this allowed for transparency and the public to be aware of what's going on and the activities, Honourable Speaker. While the circle is required to submit annual reports to the minister, the transparency of its activities and the effectiveness of its recommendations are not adequately communicated to the public from how it's listed here in Bill 44. There is no requirement listed in this bill where the public will be aware of the work being done within the matriarchs.

So there is no requirement listed for audited statements; there is no requirement listed to submit a report to the Assembly. It just makes me question the transparency of what the Matriarch Circle may be doing, and I believe there should be some sort of public

accountability to—and transparency to the work that is being done there.

Within Bill 44 there's—with the not having a term listed there for the members belonging to the Matriarch Circle, I just wonder about the consistency of, let's say, maybe some of the work being done, or it could lead to disruption of ongoing activities and the work that the organization or—sorry—the circle is trying to achieve. It may face pressure from external entities and get pressured from various advocacy groups, community organizations or political entities to align its priorities with specific agendas.

And, you know, we are very lucky here in our country, Honourable Speaker, and our great province. We have the freedom to celebrate various cultures and honour women's achievements through very distinct traditions, events, rituals. And they all reflect a very unique history as well as value.

I just want to mention some of the events or festivals where I have been, and—or special days that maybe even recognize the work of many of our women in our communities who do a lot of work and provide leadership to many of our younger people.

Not long ago, on March 8, we celebrated International Women's Day. This is a global day, and it's celebrated in many countries with events, rallies and discussions focused on women's rights and achievements. In nations like Italy, women receive mimosa flowers as a symbol of respect.

Here in our province and across the world, Mother's Day is celebrated, as well as many other—it's celebrated in other countries, and this is a special day that honours mothers, maternal figures, and we recognize their contributions to family and society. And in our country and here in our province of Manitoba, it 'often' in—often involves giving gifts, spending quality time with family and maybe even includes a meal prepared by someone else.

I know in our communities closer to home here, our local—we have many local festivals with cultures having specific celebrations for women's roles. For instance, in Neepawa, I know the community in Neepawa, when they do the kickoff to the Filipino heritage munch—month, they have had a pageant as part of its annual events celebrating their culture, and it has a particular focus on their young Filipinas, and they have an opportunity to showcase their talents as well as their beautiful attire. And I know that there's many people in Neepawa that support and enjoy going to that.

I know here there's often candlelight vigils and marches in various cultures. They're organized to honour women who have significant contributions, like I said, to their communities and their culture.

* (16:40)

There's many events that celebrate women's achievements. I know the women of the year awards in some places highlight exceptional women's contributions across various domains.

I've attended for a number of years the Women of Distinction awards in Brandon, that of which is fast approaching here, and this is an evening where a diverse group of women and individuals who are recognized and awarded honours with the work that they've done in their community, where they've had a significant impact through their culture or leadership or even trades.

I've attended the Asian Women of Winnipeg, where they host and celebrate the International Women's Day with awards being given to distinguished women, who again have made significant contributions in our province.

I recently attended another celebration highlighting the work of women with the Habitat for Humanity Women Build events. Again, this is in celebration of women and not only in leadership, but also in trades.

And, you know, when we go to many of these events, they have guest speakers, typically individuals who have had a significant impact, whether it be in their job or provided leadership in a great capacity. And it's very inspiring listening to these women share their stories and hear their life journey. And some are—you know, start off very small and they have a big impact and they grow into their role and their leadership.

Many cultures celebrate women's achievements through literature, poetry, art, story-telling traditions, often highlighting the accomplishments of women in history. I know in today's digital age, social media campaigns such as women in history and HerStory are used globally to celebrate women's achievements.

And, you know, with these campaigns and using social media platforms, you're getting a whole different age demographic engaged. And hearing from—or seeing these on social media and getting into that younger age demographic, they can be inspiring to those young minds and it helps those other women amplify their voices and share their contributions.

We see many women in leadership and mentorship roles. For myself, there are many women who stand out, who have been by my side, most importantly, my mom, who's always stood by me and supported me in all my endeavours, guiding me through life, and continues to be my support in good times and in rough times.

My sister has always been another great support as well as an inspiration for me. She's always demonstrated consistent strength. My daughters, they're always there to provide input from a much younger perspective and give me guidance and advice from a younger mind.

Another role model of mine is Eileen Clarke. She was a leader in our province. She provided excellent leadership in this province and did so with honesty and integrity and a style that demonstrates strength and determination.

And these are just some of the great women who have inspired me, supported me and guided me through my journey thus far.

Although there are many great role models out there for women and girls, females still lag in leadership roles. The reality is that gender pay gaps still exist here in our Canadian markets. Only 5 per cent of TSX companies have female CEOs and less than 10 per cent of all executive officer jobs in Canada are held by women. So pay equity still exists.

Going back to talk about the women advisory council, which was made up of 18 members. They provided advice from council came from many individuals. And they organized public events to celebrate.

When we were—or, when the previous government was in power, they had—they worked together to find solutions in combatting gender-based violence. They assisted in establishing anti-harassment policies for the civil service and legislative staff and helped create a framework for handling complaints of bullying and harassment occurring at the municipal level.

The council also modernized a funding formula for women's shelters and assisted in the provincial portfolio transition from Status of Women to Gender Equity. For the last 45 years, the council has been instrumental in achieving many good things for the women of this province.

Also, I want to highlight what the PCs—when the PCs were in government, they made investment of \$2 million to support family violence prevention. The

funding was going to many resource centres like the Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre in Winnipeg, Interlake Women's Resource Centre in Gimli, Lakeshore Family Resource Centre in Ashern, North End Women's Centre in Winnipeg, Pluri-Elles (Manitoba) in Winnipeg, Swan Valley Crisis Centre in Swan River, western Manitoba regional—Western Manitoba Women's Regional Resource Centre in Brandon, West Central Women's Resource Centre in Winnipeg, women's safe haven resource centre in Flin Flon. And these were some significant and important investments made by our PC team.

These resource centres continue to be an important and integral part for many individuals, providing essential supports, resources and programs to those who need them. Many communities form support networks and organizations that focus on empowering women and celebrating their achievements. These groups often host events, workshops and mentorship programs aimed to uplift women and acknowledge their successes.

I have had the opportunity to tour shelters and resource centres that provide services for women and our most vulnerable. I see the many programs these organizations offer and the diverse need that is required to fulfill the programs. I visited these centres and got to see great work that the group delivers.

Specifically, I was at a resource centre and I got a little bit of an opportunity to learn about ribbon skirt-making workshops that are offered in some spaces. I learned the significance the program holds for many and the profound impact on the lives of women and young Indigenous individuals that this program delivers to those people. It's giving them valuable skills and serves as a vital connection to their history and their culture.

I learned that the practice of making ribbon skirts has been passed down through generations and serves as a means for women to share their stories, express their identities and celebrate their heritage. In many Indigenous cultures, the act of creating these skirts is empowering experience, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among young women and girls. It's a great way to reclaim and honour the traditions that have been preserved despite the challenges that many have faced over the years.

Teaching the skills necessary to create these ribbon skirts provides participants with hands-on experience in sewing, design and craftsmanship, and through the guided workshops, women and young Indigenous individuals learn not only the technical aspects of

ribbon skirt-making, but also the stories and the meanings behind the materials and the techniques used. It's a—the ribbon skirt-making program, I learned, was a platform and tool for community building and provides a sense of community. It encourages mentorship and the passing down of knowledge, all of which is very important. Older women who have mastered the art of ribbon skirt-making become role models for the younger participants and help them navigate their cultural identities and encourage them to express themselves creatively.

* (16:50)

In addition to the cultural and community benefits, the program also emphasizes on personal empowerment and self-expressions. As these participants create their ribbon skirts, they're encouraged to infuse their creations with their own unique styles and stories, making each piece very unique to them.

In conclusion, I want to just say, Honourable Speaker, that the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council was instrumental in furthering the cause of gender equity in Manitoba, and I still see that there are some negative aspects and challenges within Bill 44 in fulfilling its mission to operate effectively and transparently. And, again, I just want to go back and reflect on some of the things I said.

So that would be the fact that there is no accountability to share or provide—no requirement to provide an audit on the work that is done with the Matriarch Circle, and leaving the general public feeling—or maybe even having questions on the work that is getting done in that Matriarch Circle.

I just want to close by saying I hope we can all work together to empower the diverse communities and build up women—young women and those of all different diverse backgrounds. And may we all come together to make Manitoba a better place here in the Legislature.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I see there's not tons of time here left tonight. Hopefully we can bring this to a vote and get it passed here tonight. Hopefully members on the other side of the House will support this as well.

But I do want to rise and speak in favour of a powerful piece of legislation that's before us here today, Bill 44, the Matriarch Circle act, and the amendment to proclaim January 4 as ribbon skirt day here in Manitoba.

These are not just symbolic gestures that we're doing here today. They're meaningful, transformative steps towards reconciliation, equity and justice. They reflect our collective responsibility to honour the voices and leadership that—and lived experiences of different individuals in Manitoba, particularly those from Indigenous communities who have too often been silenced, ignored or even excluded from the table.

These changes recognize pain, but more importantly, they empower healing. They acknowledge injustice, but, more significantly, they create the space for justice to take root.

Let me begin with the Matriarch Circle act. This act establishes a permanent advisory body made up of women, girls and diverse individuals with diverse lived experiences. They will provide vision, insight and guidance to the government on policies that directly affect their lives, education, health, economic opportunity, safety, justice and leadership.

This is a profound shift on how we do government. It's not about consulting after the fact; it's about listening first. It's not about imposing solutions; it's about co-creating them. And that is the kind of particularly responsive democracy that we should be all striving for.

I will review a bill—a little bit of historical context before I get into the context of my speaking points, which I'm not certain I'll get through the whole thing today, but I will have an opportunity at third reading.

We cannot forget Indigenous societies have long honoured the leadership and wisdom of women. Before colonization, matriarchs were central to governance, social cohesion and intergenerational knowledge.

They were not advisory figures; they were leaders, decision-makers, diplomats, healers and also protectors. Colonization did not just remove them from their land, it tried to erase the leadership structure that they had in place.

The imposition of patriarchal systems, including the Indian Act, deliberately excluded women from positions of power. Women who had been clan mothers, chiefs and keepers of cultural law were suddenly sidelined by foreign frameworks.

But here's what's remarkable: those voices were never truly silenced—excuse me. They continued to lead in the shadows. They held communities together through the darkest chapters of residential schools, the '60s scoop and the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Today, the Matriarch Circle act is about bringing those voices back to the centre, not just as gestures of inclusion, but as restoration of rightful authority. This is what real reconciliation looks like: not just land acknowledgements; not just apologies, but tangible structures that return power to those from whom— which it was taken.

There is power in diverse voices. One of the most powerful elements of this act is its requirement for diversity, not just culturally, but geographically, socially and economically. Urban, rural and northern Manitobans must all be represented, perspectives from every corner of this province, every identity, every age, every walk of life.

Now, I see the time is coming very, very close. I think it's more important that we conclude this vote today and pass Bill 44 before the day concludes. And next time it's up, I do want to talk about some people that really 'resonate' with me in my home community.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 44, The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to the Commemoration of Days, Weeks, and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day).

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?
[Agreed]

The motion is accordingly passed.

* * *

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):
Is it the will of the House to see it 5 p.m.?

The Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 5 p.m.?
[Agreed]

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 10, 2025

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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