



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*



Vol. LXXIX No. 57 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 21, 2025

ISSN 0542-5492

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

Wednesday, May 21, 2025

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

House Business

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, on House business.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on House business.

MLA Lamoureux: Could you please canvass the House for leave to allow me to swap my questions in oral questions for today and tomorrow as follows: (1) I will ask the fourth set of questions; (2) the official opposition will ask the seventh set of questions.

This agreement does not affect the allocation of questions for the government caucus or the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv).

The Speaker: Is there leave for the House to allow the member for Tyndall Park to swap questions in oral questions for today and tomorrow as follows: she would ask the fourth set of questions; the official opposition would ask the seventh set of questions.

And this agreement would not affect the allocation of questions for the government caucus or the honourable member for Fort Garry.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

One second, please.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: And I have a report to table.

In accordance with section 49(2) of The Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) Act, I am tabling a report dated May 21, 2025 by the Ethics Commissioner regarding Heather Stefanson, former member for Tuxedo; Cliff Cullen, former member for Spruce Woods; the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton); the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson).

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Wildfire Update

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures): Despite rain and cool temperatures over the May long weekend, wildfire risk in the province of Manitoba remains high.

The Manitoba Wildfire Service continues to respond to active wildfires across the province, and we are just hearing about a flare-up in the—in Lynn Lake and a new fire near Cranberry Portage.

As work continues, we are relieved to hear that the fires near The Pas, Lac du Bonnet and the RM of Piney are being held, and evacuees are slowly beginning to return home. It is, however, crucial—of crucial importance that folks in those regions continue to listen to the advice and instructions of local authorities and public safety officials. Weather conditions can change and we want to make sure everyone stays safe.

The fires near Whiteshell Provincial Park, in Nopiming Provincial Park, remain out of control. Local fire departments, the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Wildfire Service continue to co-ordinate efforts.

Evacuees who need help connecting with their local authorities can contact Manitoba 211 for assistance by calling 211 from anywhere in Manitoba or emailing 211mb@findhelp.ca.

Also, for all information on current municipal burning restrictions, fire and travel restrictions and provincial park restrictions, please visit manitoba.ca/wildfire.

We recognize provincial park residents and cottagers, campers and commercial operators are keen to return to normal activities in our parks. The restrictions and closures are still in place—everyone's safety. This will allow fire crews and emergency responders space to do their work.

We thank all the fire crews working tirelessly on the front line, including the crew members from BC, Alberta and additional crews provided by Parks Canada.

We truly appreciate the collective efforts of those helping us on the front line: the reeves, the councillors, the local EMO staff and volunteers. Thank you for helping us get through this disastrous situation.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Today, I rise with continued concern for the many Manitobans who—lives remain affected by the wildfires burning across our province. While the situation remains serious, we're beginning to see signs of progress thanks to the tireless work of firefighters, emergency responders and partners working around the clock.

Across southeastern Manitoba, the wildfire along the Ontario border and inside Whiteshell Provincial Park remains out of control. But thanks to the bravery of those on the ground and the air, progress has been made.

While we welcome the positive steps forward, state of local emergency remains in place.

Reopenings are part of a careful approach led by Manitoba Parks, in close co-ordination with the Manitoba Wildfire Service, Conservation Officer Service and other key partners. The goal is to balance safety with the need to restore access and stability to affected areas.

To our front-line workers: Your courage and co-ordination are saving lives and giving hope to—or, giving hope to communities in turmoil.

And residents, business owners and cottages displaced from their homes: We know this is a long

road. But please remember, we in the Assembly stand with you and we walk with you every step of the way.

This is a time for vigilance. We're not out of the woods yet, but with every act of courage, every drop of rain and every effort to protect one another, we move closer to recovery.

Let us continue to show the strength that defines Manitoba, not just in the face of danger, but in compassion and extend to one another—but in the compassion we extend to one another.

To our first responders: Thank you. To our residents: Stay strong. To everyone impacted: You're not alone. Together, we'll get through this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: No further ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Jim Bear

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures): Today, I would like to say a few words for a truly great man: Jim Bear.

Jim is an accomplished and respected member of the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. He served as their chief and on council for 11 terms and devoted himself to advancing reconciliation and uplifting his people.

He worked to build meaningful connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, creating spaces of mutual understanding and respect to strengthen and unite different communities.

As a residential school survivor and two-time cancer survivor, Jim is no stranger to adversity, but throughout his life he always showed incredible resilience.

Jim was also integral to the foundation of several initiatives, such as when he helped create the first Indigenous Junior A hockey club, as well as South Beach Casino, an iconic landmark in Manitoba.

* (13:40)

He also helped create the Southeast Personal Care Home and Southeast Collegiate. Jim spearheaded the effort to return the medals of his uncle, Sergeant Tommy Prince, one of our country's greatest war heroes, back to their family and community.

Due to his groundbreaking work, he received numerous awards that demonstrate the incredible impact he's had, such as the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Honourable Speaker, I could continue to go on, but I would like to thank Jim not only for his work to uplift his community, but also for demonstrating the value of hard work, humility and dedication. He continues to be a leader and a valued voice, and it is an absolute honour to know him and all the incredible work he's done for our community.

Jim joins us in the gallery today, and I would like to extend my gratitude and respect to him for his tireless commitment to reconciliation, leadership, and community.

I ask that the House please join me in saying *miigwech* to Jim for his service to Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and to the many other communities in Manitoba.

Miigwech, Jim.

I would also ask to ask—I would also ask for leave for the—to insert the names of his guests into Hansard.

Miigwech.

Jim Bear, Gina Fidel, Rudy Fidel, Lyric MacKinney, Makayla MacKinney.

Marie Chipilski and Kay Rempel

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to recognize a very important birthday. Twin sisters Marie Chipilski and Kay Rempel, who we have with us in the gallery today, are celebrating their 98th birthday. These are two truly remarkable members of the Grunthal community. Both ladies are firecrackers, full of life and nearly a century of stories.

Kay and Marie were born at their family farm in New Bothwell on May 21, 1927, the second oldest to young parents. The family grew to 12 children, where they all learned the importance of hard work, faith and family.

Life on a farm at that time wasn't easy, but both sisters noted their appreciation for their upbringing, recognizing how it taught them the values and work ethic that helped guide a life spanning nearly 100 years.

Both sisters married and went on to raise their families and carry out a life full of reward. Although both lived very different lives, these two are clearly best friends that enjoy jabs and jokes, even times at each other's expense. Today these two wonderful ladies are lucky enough to live across the hall from one another, where their witty humour provides joy and entertainment to everyone around them.

When asked what the secret to a long and enjoyable life was, they both answer very similar. They were clear that it hasn't been watching what they eat or committed exercise. Instead, it was doing what they love and surrounding themselves with people who they care about. It was Kay who noted the importance of being yourself and not worrying about the rest.

To help celebrate, join me in welcoming Tracy Klippenstein, a granddaughter of Kay; Madeline Isaac, Marie's granddaughter, with her children Austin, Arizona and Forest; Rick Chipilski and his wife Annette, who is Marie's grandson; and Annette Krahn, Marie's granddaughter.

And help us celebrate the 98th birthday for Marie and Kay.

Happy birthday.

Supreme Ice Cream Shoppe

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): I am honoured to recognize Raquel Ferrier and Maricris Santos, co-owners of the renowned Supreme Ice Cream Shoppe, a cherished establishment in our community, The Maples.

The Supreme Ice Cream Shoppe has become a beloved fixture in Winnipeg, captivating residents with its diverse selection of ice cream flavours and specialty foods, including the well-known Filipino dessert halo-halo. By offering these authentic flavors, the shop has not only delighted customers but also brought a vibrant taste of Filipino culture to our city.

Beyond serving exceptional treats, this establishment has fostered a warm and welcoming environment; a place where people gather to enjoy unique desserts and comfort food. Patrons consistently commend the shop for its inviting atmosphere and diverse menu, which features not only ice cream shop ice cream, but also savoury delights such as siopao and mami soup.

In addition to enriching the culinary landscape of Winnipeg, the Supreme Ice–Shoppe has played a vital role in supporting local employment, particularly in the food service industry. It has also provided valuable job opportunities for community members, including young workers seeking to experience in hospitality and in retail. Employees frequently highlight the shop's work environment and supportive leadership, helping people develop essential skills in customer service, food preparation and inventory management.

Today, I invite all members to join me in expressing our sincere gratitude to the Supreme Ice Cream Shoppe for its contributions to the employment and food industry in Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Ste. Anne Collegiate–Mean Girls Musical

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Today, I recognize the students and staff that put together the Ste. Anne Collegiate's musical, Mean Girls.

High school musicals are more than just entertaining performances. They offer a wealth of development benefit for students and it helps build confidence and self-esteem, fosters teamwork and collaboration, enhances creativity and imagination, and cultivates discipline and time management.

The Mean Girls musical was a vibrant showcase of exceptional talent, bringing together an impressive cast and crew whose performances captivated audiences from start to finish. More than just an entertaining production, the musical served as a powerful learning experience for everyone involved, whether on stage, behind the scenes or in the audience.

The musical conveyed valuable insights into handling social relationships, embracing being true to yourself and appreciating true friendships. It emphasized avoiding the harm that comes from judging others and recognizing the strength in kindness and empathy. The show also reminds us that everyone faces insecurities and the healthiest way to deal with them is through self-acceptance and positive mindsets.

From my time on the high school drama team, I can relate to the nerves and work that goes into rehearsals and the want to perform your best. And the care was evident by all that were involved.

I would like to extend my sincerest thank you to the teachers and the staff and the students at the school for dedicating five months to creating such a wonderful masterpiece.

I would ask my colleagues to join me in applauding their effort as they watch online today.

Meadows West Students–Tour of the Legislature

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Today and tomorrow are very special days, and I'd like to begin by thanking all MLAs for allowing leave to use back-to-back member statements and to have earlier questions during question period so the students can

be present and not miss their school bus this afternoon.

Now, Honourable Speaker, let's get down to business. Today's group of grade 6 students are from Meadows West School and they have a lot of ideas and questions to share with all of us MLAs.

They were very excited to see and learn about the two bison on the Grand Staircase and to see our beautiful Chamber.

The students have been learning a lot about infrastructure, housing, cost of living and school resources. When I asked them where they learnt about these topics, they said from conversations with their families at home.

Students are curious about our roads. They have so many questions about the materials that are used, if there is such a thing as a long-term fix and why other provinces have better roads than Manitoba.

They're also curious about housing and wondering if there are ways to make it more affordable. Their hope is for less homelessness and when I asked them if they had ideas to end homelessness, they suggested building more shelters, homes—even tiny homes—and making them affordable.

* (13:50)

On the topic of affordability, the students are curious about the prices of groceries and gas, and wonder why they increase and decrease so frequently.

And lastly, Honourable Speaker, they are wondering if schools can be given more money to purchase better equipment and supplies, specifically sports equipment, funding for field trips and better toilet paper.

Honourable Speaker, in closing, I'd like to share how much the students are looking forward to having their questions answered during question period and thank them for—directly for joining us here today.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have seated in the public gallery from Vincent Massey High School, 45 students under the direction of Kevin Doerksen, and they are guests of the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen).

ORAL QUESTIONS

Tax Increase Concerns Offset Grant for School Divisions

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, I want to welcome all the students here today for this robust conversation and debate in question period.

Honourable Speaker, the NDP government keeps trying to pass the buck for their own NDP tax hikes to school divisions, municipalities and trustees.

So I ask the Premier before he passes the buck—and blame—how much did he increase the school tax offset grant for divisions to keep taxes low?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): The member doesn't understand the basics of public finance and it remains to be seen whether he understands ethical conduct in government.

It's clear that we've cut the tax credit—or rather, we've cut taxes by bringing in a tax credit of \$1,500.

And I'll invite the members opposite to be quiet.

This is a dark day. This is a very dark day in Manitoba history. For the first time in the history of our province, three members have been found guilty of breaking The Conflict of Interest Act. Specifically, the former premier that this member chose to align himself with and perform as an understudy for, was found to have breached the act and today the commissioner fined her \$18,000.

There is simply no excuse for this type of behaviour. We'll explore this issue in depth this afternoon, but I just want to put on the record that we thank the commissioner for—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

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

Education Property Taxes—Increase Concerns Impact for Seniors on Fixed Income

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitobans can see for themselves the sheer arrogance and bullying by this Premier.

I'm asking a question about affordability, where seniors on a fixed income cannot afford the education and property taxes under this NDP government and this Premier. The answer was zero for those listening. He did not increase the tax credit at all, and now he's blaming trustees and municipalities.

So I'll ask the Premier again, what does he have to say to the seniors on a fixed income that are paying thousands of dollars more in education and property taxes under his failing NDP?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I would say to seniors on a fixed income and to everyone in Manitoba, we're making your life more affordable with a \$1,500 tax credit.

And today, we have now found that the former government disregarded your democratic decision. The reason that the act was violated is because the former premier, we now know in black and white, tried to push through the approval of a controversial silica mine in Manitoba after the PCs lost the election.

They knew that they lost the confidence of the people of Manitoba. They lost the election. You made a choice to have a new government and they tried to rush this through, in the words of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, to improperly advance the interests of private parties.

The PCs, always in the bag for private interests. And now they're being fined for the first time in the history of Manitoba. All they have is—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

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

Mr. Khan: You know who can't address—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: This NDP and Premier can't address the questions that I'm asking about affordability. Manitobans want to know how they're going to pay their bills, and this Premier and Finance Minister has increased your education and property taxes over \$300 million. The Premier wants to use smoke and mirrors; we want answers on this side of the House. So do seniors, the school trustees and municipalities.

So I'll ask the Premier again: What does he have to say to the seniors on a fixed income that can't afford to pay their education property taxes? Where is that \$1,500 rebate that he claims is coming, but hasn't arrived yet?

The Speaker: The honourable Leader of the—sorry, the Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Kinew: What I would say to seniors and to everyone in the province is we respect your vote. Many members of this team sat in opposition benches, and

when we did so we didn't improperly try to influence the conduct of government.

The members opposite did. And now the only thing that they can do is heckle. None of them will address this historically dark mark on the government in Manitoba. And why? There is nothing to say to defend this.

The former premier that they hitched their wagon to was fined today for violating the act. That's just terrible. That should never happen. Will there be an apology? Will there be a fulsome address of this important issue? We're talking about your votes, the bedrock principle of our democracy, violated by the PCs.

One thing I would say on the record: shame. Shame on each of you.

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

Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit Implementation Timeline

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): If you want to talk about shame of criminal records, the Premier doesn't need to look any farther than the mirror himself, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans have a right to know. This Premier told reporters in Ontario, he promised, and I quote, every Manitoban will receive a rebate of \$1,600, end quote. I looked and it isn't anywhere in the budget.

So will the Premier stand up and admit he made a mistake and he misspoke, or is he now saying, like he said in Ontario, that every Manitoban will receive \$1,600?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Heather Stefanson was just fined \$18,000. That was his mentor. He chose to run under her banner. Everyone else was fleeing the ship at the time like Cliff Cullen who, by the way, was fined \$12,000.

They were all fleeing the ship, and he chose to align himself with Heather Stefanson. Now we know that Heather Stefanson violated the basic principle of our democracy, which is that when you vote, you get to choose the government that makes decisions.

And why did they do that? According to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, it was to improperly advance a private interest. That's just wrong.

I'll table—because I realize that we only had two copies in the House here—I'll table for the members

opposite copies of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's report. I know that they've obviously seen it, because not everybody who should be speaking to the issue is going to get up in the House today, if you know what I'm saying.

So for these members opposite to come in here and try to invoke seniors: go look the seniors in the eye and tell them why you disrespected our veterans. Tell them why you disrespected our democracy. Tell them why you ignored the basic principle that we teach schoolchildren: that democracy is a paramount value of our society.

Because every single one of you that tolerated this action—through you, the Chair—is guilty by association.

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

Mr. Khan: Manitobans, you can see it. The hypocrisy runs so deep, this Premier doesn't even know when he's saying it.

Let's not forget, Manitoba, that this very Premier has a Ethics Commissioner report still outstanding. He's a sitting Premier with a report from the commissioner still outstanding. If that isn't hypocrisy, I don't know what is.

But you know what else the Manitoba voters are realizing is that they were deceived by this 2023 NDP government. A Manitoba senior shared their tax bill, where they are now paying \$2,500 under this NDP. Last year, it was less. And where is their \$1,500 rebate? They didn't get it. More smoke and mirrors by this NDP and this Premier.

So what does this Premier have to say to the thousands of Manitobans that didn't get their \$1,500 rebates?

* (14:00)

Mr. Kinew: What I would say to Manitobans is that we're saving you money. And if you haven't received your tax credit yet, you will receive it soon.

But what I would say to every Manitoban is that we respect democracy. We respect the principles of values. The members opposite can heckle, but anyone who heckles today, I invite you to go out and address this report in the hallway afterwards.

Again, the member opposite chose to run under Heather Stefanson's banner. He was a minister of the Crown at the time. When did he become aware of the fact that the caretaker convention was being violated?

Again, it is indisputable facts: the former premier of Manitoba, that he served under, today was fined for \$18,000 for the first time in Manitoba's history. When did he know that he was part of a government that not just broke the law, according to the commissioner, violated the Canadian Constitution?

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, this Premier sure does know a lot about breaking the law. Let's just take a trip down memory lane with this Premier and look at his record.

I asked him clearly when he quoted—in Toronto he said: every Manitoban will get \$1,600—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order, please.

The government bench needs to come to order.

Mr. Khan: The Premier wants to stand up and talk about heckling, and yet his own members are the ones being called to order for heckling. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

All talk, no action by this NDP. The Premier defends his D- failing Health Minister, and now he defends his backpedaling and sloppy failing Finance Minister.

Premier's blaming everyone else but himself. No leadership; no accountability.

Does the Premier approve of his minister's sloppy budget and rebate rollout, or will he fire his Finance Minister today?

Mr. Kinew: You know, I will always accept responsibility any time our government falls short of meeting your needs. But the reality is we're fixing health care, we're saving you money, and we're standing up to Donald Trump, unlike the member opposite who thanks Donald Trump. And you know why we do that? Because that's leadership.

I would like to quote something from the commissioner's report today on the subject of leadership, and this applies to Heather Stefanson, his close friend and political mentor. The Conflict of Interest Commissioner says, and I quote: "She had a higher leadership responsibility that she failed to meet".

This is a damning condemnation of a failed government, a failed government that launched ads against the victims of a serial killer, a failed government that launched ads attacking trans children, and then after debasing themselves in such a fashion and losing

power because of you, the good people of Manitoba, then proceeded to break the law to improperly further their own or others' private interest. An \$18,000 fine—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Every day another Manitoban is distressed over their skyrocketing education taxes. On a community talk page, a resident of River Park South wrote their education taxes went up by 16 per cent, an additional \$444 from last year.

Does this Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) think that a 16 per cent increase in their education taxes is affordable?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): The member comes from a constituency that is far better off under our government than it ever was under the PCs. And as much as they want to raise their voices, everyone in the province knows that there is one political issue today that must be addressed, and it's the violation of the caretaker convention.

There are hecklers coming across the way here, but that's because they know they have nothing to say. The former Attorney General is heckling right now, under the PC government. Let him go into the hall and explain when he knew that Heather Stefanson violated not just the law, but the Constitution.

These are the words in black and white of the Ethics Commissioner. They shake their head now. Why didn't any of them say no to Heather Stefanson when she was pushing Cabinet members to inappropriately approve a mine? Quote: "Did we get it done today?" End quote.

Perhaps the member would like to explain the significance and context of that quote from the commissioner's report.

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

Mrs. Stone: Honourable Speaker, it's clear this Premier is trying to distract Manitobans from the bad press and negative emails their office is getting, because another River Park South resident on a talk page—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: —says: we, the taxpayers, need to push back against rising school taxes. These residents are calling for formal complaints, formal appeals and to

contact their MLAs to phase out education taxes on properties.

So will the member for Seine River (MLA Cross) stand up for their constituents in River Park South and call for an end to education taxes on properties?

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker, let's be clear: the PCs are recycling the same questions they ask every day.

This is new, and this is significant. This is the first time in the province's history that a sitting premier, on her way out of office, tried to improperly further a private interest. She has now been fined; the first time a fine has ever been issued under this law. Other ministers of the Crown, who continue to caucus, or maybe not caucus, with the PCs—we'll see—were also fined today.

The member knows that the member for Seine River cannot respond to the question because she is not a minister of the Crown.

Given that she has this rudimentary knowledge and is trying to play games in the question period that we have before us, will she instead devote that knowledge towards her former minister of the Crown colleagues, and ask them: Why did they violate the Canadian Constitution? Why did they break the law? How can you explain this in the caucus room, and then come in here and heckle in the House?

There's—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mrs. Stone: Honourable Speaker, these are important questions because we are hearing from thousands of Winnipeggers who are concerned that they cannot pay their property bills because of the education taxes that this NDP government has 'tiked'.

This sloppy scheme, brought on by the NDP, has raid taxes on seniors with fixed incomes and hard-working families, while puffing their own coffers by \$330 million. This minister is blaming everyone but himself. He made the changes, he raised the taxes, and the blame rests solely with him.

When will this minister stand up and take responsibility for his sloppy tax scheme on Manitobans?

Mr. Kinew: Well this is the issue of the day, isn't it? Lining private coffers. That's what the PCs did. It would have been one thing if they had a mandate from the people of Manitoba, but they did not. They lost

your support in the election. You chose a new government; they still tried to force through this controversial mine.

These are direct quotes about Heather Stefanson: These efforts lacked ethical and constitutional legitimacy. I found her repeated dismissal of the caretaker convention in her written representations to me—a convention that is central to respect for the wishes of voters—to be disheartening. Despite her denials, she was aware that the incoming NDP government did not agree that her outgoing government should approve the Project license. End quote.

How can any self-proclaimed conservative abide by somebody who violates the Canadian Constitution? Is conservatism not about respecting the rule of law? Is it not about respecting the democracy? I've—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Students from Meadows West School Questions for Government

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The students from Meadows West are hoping that this government can help us all better understand the role that the Province plays when it comes to roads. They are wondering why other provinces have better roads than us.

Are there better materials that could be used for a more long-term fix, and will they fix the old roads before building new ones?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I thank the member and her guests for that question. I think these are really good questions.

When I visit other provinces, I often wonder and compare roads and what's happening in our province. But in this role, I've learned that a big reason for some of the problems in our—on our province's roads are all the cuts and underspending that happened under the previous government.

There's two different budgets, one that—or, two different pockets of money: one that applies to repairing roads and one that applies to building new infrastructure. And in both cases, the previous government underspent and cut their budget year after year after year.

* (14:10)

So we have to do both things at the same time. We—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

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

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, life is expensive. The students of Meadows West understand that homelessness is very real and they think that it is in part because housing and groceries are too expensive.

Can the Minister of Housing share if housing and groceries will become more affordable and can the students do anything to help?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I thank the students for coming forward with some great questions that affect some really important topics.

When we're talking about homelessness we also have to recognize the role that mental health and addictions plays, and when we talk about that we have to understand trauma when really bad things happen in people's lives.

And, unfortunately, for more people in Manitoba relative to other parts of the world, a lot of those traumas happen because of the bad decisions of former governments, going back 150 years in some cases.

So part of what we need to do—absolutely, affordability. We cut the gas tax; we fixed gas prices in Manitoba. We're putting money in your pocket to be able to send—spend it at the grocery store.

But we also have to address the historic lineage that bad decision making in the past governments has on people today. So we're building housing, we're offering supports to people in community, and most importantly, we're trying to bring everyone together to build a Manitoba that you will inherit, that you'll be proud of.

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

MLA Lamoureux: As mentioned in the member's statement, students from Meadows West want to advocate for their teachers and their own learning by ensuring that they have access to the best equipment and supplies. They would like to be able to purchase more sports equipment and have more funding for field trips.

Is there anything this government can do to directly help?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, for sure. We've dramatically introduced and increased the number of funds that the schools have to help with your education. When you heard the members opposite shouting and getting all worked up and raising their voices for the first two or

three questions in question period, you need to understand what they're pushing for is less money for schools.

The money that they're talking about is money that goes directly to your education. So when you hear them shouting and even heckling now, they're running completely a hundred and eighty degrees against what you're pushing for—more support in schools.

But here's the thing: you shouldn't be surprised—anyone in Manitoba shouldn't be surprised—that the PCs are doing that because they wouldn't even respect you, the voter. They spent the entire lead up to the election, the entire writ period, trying to win your support back, and when you rejected them, what did they do? They ignored the fact that you had chosen a new government. And now they're being held accountable.

A base principle of conservatism is supposed to be accountability in the face of transgression. Where do we see that—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Just prior to moving on, I will remind the First Minister that I've previously ruled about trying to engage people directly in the visitors' gallery that they can't participate, so we shouldn't try and engage them. So I would just remind the First Minister of that.

AMM Resolution on Property Taxes Request to Reform Education System Funding

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Honourable Speaker, municipalities are under pressure. School taxes and property tax burdens continue to rise. Municipalities are being forced to carry the load.

That's why the AMM has passed a formal resolution calling on the provincial government to work to create a new modernized model for how education funding is achieved, and I'll table that resolution.

If the minister is truly serious about collaborating with municipalities, can he tell Manitobans and other municipal officials what's been done in response to AMM's call to—for reforms?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Just prior to that answer, I must also call to attention that the member from Tyndall Park was also trying to directly engage students, and that is, again, against my advice, so please refrain from doing that.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We'll always work with the AMM because we respect democracy and the

people that get elected and those local leaders were democratically elected.

The members opposite, though, rallied around Heather Stefanson after the election. They asked her to come into this Chamber and represent them in question period through the first months of our government. They defended her in public. Even though they knew full well, we now see from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's report, that she broke the Constitution. How often does that happen?

We're not talking about legal breaches here; we're talking about violating the Constitution, the highest law of the land. It's the first time in Manitoba history that a sitting premier was found to have violated this law.

The members opposite want to heckle, bring it on. I am totally fine to engage with you, I say through you, the Chair, because the principle of our democracy is something worth fighting for, and if I got to deal with a couple of heckles along the way in order to honour your choice—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Lakeside, on a supplementary question.

Mr. King: Honourable Speaker, under this government, municipalities and school divisions are forced to raise taxes just to cover basic services. And what does the Premier say in response? I quote: You have the opportunity to go to the ballot box next year if you're not happy.

I, for one, encourage Manitobans to take the Premier up on that offer in about two years.

Will the minister step up and take ownership with the school tax, farmland tax, municipal funding pressures facing Manitoba communities instead of leaving municipalities to take the political and financial heat?

Mr. Kinew: You know, I think the member has an interesting challenge. Like, he has to go back to the PC caucus room and in, like a somehow uplifting way, still give them heck for giving him such a terrible question on this of all days, because we are talking about the ballot box. You lost the election. You had no right to govern. Heather Stefanson violated that base principle of our democracy.

So, yes, please exercise your democratic right. Exercise it at the municipal level. Exercise it at the federal level. Hopefully, not too soon. Exercise it at the provincial level. We will gladly stand up every

single time and stand up and respect the way you cast your ballots.

The leader of their party couldn't even get more votes than the other guy. So I guess it's no surprise that they all have 'raddied'—rallied around Heather Stefanson, who was just fined for \$18,000; a historic black mark on our democracy. It is absolutely shameful.

I invite the member to turn over a new leaf and—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Provincial Government Contracts Issued to US-Based Businesses

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Yesterday, the minister told this House that he is, quote, reviewing all contracts and government policies.

Can the minister explain why just last week this NDP government gave Donald Trump more direct-award contracts?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Like, at some point the PC MLAs have to be mad at their leader. Why are they being put up to ask these terrible questions when they're walking right into the line of fire?

Inappropriate use of government decision making? Yes, we got a report on that, I say to the member for Borderland. It just made history for fining Heather Stefanson by \$18,000; Cliff Cullen, \$12,000; the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), \$10,000.

I don't expect to see the Red River North MLA get up today. I do, perhaps, think that the Borderland's MLA will now rise. Will he address the fact that the government he was a part of broke the law, violated the Canadian Constitution? You probably think he got a safe seat in Emerson, but how do you explain that to people who want to know why you ignored their democratic choice to elect a new government?

Mr. Guenter: Well, clearly, the Premier's covering for the weakness of his ministers and their absolute inability to give Manitobans any answers, but we'll try. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

The member for St. Boniface (MLA Loiselle) needs to come to order.

Mr. Guenter: We'll keep trying to get answers.

No one expected this NDP government to review American contracts in order to increase their value. But on April 1, the Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz) signed to increase a

contract with a Washington, DC, firm to \$2 million. I table that contract.

Is this the review that the minister was talking about?

* (14:20)

Mr. Kinew: You know what? I'm going to go out and say it: I love Canada. I love this country so much, and here's the thing about the deep-seated love for this country that I have, whose freedom was fought for by our veterans, it's that I respect your vote. I respected the outcome of elections I lost. And I certainly, with deep humility, accepted the outcome of the election that our team won.

So if the question the member has is about ministerial relationship with the president of the Executive Council, let's turn again to the report. Despite the roles of Mr. Cullen and the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), final accountability must rest with the premier. She had a higher leadership responsibility that she failed to meet.

I think that much is clear; the fact that she's been fined is very apparent proof of that. For the members opposite, including the member for Borderland, how do they justify supporting this travesty and disrespect to the base principles of our democracy?

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

Mr. Guenter: You know, it's frankly disgusting and disappointing that this government walks out every single day that O Canada is sung in this Chamber. Those members walk out.

I table another three-quarters of a million dollars in US contracts this government gave out in April. Remember, this is after Donald Trump's tariffs have been applied to Canada. While this government was voting down our bill to eliminate interprovincial trade barriers, their ministers were sending direct awards to US firms. More NDP hypocrisy.

Will any of the ministers who signed these contracts rise and explain why they prefer Donald Trump's firms over Canadians'?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, again—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: Again, to quote: despite the roles of Mr. Cullen and the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), final accountability must rest with the premier. In our interview, Ms. Stefanson acknowledged that, as premier, she had a responsibility to

ensure that ministers in her government complied with their ethical obligations and to address any member's misconduct that came to her attention. I agree. She had a higher leadership responsibility that she failed to meet. End quote.

The member opposite is getting worked up about questions about ministerial accountability to the Premier? I accept those questions each and every day. I basically own them each and every time the members step up. But now that there's serious accountability questions about the failed PC government, where are the PC answers?

Who among them is going to address this issue seriously? They just made history in the worst possible way, after the landfill ads, after the parental rights campaign which you thought was going to be rock bottom. Here they find a new low—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Release of Repeat Offenders Call for Bail Reform

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): In April, Brandon Police Service arrested a man as part of a Controlled Drug and Substances Act investigation. In his hotel room, they found \$28,000 in cash, drug paraphernalia and drugs.

When are the minister and the Premier going to be tough on drug dealers? Can the minister explain why this individual was released back into our community?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): You know, the member opposite has an understanding of the justice system which he is betraying right now by trying to cast aspersions against the best Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) in the country.

And why does he do that? He does that for partisan purposes. It's the same partisan purposes that blinded their colleagues, their former leader. Not just into the election; after the election they followed Heather Stefanson. She violated the Canadian Constitution. Doesn't get more awful than that.

There is a rot in the PC organization, and it goes much deeper than fines that were levied today. It has to do with the continued partisan interest in obfuscating the truth, something that the very member participates in this very moment.

Will he show honour to his former profession, turn over a new leaf and begin to address why he chose to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Brandon West, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Balcaen: Honourable Speaker, if this minister is the best minister in the country, why isn't he answering the questions and why does the Premier have to step in and answer for him? Because he doesn't trust his ministers to answer the questions.

What you also didn't hear was an answer. We've been calling for tougher sanctions, especially for repeat violent offenders. In this case, the man the minister released into the community is still at large and failed to attend court.

Will the minister admit his bail reform is a sham or, like his Cabinet colleagues, will he blame everyone else?

Mr. Kinew: We got the best Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) in the country. Guess what? *[interjection]* No, no, no, guess what? Guess what? Guess what? Guess what? Guess what? We got the best Attorney General (Mr. Wiebe) too.

The reason why I'm answering questions is because the leader of the PC Party, the former premier that he chose to start his political career under, was just found to have violated The Conflict of Interest Act, was found to have not had constitutional legitimacy, was found to have disrespected your decision as the people of Manitoba. So when they continue to recycle these questions, of course, I am going to rise and call them to be accountable.

The member opposite grins. What is so funny about ignoring the wishes of people in Brandon West? I would like him to answer that question to you, the Chair. And while he's at it, why did Cliff Cullen break the law? Why did the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) break the law? And why hasn't he been tough on their crimes?

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

Mr. Balcaen: I would ask the question of how the minister feels to be muzzled, but he won't be allowed to get up and answer it.

Early Sunday morning, a woman was arrested after a collision involving a parked vehicle. While being processed, she attacked a central processing officer and was found to be in possession of a folding knife and drug-packaging paraphernalia.

She was charged with assaulting a peace officer, possession of a weapon, impaired driving and multiple other charges, and guess what? She was released.

How many individuals have been released into the community after committing violence under this minister's watch?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, you know, the thing about the NDP is, we're consistent. When we say we're tough on crime, that means that we're tough on anyone who commits a crime. But the members opposite are hypocrites because they're only tough on crime when certain people commit them.

Today, a police officer stood up and refused to ask about his own political mentor breaking the law and being fined \$18,000. He refused to ask a question—or answer a question about his former colleague in the neighbouring constituency of Spruce Woods breaking the law and being fined \$12,000. And again, the current colleague that he may or may not sit with in the PC caucus, also fined 10 grand.

Why is it that the members opposite get so worked up about some people committing crimes, but when their own rich insider friends break the law, they are completely silent? And you know what? That's a rhetorical question. We all know the answer because the answer to that question is the entire reason—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Ethics Commissioner's Report Findings PC Violation of the Caretaker Convention

MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo): Earlier today, Manitoba's Ethics Commissioner released a historic report into the failures of the former PC government, including former premier Heather Stefanson.

Can the Premier please tell the House more about this important report and the actions of the members opposite?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): You know what? It's 38 minutes into question period and we finally got a question on the No. 1 political issue of the day. What does that tell you about the weak opposition? Pretty much everything you need to know.

I also think it's very significant that the question came from the person who defeated the PCs in Heather Stefanson's old seat for the first time in Manitoba history. And here's the thing: The good people of Tuxedo made that decision because of this great candidate who stepped up to represent them.

But today, what are the PCs going to say about the fact that Heather Stefanson broke the law and was fined \$18,000 for the first time in Manitoba history under this statute? I'm sure that they will want an answer from the PCs on this quote in particular, that Ms. Stefanson had a higher leadership responsibility that she failed to meet, end quote.

* (14:30)

I'll go a step further and tell you that today, in question period and likely in the media coverage after, no one on the PC side is stepping up to that higher leadership responsibility that they should be required—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Bail Reform Policy Government Record

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Over a year ago, the Premier released his major policy announcement on bail reform by telling Crown attorneys to, I quote: consider risk to public safety in making bail decisions.

Crown attorneys stated that wasn't new; they always have done that. In fact, this was kind of insulting. And I'll table the article.

After a year of the Premier's bail reform plan, Crown attorneys are saying nothing's changed. Defence lawyers are saying nothing has changed. Now, this Premier has attacked Crown attorneys; he's insulted them and said they weren't doing their jobs. He's told Manitobans that the justice system is broken and can't keep them safe. He's provided no new resources to support bail court.

Will this Premier now apologize to Crown attorneys for blaming them for his bail—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Honourable Speaker, the member opposite is a case study in what happens when your judgment is poisoned by personal animus. Anyone who is elected to this House ought to be asking a question about the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's report today. The member declines to do so; it is a sad commentary on the waste of time that he performs here in this esteemed Chamber.

The basic function of this Chamber is to exercise your democratic will. Today, for the first time in Manitoba history, we have conclusive proof that that democratic will was ignored by the defeated PC government. To be very clear, that means that this is worse than the vote-rigging scandal of the 1990s,

which ultimately was not pinned on that premier of the day. This one was.

They lost the election. They still tried to force through a controversial decision and they did it to improperly advance a private interest. This is the sad coda on the darkest period of government—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Order, please.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Speaker: The Honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to say I look forward to Estimates, so please show up right away.

The Speaker: I would advise that that is clearly not a point of order.

* * *

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired. *[interjection]*

Order, please.

The Speaker is standing.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to moving on, we have some more guests in the gallery.

From Vincent Massey High School, we have a second group of 45 students under the direction of Kevin Doerksen; the—guests of the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen).

And we welcome you all here today.

PETITIONS

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I wish to present the following petition to—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Someone is trying to speak. The Speaker can't hear them, so I would ask members, particularly on the government side, to allow members that have the floor to be heard.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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 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 standards 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 in the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decisions to not 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 where 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 the 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.

This petition was signed by Kelsey Gillespie, Chastyn Lavoie, Katherine Silver and many, many other fine Manitobans.

MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): 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 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 regional health authority.

* (14:40)

(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.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

(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 and 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 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 is signed by Lori Blight, Joan McCallister, Elaine Donald and many other Manitobans.

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

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 a computer-generated radio wave 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 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 services and ambulance use. It will bring care closer to home and reduce wait times for MRI scans across the province.

(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 remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

(7) The average wait time for 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 Portage regional health facility in Portage la Prairie.

This is signed by Suzanne M. Donley, Sheila Kim Chipman and Landeyn Aymont and many, many more Manitobans.

Thank you.

Rural Community Policing Services

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) All Manitobans deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities.

(2) Throughout Manitoba, rural communities are seeing dramatic increases in criminal activities targeting individuals and property, which has eroded their sense of safety.

(3) Though the communities pay taxes for RCMP coverage, many have lost local policing as RCMP detachments consolidate. This situation is unacceptable to communities who expect a level of service and police protection.

(4) The lack of community policing has led to many Manitobans losing faith in the rule of law and the availability of emergency services when they are needed.

(5) The provincial government has a responsibility to act and ensure that communities receive adequate service and coverage from police resources.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately work with the RCMP to restore rural community policing and to provide adequate resources to protect Manitoba communities.

This petition is signed by JoAnne Oswald, Kenneth Oswald, Frank Pubben [*phonetic*] and 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:

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.

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

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

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.

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

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.

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.

* (14:50)

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 Jessica Gillespie, Scott Lillie, Kevin Seavers and many, many other Manitobans.

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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, was not—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 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 the decision to not prosecute to be reviewed independently.

(6) A recent—as recently as 2022, there is precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to extraprovincial 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.

(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.

And, honourable Deputy Speaker, this is signed by Charles Bickford, Kyle Bickford, Doris Horn and many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

Removal of Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the reasons for 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 much-needed relief.

This petition is signed by Debra Sanderson, Robert C. Grant, Don MacKenzie and many, many more fine Manitobans, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Medical Assistance in Dying

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Persons struggling with mental health as their sole condition may access medical assistance in dying unless Parliament intervenes.

(2) Suicidality is often a symptom of mental illness, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadians between the age of 10 and 19.

(3) There have been reports of the unsolicited introduction of medical assistance in dying to non-seeking persons, including Canadian veterans, as a solution for their medical and mental health issues.

(4) Legal and medical experts are deeply concerned that permitting Canadians suffering from depression and other mental illnesses to access euthanasia would undermine suicide prevention efforts and risk normalizing suicide as a solution for those suffering from mental illness.

(5) The federal government is bound by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to advance and protect the life, liberty and security of its citizens.

(6) Manitobans consider it a priority to ensure that adequate supports are in place for the mental health of all Canadians.

(7) Vulnerable Manitobans must be given suicide prevention counselling instead of suicide assistance; and

(8) The federal government should focus on increasing mental health supports to provinces and improve access to these supports, instead of offering medical assistance in dying for those with mental illness.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to stop the expansion of medical assistance in dying to those for whom mental illness is the sole condition; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to protect Canadians struggling with mental illness by facilitating treatment, recovery and medical assistance in living, not death.

This petition has been signed by Mary Reimer, Ann Wolfe, Tina Hildebrandt and many, many Manitobans.

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): 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.

* (15:00)

(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 a 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 decision is to not—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.

(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 of 2024, the Winnipeg Police Service 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.

This petition is signed by Rob Lyons, Trevor Krauchek and many, many, many other fine 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 2022 that almost \$70 million would be spent on upgrades to provincial road 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.

(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 infrastructural 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.

(2) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure—the commitment 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 Colton King, Blair Myskiw and Kaley Byron and many, many, many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

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

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

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

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.

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'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 to be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is a 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 of 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 with a—when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December of 2024, the Winnipeg Police Service reported an alarming number of impaired driving—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.

* (15:10)

(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.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Provincial Road 210

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): 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 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 reconstruction 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 John Hiebert, Carol Hiebert, Brent Fulmore and many, many other Manitobans.

Carbon Tax and Rising Food Prices

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) In 2022, according to Statistics Canada, there was an 11.4 per cent increase in food prices.

(2) Staple food products such as baked goods, margarine and other oils, dairy products and eggs have seen some of the largest price increases.

(3) Agriculture and the agri-food sectors contribute close to 10 per cent of Manitoba's GDP.

(4) There are increased costs added at every step of the process for Manitoba's agriculture producers. In order to make 18 cents from one bread loaf worth of wheat, farmers are paying carbon tax at every stage of production to grow the crop and get it to market.

(5) Grain drying, fertilizer and chemical production, mushroom farming, hog operations, the cost of heating a livestock barn, machine shops and utility buildings are all examples of how the carbon tax on natural gas and other fuels cost farmers and consumers more each year.

(6) In food production there are currently no viable alternatives to natural gas and propane. The carbon tax takes money away from farmers, making them less profitable and hindering rural agricultural producers' ability to invest in upgrades and improve efficiency while reducing emissions.

(7) The provincial government neglected farmers in the six-month fuel tax holiday until the opposition critic and local stakeholder groups called for their inclusion.

(8) Other provincial jurisdictions and leaders have taken action on calling on the federal government to remove the punishing carbon tax and/or stop collecting the carbon tax altogether.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to call on the federal government to remove the punishing carbon tax on natural gas and other fuels and farm inputs for Manitoba agriculture producers and the agri-food sector to decrease the costs of putting food on the table for Manitoba consumers.

This, Speaker—this, honourable Deputy Speaker, has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Provincial Road 210

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road 210 is a 117.3-kilometre 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 is also notably used by those in 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 reconstruction 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 Dylan Bell, Allan Gorda, Reed Sutherland and many more Manitobans.

* (15:20)

Teaching Certification

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Ensuring that teachers have a robust background in the subjects they teach in the essentials of maintaining high-quality education and fostering well-rounded learning experiences for all Manitoba students.

(2) The recent amendment to the provincial—Province of Manitoba to the Teaching Certificates and Qualifications Regulation under The Education Administration Act have significantly lowered the standards for subjects-area expertise requires for teacher certification.

(3) The amendments eliminated all subject-area requires for teacher certification, including major and minor teachable subjects and subjects specifically requiring—requirements of early/middle years streams.

(4) Specifically, the amendment removed: the senior years credit requirement in the approved teachable major and minor; early/middle years credit requirements in the approval teachable major and minor; and early/middle years credit requirements specific subjects, including: math; physics—physical or biological science; English and French; and history or geography.

(5) Key stakeholders, such as parents, post-secondary educators outside the facility of education and the business partners were not consulted about the changes.

(5) Key stakeholders, such as parents, post-secondary educators outside the facilities of education and business partners were not consulted about the changes.

(6) The removal of subject-specific requirements undermined—undermines the educational quality of Manitoba schools by permitting teachers to enter the classroom without significant training in core

academic areas, thereby comprising of education that Manitoba students receive.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning to reverse recent amendments to the Teaching Certificates and Qualifications Regulation that weaken subject-areas' requirements for teacher's certification and to reinstate teachable major and minors to early/middle years requirements which are essential for ensuring teachers have strong knowledge of the core subject areas.

(2) To urge the provincial government to address teacher shortages through alternative measures that uphold rigorous subject-area standards, which are critical for providing quality education to all Manitoba students.

This has been signed by Chance Horn, Dwight Barre and Jason Morton and many other Manitobans.

Carbon Tax and Rising Food Prices

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) In 2022, according to Statistics Canada, there was an 11.4 per cent increase in food prices.

(2) Staple food products such as baked goods, margarine and other oils, dairy products and eggs have seen some of the largest price increases.

Agriculture and agri-food sectors contribute close to 10 per cent of Manitoba's GDP.

(4) There are increased costs added at every step of the process for Manitoba's agriculture producers. In order to make 18 cents from one bread loaf worth of wheat, farmers are paying carbon tax at every stage of production to grow the crop and get it to market.

(5) Grain drying, fertilizer and chemical production, mushroom farming, hog operations, the cost of heating a livestock barn, machine shops and utility buildings are all examples of how the carbon tax on natural gas and other fuels cost farmers and consumers more each year.

(6) In food production there are currently no viable alternatives to natural gas and propane. The carbon tax takes money away from farmers, making them less profitable and hindering rural agricultural producers' ability to invest in upgrades and improve efficiency while reducing emissions.

(7) The provincial government neglected farmers in the six-month fuel tax holiday until the opposition critic and local stakeholder groups called for their inclusion.

(8) Other provincial jurisdictions and leaders have taken action on calling on the federal government to remove the punishing carbon tax and/or stop collecting the carbon tax altogether.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to call on the federal government to remove the punishing carbon tax on natural gas and other fuels, farm inputs for Manitoba agriculture producers and the agri-food sector to decrease the costs of putting food on the table for Manitoba consumers.

This is signed by Don Wiebe, Ken Rutter, Cor Lodder and many, many, many more Manitobans.

Provincial Trunk Highway 34

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): 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) Provincial Trunk Highway 40—or 34, PTH 34, is a two-lane provincial primary highway that runs from the US border where it meets with ND 20 to PTH 16 at the town of Gladstone.

(2) PTH 34 runs north-south in the south-central region of the province. It is the main highway for the towns of Crystal City, Pilot Mound and Holland, serving as a main corridor for semi-trailers, farm equipment, daily drivers and local school bus routes.

(3) A new bridge is currently being constructed over the Assiniboine River at PTH 34, north of Holland, in the RM of Victoria. The bridge serves as an important north-south link over the Assiniboine River between the Trans-Canada Highway and PTH 2.

(4) The deterioration of PTH 34 has raised major concerns due to the narrow shoulders and numerous deep potholes that pose serious safety risks considering farmers often need to use the highway to transport heavy equipment.

(5) Construction of a new bridge in accordance—current design codes and the RTAC standard, located on PTH 34 crossing the Assiniboine River, will support trade and commerce and improve public safety in

the area, and also accommodate flood events in the Assiniboine River.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to address the conditions of Provincial Trunk Highway 34, making the necessary upgrades to RTAC standard and to resurface the road once the new bridge has been completed.

* (15:30)

This petition has been signed by Christina Hunter, Kent Farrant, George Ong and many, many, many other Manitobans.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no further petitions, grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Acting Government House Leader): Honourable Deputy Speaker, can you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply for the consideration of departmental Estimates.

The Deputy Speaker: We will now resolve into Committee of Supply for departmental Estimates.

Deputy Speaker, take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

* (15:40)

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Early—or, of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): So to sort of carry on from yesterday a little bit: I know, near the end of our time yesterday, I wanted to talk about the funding to school divisions. I believe the second last

year of my tender, I—we hit—had hit an astronomical amount is basically what I said yesterday.

And to the news, when we did announce the amount of funding to our school divisions within our great province of ours, and there was a couple things that I wanted to make sure that we put on the record, and it was in regard to—I believe the minister yesterday, and I looked through Hansard just to sort of verify—that the minister was making a comment on how we were the ones who were blaming school divisions for reductions in school funding—or, no; we were blaming school divisions for the reductions of funding. And actually, we weren't.

And just yesterday, there was even more evidence on the evening news and in the media talking about how the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself and the Finance Minister were actually blaming school divisions for the double-digit—some of the double-digit hikes, and we had that conversation yesterday about not all school divisions were hitting that double-digit hike, but some definitely were.

And I guess where I was trying to get to was, if the Education Minister sees, for the upcoming school year, some form of regular double-digit hikes, because we are talking about a—you know, not just accountability from being in government, but also the fact that we're looking at predictability—predictable funding to school divisions.

And so I was wondering if the last couple years of underfunding education, which is now we're seeing the reduction in the—a major reduction in the education offset grant to school divisions but at the same time trying to keep those taxes low to Manitobans, we're seeing school divisions now hiking taxes up considerably. And the only reason that school divisions are hiking taxes up considerably is that this year's funding cuts to those school divisions.

So I'm asking the minister if she is going to be talking with school divisions, working with school divisions about whether they're going to be limiting the amount of the double-digit tax hikes, or is she okay with the fact that under her leadership, there's cuts to education funding and then forcing school divisions to raise taxes by, in some cases, in double-digit numbers?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): And, again, just—there's a few things we need to—I would like to set the record straight, based on some of what the member opposite put in his question.

There is blame to be levelled when we're talking about the property tax increases for those Manitobans who are seeing them.

And by the way, we know that 80 per cent of Manitobans will and are better off under the NDP's Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit. It was to—it was designed to help those Manitobans who are most in need of tax relief and that's exactly what it's doing.

But where there is blame to be levelled when it comes to school divisions and their need to address their budgetary needs, the blame is on the previous government for the chronic underfunding of education that they did during nearly their whole time in office. Again, as I mentioned yesterday, up and until the election year when, all of a sudden, the PCs decided all of a sudden they valued the funding of education, after year and year and year of cuts.

Again, I read this into the record yesterday, but for clarity, we'll read it again: In 27–2018, a 1.1 per cent increase; in 2018–19, a 0.7 per cent increase; in 2019–2020, a 0.5 per cent increase; in 2020–2021, a 0.5 per cent increase.

And, again, these were at times when school divisions were facing the greatest challenge they may have ever faced, at least in this century, which was the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time they needed supports more than ever, they got a 0.5 from this previous government.

The member, in his question, stated that our government has cut education funding. It is simply inaccurate. In our first two years alone in government, we have increased funding to school divisions by a total of \$170 million. Those are increases. Those are facts. They're printed in our budget Estimates. Manitobans can look them up.

Manitobans know who they can trust when it comes to delivering education in our province. Manitobans know who they can trust when it comes to funding education in our province. The record is clear.

* (15:50)

So there were no funding cuts either this year or last year. We are increasing the budgets that go to school divisions every single year since we've been in government.

There's also been no reduction to the offset grant, as was put on the record by the member during his question. There's been absolutely no reduction to the offset grant. As we stated on the record yesterday for

the committee, the offset grant was, in fact, rolled into base, which means that is continued to be provided to school divisions.

There is one thing that I agree with that the member said, and that's about—the member alluded to, or asked or posed whether or not we would continue working with school divisions and boards, and I can say, resoundingly: absolutely. That is something that Manitobans were asking for in the 2023 election, was a government that knows how to work with other people, knows how to work with other orders of government, knows how to work with the federal government, knows how to work with the cities, the municipalities, knows how to work with the elected school boards.

The previous government's track record was clear. Manitobans know it; the education sector knows it. They had no friends in the PC government. Our government—we are a listening government, we're a collaborative government and we're here to work for Manitobans and to serve Manitobans. So we will continue to do so.

Just last week, I met with the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents; we met on Friday. We met again last Monday. We met with MASS, alongside all of the other Ed. partners: MASBO, the MSBA, the MTS. I have an open door and I'm happy to continue working with the Manitoba School Boards Association, again, who I've had many, many, many discussions with in the lead-up to our funding announcement, during our funding announcement and post our funding announcement.

The sector knows they have a great partner in the NDP.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Thank you.

Any further questions?

Mr. Ewasko: So I guess a roundabout way, it would have been nice if the minister would have landed the plane on the actual question, which was: Are—is she going to be speaking with the Manitoba School Boards Association about asking them if they're going to be locking in their double-digit tax increases on Manitobans? Is—are the conversations happening where they're asking for increased funding?

Because where I left off yesterday—part of where I left off yesterday was talking about the historical percentages of where the funding was coming from to fund education in this great province of ours.

And initially—and, you know, I look around the room and I see some of the members sitting around the table that have some history on the agriculture side. Initially, in the late '50s, the percentages of—well, maybe just a couple members sitting around the table that actually remember that. But that being said, in the late '50s, we had the split of about 80-20, where 80 per cent of the funding for education was coming from government and 20 per cent was coming from the property owners.

And we had seen, over the 17 years of debt, decay and decline under the previous NDP government, the dark days of the Selinger government, we saw, you know, record-breaking shift in those ratios. We're looking at, roughly, I think, as low as maybe 53 per cent coming from government and then the other 47 roughly coming from local taxation.

And in 2019, the PC government decided that they were going to try to alleviate some of that tax burden off of the property and homeowners and start to eliminate the education tax off of property in 10 years.

Well, yes, fast-tracked. I believe we got to about—not to about—we got to 50 per cent of the education tax coming off of property tax rather quickly. And so homeowners—property owners—saw the benefit to that.

And with that, I believe, for the '23-24 school year, we were probably—we surpassed that 1957 ratio of 80-20. I think we were closer to—you know, I'm sure that the minister could ask her department officials specifically—but I believe that we were north of 84-16, roughly, on that percentage of coming from government and then local taxation.

And now, I think, in two budgetary cycles under the current NDP government, under this Education Minister, her working with the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself, I think we've gone back to that slippery slope of maybe a 60-40. Maybe even more of an even split than that now that they're putting the burden back on taxpayers, and now, as we heard yesterday, blaming school boards for those increases.

So I guess what I'd like to ask the minister now is that, in the '25-26 budget year, how much, as a breakdown, did school division—I'm just going to pick one—River East Transcona receive in the '25-26 school year? And that's a breakdown between of the nutrition funding and the operating support funding.

* (16:00)

MLA Schmidt: Yes, as a general statement, I don't blame school divisions for the situation that they're in. I blame poor leadership and a lack of ability to prioritize and fund education by the previous government.

Just so we're clear, and I'll keep repeating it for the member: he likes to categorize this as blame; the Premier and the health and—pardon me—the Finance Minister and myself as Minister of Education have been crystal clear: we're not assigning blame to school divisions. We blame the previous government. We're just simply correcting the record from the continuous misinformation that the member opposite and the Leader of the Opposition and many people continue to get up day in and day out and put misinformation on the record about what is driving property tax increases.

So we feel that the public deserves to know the truth and they deserve transparency and clarity, so we're just trying to clarify the record.

The member's question is about ratios, so I'm happy to talk about ratios. However, I think it's important to know that regardless of the ratio—80-20, 60-40—when the amount of funding is cut, it's still a cut. When the amount is woefully inadequate, it's woefully inadequate. So the member can talk about ratios, but the fact of the matter is, year after year after year, they cut funding to education. I read the numbers into the record: 0.5, 0.5—two years in a row of 0.5s. Adjusted against inflation, that's a cut, so that's their record.

When we talk about their record of funding ratios, it's a fact that in 2016 when the NDP left office, the Province, at that time, was paying about 62 and a half per cent, and by 2020-2021 under the leadership of the previous PC government, that fell to 56.4. So that's the truth in the matter.

Another fact I'd love to put on the record, which we're pulling from the FRAME report itself, that currently, based on the funding that we have provided to school divisions in this year—and this is taking into account the operating grants to school divisions, capital, TRAF contributions and the government's contribution via the homeowners tax credit—we're closer actually to 80 per cent—76.8 is the actual specific number, and again, it's in the FRAME report. This is something that the member can access and can verify.

So I think we're doing a pretty good job. But, again, we have a lot of catch up to do. This is what happens when you chronically underfund the education system. School divisions are in a really tough situation.

Here's another fact that I would like to put on the record: the member asks about River East Transcona School Division. And to answer his question substantively, River East Transcona School Division is—it's about 70 per cent provincial funding, 30 per cent municipal funding. So it's about a 70-30 split, based on the rough math that I'm doing here at the table, that River East Transcona is funding their school division.

But it's a fact that in River East Transcona School Division, during the six-year period in which—six, seven year period in which the PCs were in power, River East Transcona, during that time, over a five-year period underneath the leadership of the Progressive Conservatives, over five years the River East Transcona School Division was able to add 30 teachers.

That's not enough. That's simply not enough. We're talking six teachers a year. In 2024, after finally receiving some sustainable, predictable, equitable funding from the Province of Manitoba; in 2024, in one year alone, River East Transcona School Division hired 88 teachers and 74 other educators. It's nearly 150 positions in a year, when they added only 30 positions under—over years—under the previous government.

So this is how our government is supporting school divisions.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: So just, you know, taking a look at a couple things here. So just yesterday, I mean, the Education Minister just put on the record that neither her nor the Finance Minister nor the Premier (Mr. Kinew) blamed school divisions, yet there were questions in regards to the increased property taxes, basically on not only Winnipeggers, but soon Manitobans are all going to be receiving these—their tax bills in the mail.

And I think as many of my colleagues had mentioned yesterday, there is going to be that sticker shock, I think, to the point where, you know—matter of fact, the Education Minister put it on the record today that earlier in her—one of her initial answers, that 80 per cent of Manitobans were going to be receiving the relief, but all along, I mean, the Premier's been patting himself on the back, saying that 100 per cent of Manitobans were going to be receiving that relief, but then, you know, now the Education Minister says 80 per cent; I believe the Finance Minister said 98 per cent.

So I know that, you know, witnessing what had happened with the member from Fort Garry in their

caucus, I know that they do have the odd disagreement, so I would think that on something to the tune of the property tax increases and the credits that are going back to Manitobans, I would hope that the New Democratic—the NDP party would actually get together and have consistent messaging.

So—but just to put on the record, the Premier did say yesterday that, to the tune of—if the members are upset with the property tax increases, that, and I quote the Premier saying, "We don't set the property taxes; the school divisions do. So, again, if he wants to run for school trustee, go ahead and do so." End quote, from the Premier.

He also said that it's the school trustees who set the taxation rates. "You have the opportunity to go to the ballot box next year if you're unhappy what's happening this year." End quote.

So, to me, it's seeming like the Premier is taking a page out of the Selinger government and—which is his mentor—and trying to put the blame on the school boards and not taking accountability for the funding cuts that we've seen.

So I guess the question that I had for the minister was specifically—and we'll—again, we'll talk about River East Transcona. So I'm looking at their overall budget this year, looking from your—from the minister's announcement of \$135.4 million.

So what I'd like to know is: In that increase, can you break that down between operating and the nutrition funding and also the nutrition funding from the federal increase? I know the percentages are there, but I want to hear the dollar amounts.

Thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The minister would just like to ask a question for clarification.

An Honourable Member: Sure.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The Minister of Education—sorry.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you, honourable Chairperson, and thank you, Member, for allowing my clarification.

You're asking for that breakdown for River East Transcona School Division specifically?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

MLA Schmidt: Okay, thank you.

An Honourable Member: I just picked.

MLA Schmidt: Okay, yes.

Mr. Ewasko: Yes. So just for clarification, I just picked one, River East Transcona School Division, off your backgrounder on the news release.

* (16:10)

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): And just a quick reminder to put questions and answers through the Chair, please.

MLA Schmidt: I want to start off by saying that Manitobans are smart, and Manitobans' government that they have today respects them. And we respect clarity and transparency and clear, factual information.

So the member, in his question, at the beginning of his question, talked about—questioned some of the numbers that we've put forward as a team, and I would love to set the record straight. It is the case that, unfortunately, the member has not been paying close enough attention.

So the Premier (Mr. Kinew) absolutely did say 100 per cent of Manitobans are better off with an NDP government, and that is a true and factual statement. And the member can check Hansard; that is exactly what the Premier said. The Premier did not say 100 per cent of Manitobans—it was not in reference to any sort of tax credit. The comment was general and it was factual: 100 per cent of Manitobans are better off today than they were under the previous administration.

We are getting to work on health care, fixing the cuts and the chaos that was caused to our precious health-care system under the leadership of Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson. We are finally funding education. We have a strategy to end chronic homelessness in our province, which was something that the previous government completely neglected to even accept as a reality.

So we have a lot of work to do, we've got a lot of catch up to make, but, again, to clarify, the Premier said—and he spoke the truth—100 per cent of Manitobans are better off under an NDP government.

Our Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), yesterday, put on the record that 95 per cent of homeowners in the municipality of Carman will be better off under the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, better than they would have been under the previous PC government's plan to phase out education property taxes, eliminate elected school boards and defund our education system wholly, which is what their plan was. Thank goodness Manitobans knew that they could

trust the NDP on health care, on education, and they elected us on October the 3rd of 2023.

So there's no blame here when it comes to school divisions. As I've said a few times now, there is blame to be had for the underfunding of education in the province of Manitoba, and that blame rests on the shoulders of the member opposite and the team for which he was a part of. And they would like to come in here today as they've done many times and mislead Manitobans, confuse Manitobans about the numbers, about the facts, put misinformation on the record.

We saw this very recently; we saw it with the wildfires. Shamefully, the Leader of the Opposition got up in the House and tried to confuse Manitobans about whether or not there was a fire ban, whether there was a fire ban or not a fire ban.

During a time of emergency in our province, where Manitobans were worried about their safety, were worried about their families, were worried about their property, the members opposite stood up in the Chamber and wanted to confuse Manitobans. That's irresponsible leadership.

We've also seen them break the law. We just found out today there was a conflict of interest report.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Relevance, please. *[interjection]* Oh, sorry, Minister of Education.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you for your guidance, honourable Chairperson.

I think that Manitobans know who they can trust when it comes to education and who they can trust when it comes to keeping their families safe and who they can trust when it takes—when it comes to taking care of their children.

To answer the member's question about River East Transcona School Division and some of the breakdown of their funding, River East Transcona receives \$1.6 million from provincial nutrition funding, \$303,000 from federal nutrition funding. They also have three community schools which are funded to the tune of \$80,000 each, and they have two BSSIP schools funded to the tune of \$20,000 each.

I'd be happy to provide further clarity on the funding of River East Transcona School Division if the member has any further questions.

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Chairperson, thank you for also trying to get us back into some relevance on the fact that we're talking about Education Estimates—

Education and Early Childhood Learning Estimates, to be specific. And I'm glad that the—after speaking for roughly four minutes and 30 seconds off topic, the Education Minister got closer to the original two questions that I've asked and we're finally getting closer to the answer.

So what I'm seeing here then, this past—this year—this coming—this upcoming school year, for '25-26, so just looking at some math, looking at the '24-25 school year for River East Transcona—and I'm just picking them as an example and trying to get my head wrapped around the fact on this funding—adequately funding that the minister's trying to sell to Manitobans—so with her math, I'm looking at—we're looking at a \$3.3-million increase from last year.

And when you take into account the food and nutrition from Manitoba and from the federal government nearing \$2 million, we're looking at a one point—about a \$1.4-million increase in education funding to River East Transcona.

And so it's no wonder that River East Transcona has recently put out a newsletter to the public—the constituents in River East Transcona talking about the shortfall that they've received this year as opposed to last year.

So I will give the opportunity for the minister to talk about the dollars and cents again, breaking it down. She was almost getting there in her last answer, so I'm not going to take up my entire five minutes and getting off topic, because I know Manitobans have sent me here to be the advocate for Education and Early Childhood Learning and that's what I'm going to do: ask questions on behalf of Manitobans.

So if she can continue breaking down that funding increase, specifically for River East Transcona, because she had said \$1.6 million from the provincial increase with nutrition funding and a \$303,000 increase as part of the federal nutrition funding.

So if she can continue to elaborate on that roughly \$3.3-million increase to Transcona—River East Transcona School Division.

Thank you, honourable Chairperson.

* (16:20)

MLA Schmidt: So, yes, happy to provide more information to the committee and read some numbers into the record.

So the total support going to River East Transcona for the '25-26 school year is 134—pardon me, \$135,402,370. That's the total funding envelope. That

represents an increase of \$3,946,728. When you calculate that by a percentage, that's a 3 per cent increase that the River East Transcona School Division saw this year.

Last year, the River East Transcona School Division saw about a six and a half—six? *[interjection]* 6.7 per cent increase, so over the two years that we've been in government, River East Transcona has seen roughly 10 per cent increase in their budget—in their funding, I should say.

Again, of that, they will receive—so to break that down further, for the '25-26 school year, River East Transcona School Division will receive \$189,170,700 in provincial funding, \$79,464,000 in municipal funding and \$1,565,000 from other sources.

River East Transcona School Division is collecting \$120,289,000 in special levy for 2025; \$216 million will be allocated to salary expenses, which is roughly 55 per cent of the division's revenues.

I think it's important to note that—again, I read in my—during my last answer, I spoke a bit about the nutrition funding increases. I think it's important to note that all nutrition funding increases are a one hundred per cent lift over what the PC government had provided in nutrition funding directly to schools, which was zero.

So all of that nutrition funding, \$30 million a year, is an increase and something that schools value and are benefiting from every single day. And we're hearing this anecdotally. I can't wait for the data to start coming in, the data that will show what we already know to be true, which is that Nello's universal nutrition program is changing lives across Manitoba.

I'll read just one quote that we got from the superintendent at Frontier School Division: Having food available at school is a game changer for these students. Some show better attendance, but all of them demonstrate better in-class engagement and achievement in their work as well as better behaviour.

So this is what we're talking about when we're talking about valuing education and funding education and meeting the needs of Manitoba children. This is what we're talking about, and this is evidence that we're doing it.

I'm so proud of the universal nutrition program that was started under the leadership of Minister Nello Altomare, again, a \$30-million new, historic investment in our kids and in the future of our province. Much accomplished, much more to do and much to

lose if we were go—to go back to the PC way of funding education.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The minister's time is up.

Can you tell me if—or tell—can you let us know if this is from a public document—the quotes? The numbers? The quote from the superintendent, sorry.

MLA Schmidt: No, I apologize. It's not from a public document, but I can have that tabled for the committee before we rise at 5 o'clock.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Okay, thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, Manitobans, the hundreds of you that are watching the Estimates process, specifically in room 254 today, you're seeing the minister start to, unfortunately, get off track a little bit and start to want to pick fights here.

I've been brought here to advocate for education and early childhood learning and ask questions about this year's budget. And, you know, much like what the Education Minister has just done—quoted from something, and we're going to see what that specific quote came from in the near future, I guess; sometime between right now and the future, we will get that quote and what she was reading off of.

So to correct the record, the previous PC government absolutely contributed to schools through the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba, and, matter of fact, since the original Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba was created—and I will give credit, unlike the Education Minister, who can't get out of the partisan sphere. Originally, that Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba was created under an NDP government, and then for roughly 11, 12 years, the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba did not see an increase. And so I had the pleasure of attending an announcement that more than doubled the funds to the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba.

And so we all agree, on all sides of the House, unless, of course, you're just listening to the current Education Minister, we—I do believe that on all sides of the House we do believe that, you know, feeding kids is the right thing to do for those students and children that can't—or for whatever reason are having those challenges at home, many times.

* (16:30)

And, you know, I know that the Education Minister can't speak from experience on this, but I know that she has shared that she's been involved in education

for quite some time because I do believe that her parents were educators as well. But I'm sure they told stories of having their drawers, their desks in the classrooms full of granola bars or some sort of snacks to help students get by, and I believe that many people who are educators or teachers had gone through the same thing and had that availability to students.

So I wish that the Education Minister would be able to actually be accountable and transparent and put the facts on the record in regards to some of that and not put misinformation out there.

But I would like to read from a public document, honourable Chairperson, just so that we're quoting properly here. The title is Budget 2025-2026. It is The Torch, and it is put out by River East Transcona School Division.

And so a couple things that I'm going to quote from this document—and it's right on the front page. It says how the funding increase from the Province was \$4 million less than last year's increase. Last year, the board passed a status quo budget that maintained the level of programs, programming services, for students and staff that was based on the estimated increase in student enrolment for the '24-25 school year.

This year's budget goes beyond the status quo as the board refuses to make cuts that would be felt directly in the classroom, end quote, due to the underfunding by this current minister, her Finance Minister and the Kinew government.

And what continues on—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Minister of Education.

MLA Schmidt: It's unclear whether the member is still quoting or whether he's moved on from his quote and is adding his own colourful commentary, so I would like some clarity on what was the quote and what was the—his own commentary on the quote.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Can the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) please clarify whether he was still reading from the quote or there was some additional comments made.

Mr. Ewasko: So in regard to what I was stating, and now my clock is running, honourable Chairperson, and it was actually the minister who interrupted.

But it's unfortunate that the minister wasn't paying close enough attention, but I did start the quote.

I referenced the article that I was referencing. I started the quote; I ended the quote. I gave my own little addition in there, and now I'm requoting again: In absence of the provincial government properly funding public education, introducing an equitable funding model, we must, unfortunately, turn to our community to address the needs of our growing division. End quote.

Who said this? The trustee, Brianne Goertzen, chair of the finance and facilities for River East Transcona.

So my question is, how can the member—how can the minister sit there and say that she's funding education properly when obviously there's a shortfall in education funding in River East Transcona?

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): With that clarification, there is no point of order.

* * *

MLA Schmidt: Yes, I respect the board chair, Colleen Carswell, very much and all of the board members, including Brianne Goertzen, who you just quoted from. And they certainly have a job to do, and I respect their job and their role.

I would suggest to Manitobans and to the River East Transcona School Division that a 10 per cent increase over two years is pretty healthy. But I understand, like I said, they have a role to do and they're always going to ask for more.

I wonder if the member opposite, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), during his time as minister of Education, if he ever had a school division come to him and say: Wow, we love our funding this year; it's enough; we don't need any more. I would hesitate to guess that that never happened.

Again, school divisions have a job to do. They have a duty to their community. And I would fully expect Mrs. Goertzen, Mrs. Carswell, all the members of that board and every school division across Manitoba to always be looking to advocate for their students and to their communities. So I thank them for that advocacy.

I would like to read some quotes into the—so, again, just to be clear, very proud of the funding increase we provided this year.

Is there more work to do? Absolutely. As I've said time and time again, catching up: that's what we're doing. We have a lot of ground to recover. This is a result of the chronic underfunding of an education system, of no plan for the education system. School

divisions are set back and they have a lot of catch-up to do.

So we are here to partner with them in that work. Our funding has been predictable and stable. We have provided increases to every school division.

In fact, let's do some quotes.

Sandy Nemeth, at the time, was the president of the Manitoba School Boards Association, and quote: "Not seeing any board get a decrease, that's huge." End of quote. From the Winnipeg Free Press, on February 10, 2025. So that's what the Manitoba School Boards Association president had to say about our funding announcement this year, 2025.

Let's talk about the record of the previous government; let's talk about River East Transcona School Division. So, in 2023, the River East Transcona School Division was in a unique position, and what they said to CTV News on March 10 of 2023 was that they had to, quote, borrow money for the first time in two decades. Unquote. Their reserve funds were tapped out. They had to defer maintenance projects, they had to take out a loan—again, for the first time in two decades—to cover transportation costs, to cover costs of student records system.

We saw cuts to multiple school divisions under the leadership of the member from Lac du Bonnet—\$11 million cut from Seven Oaks, 8 and a half million from St. James-Assiniboia, \$10 million from Louis Riel, \$2 million from Borderland. Cut after cut after cut after cut.

Let's hear another quote from River East Transcona School Division from, again, CTV News, March 10, 2023. Quote: "Provincial funding over the last number of years has been substantially shorter than what we needed in comparison to inflation as well as the number of new students we are receiving." Unquote. And that is a quote from trustee Rod Giesbrecht.

So this is the fact of the matter: the education system was chronically underfunded for seven and a half years. We have a lot of catch-up to do.

We are here to work with River East Transcona School Division. We know that they're always going to be asking for more, and we are always going to be working to deliver more, year after year after year. We will be here as your partner in education to meet the needs of our students and to make sure that we're making progress here in Manitoba when it comes to the education of our students. I think our budget this year is evidence of that.

Oh—and so—and I—my apologies for not reading from a public document previously, but we do have the quote and where I was reading from in my previous answer to table for the committee.

* (16:40)

Mr. Ewasko: Just to reference, again—okay, well, the document doesn't have a date or time. It does have—don't know if the minister just typed that up or whatever, but it is what it is. Date—there's no date on there, no email or whatever, but there is some quotes on there, so she could have got someone either in the department or political staff, one of the three political staff to type that up, but, nonetheless, it is what it is; it's fine, and I'll accept that.

So the quote that I read from trustee Brianne Goertzen who, you know, obviously was stating her displeasure in the lack of funding this year by the current Education Minister, actually ran for—as a New Democrat candidate back a few years ago for Winnipeg South. And so, when you have somebody coming out that strongly in a public newsletter to community, sort of speaks volumes, and I don't want to get too far off track so I'm just going to say this quickly.

Much like what we've been seeing from the nurses union in—for the health-care situations, and the only reason I reference that is because the Education Minister referenced health as far as one of their top priorities. And I'm not even going to go down the road right now about how the NDP government feels that they've put education not even in their top five priority list.

So just to talk about the funding that the Education Minister put on the record for River East Transcona as one example, and then she referenced Seven Oaks, which I know that there's a very close tie to the Seven Oaks School Division within the department now. So River East Transcona School Division in the '23-24 school year received almost \$11 million of provincial funding, and the Seven Oaks School Division received, I believe, somewhere in the tune of 3.3 to 3.8 million dollars in funding from the provincial government in the '23-24.

So that's far from a perceived cut. That's an increase, and I don't know what type of math the Education Minister has done in her past. I'm not sure under her previous occupation prior to politics or her previous, you know. It is what it is. She can put on the record her results and her math expertise and qualifications on the record.

So what I'd like to ask the minister, in the short amount of time that we have left, is that, under our government, we had worked quite closely with other jurisdictions, not only in Canada but around the world on recruitment—retaining and recruiting teachers. And so in 2023, we put forward a—the implementation of Manitoba's Recruitment and Retention Strategy for French Language Teachers, moving in action 2023. The strategy was created to address the shortage of French-speaking teachers, for the français and French immersion programs in Manitoba.

I'd like to know how that's going, if the Education Minister can update the House.

French spoken

MLA Schmidt: Je suis très fière d'être l'un des nombreux Manitobains qui ont bénéficié de l'éducation en français dans notre province.

Translation

I am very proud to be one of the many Manitobans who have benefited from French-language education in our province.

English

I am so lucky to be one of the many Manitobans who have benefitted from French language education in our province, and it's something that I think we should be so proud of as Manitobans, that not only do we live in a truly bilingual province, but that our government sees the value in investing in French language services and French language education.

So I will give the minister credit for recognizing that and coming up and recognizing the need for the provincial government to have a strategy on recruiting and retaining French language teachers here in the province because the interest in learning French, either as a language of primary instruction, as your first language, or as an additional language through an immersion program, that increase, that demand is growing and, unfortunately, we don't see the labour market keeping up.

So absolutely we need to work on our recruitment and retention strategy for French language, so we're happy to take up that mantle and carry it forward.

Again, I think that we would be further along as a province had the previous government not eliminated, as a proper division, the—le Bureau de l'éducation française [*the Bureau de l'éducation française.*]

Thankfully, our government, one of the first things we did when coming into government, was to reappoint an assistant deputy minister for le bureau,

and that's no disrespect to Janet Tomey, as the member opposite mentioned yesterday, that Janet was—in the absence of having a specific assistant deputy minister on that file, thank goodness we had Janet, and she did great work.

However, French language education is of such importance in our province that our government believes and knows that it deserves its own assistant deputy minister to be able to accomplish this work that needs to get done.

So we are very committed to strengthening public education in French. We are partners with the DSFM and we know that they do great work in promoting French language, public education, in our province.

* (16:50)

Obviously, those partnerships are going to be essential. We're happy to partner with them. We have great partnerships with l'Université de Saint-Boniface to increase the number of students admitted to the faculty of education. I was lucky enough to—had the privilege of meeting with leadership from l'Université just in the last week or two to discuss some of the successes and any challenges that they are experiencing in filling their—those expanded seats.

Very proud of the work being accomplished by our ADM René Déquier; he's making fantastic progress. Again, that was a mandate commitment to appoint that ADM role, and it was something that my predecessor, Nello Altomare, did with great swiftness.

So there are a number of initiatives that we're working on, so within the framework for learning there are dedicated spaces for French Immersion Program and the français program, which reflect each program's unique context. The curriculum renewal will now be better aligned with the goals and expected outcomes of these programs.

The French immersion policy establishes a common provincial framework for effective implementation of French immersion programming in Manitoba. The policy is supported through professional learning for leaders and teachers, as well as the creation of support materials.

The access to a growing collection of French language educational resources is happening to support teachers in all three programs throughout the province, and we're also working on teacher supply issues for not only French-language teachers, but also Indigenous teachers and teachers in the North.

So, again, a lot of catching up to do. Much accomplished, much to do; much to lose if we go back to the PC model of funding and valuing education, and their record speaks for itself.

Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: So you've heard it here again, Manitobans. So far, I've heard really not much in regards to what this Education Minister has done.

We have heard that, of course, that previous Education Minister, the late Nello Altomare, you know, felt that French immersion and français teacher training was important.

That's great; carried on the work of the previous Progressive Conservative government. I mean, we saw the fact that, as the minister stated—a little bit incorrectly, but as no one—as everybody saw that I didn't, you know, necessarily get too uppity, off the record, of course, over misrepresenting my position or title or anything else.

But I do appreciate the Education Minister acknowledging the good work that we had put forward in the strategy in 2023. In addition to that, we know that the Progressive Conservative government had put in—created 20 new seats in—at the Université de Saint-Boniface teacher education program for the '23-24 school year.

And in addition to that, 30 seats for the French language educational assistant training program. I have not quite heard of any kind of plan, other than our plan, that the Education Minister has moving forward. Again, I'd like to congratulate Monsieur Déquier on his position and his appointment, and I—almost in person, I can, again, apologize for the mispronouns from yesterday. But, in person, you know, hopefully he'll accept my apology, but congratulate him on his appointment.

And so, hopefully, again, under the great work of Janet Tomy, who was working as the assistant deputy minister in charge of French language training and recruitment, and with the great staff that Janet had working with her, I know that we moved quite well, created new seats in the various different locations across this great province of ours. Matter of fact, it was under—the only thing that I can say that this Education Minister has done on her own since becoming the Education Minister, is basically put a huge delay on the construction of the DSFM school in Brandon, and that's unfortunate.

But it is nice to know that at least those 20 new seats at USB and the 30 assistant—educational assistant training spots, at least she hasn't cut those.

And so, in a couple years, the Education Minister will be able to pat herself on the back and go and take a stool and pick the low-hanging fruit that we have planted for her in regards to new either francophone or French immersion educational assistants and teachers.

And so I guess I'll ask the minister, in the last just over a year and a half that the NDP government has been in government, how many new francophone or French immersion teachers do we have in the province?

MLA Schmidt: I thank the member for the question.

Again, Manitobans are smart. Manitobans pay attention. Manitobans know I've never patted myself on the back at all. I'm here to serve Manitobans; it's my humble privilege to do so. I'm happy to work with a fantastic team under the leadership of a visionary Premier (Mr. Kinew), and we come—very privileged to come to work every single day and work on behalf of Manitobans.

There's a lot of work to do, as I've said several times today. There is much to do. We've accomplished a lot, and we certainly have a lot to lose if we go back to a PC government.

So I've never patted myself on the back. I've also never broken The Conflict of Interest Act in Manitoba. The member in his question mentioned the pausing of a school for the DSFM. Thank goodness—thank goodness—we paused. Coming into government we had a lot of questions, some of those questions were answered today in the Chamber: a historic day here in Manitoba, a dark day for Manitoban democracy.

We have a lot of questions to ask, so we had to pause all of those schools and we had to look into each one of those schools and make sure that the contracts awarded under the previous government were done so in a way that gives value for Manitobans.

So Manitobans learned a lot today. Manitobans have a lot of questions about how the member opposite awarded child-care centres. There's a lot of questions to be asked. Manitobans have a lot of questions. We got some of those answers today. We'll keep working on behalf of Manitobans. We'll keep being transparent, we'll keep uncovering the mess that the PCs left us with and we'll continue to fund education. We'll continue to listen. We'll continue to work with our education partners, superintendents, school boards, educators; and we're going to do that every day to

make sure that we are serving and meeting the needs of children in Manitoba.

That is who I work for. That is who I answer to, and I am so proud and humbled to do so. We have an important task as government. It is a sacred privilege that we've been given, and again, we're going to make progress every single day, every single year.

How many French language teachers are there in the province of Manitoba today? There's more. There are more teachers working in our system today, certainly than there was in 2023: 630—at least 630 more educators working in the province of Manitoba today, thanks to the investments made by the NDP government in partnership with school divisions. It's great news.

Again, I'm not going to stand here and lie to Manitobans: there's a lot of work to do. There's a lot of ground to recover. There is so much catching up to do after seven and a half years of chronically underfunding the education system. We're going to make progress on French language instruction here in Manitoba. We're going to make progress on Indigenous language immersion, something that's never been done in Manitoba before—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The hour being 5 o'clock, the committee will rise.

ROOM 255

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:40)

The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of Estimates of Executive Council.

Questions will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Looking forward to getting some questions here on the economy to the Premier (Mr. Kinew).

So I'll start off with this question here. So the Premier can answer for Manitoba here.

The total value of Manitoba building permits for March 2025 is down 11.6 per cent from February and down 34.5 per cent from March of last year. Manitoba's residential building permits are also down 16.5 per cent from February. Meanwhile, the value of non-residential building permits for March 2025 is also down 2.1 per cent to \$117.1 million, and down 60 per cent compared to last March.

So just based on those numbers alone, we can see that, under this NDP government and this Premier, (Mr. Kinew) that the economy is not doing so well. Building permits are down, non-residential building permits are down 61 per cent from March of last year, 35 per cent for the total value.

The combined—that combined with unemployment around 6 per cent, the highest it's been in the past seven years—five years, sorry—and exports down—and significantly down to China 31.5 per cent, and the US down 3.4 per cent: all the stats suggest a struggling economy under the NDP. Some may call—we're headed into a recession under this Premier's leadership.

In fact, TD Bank's chief economist is saying that Canada will shed another 100,000 jobs this year and will have negative growth in the next two quarters, including last year's budget introduced—sorry. Last year's budget introduced a rental housing construction tax credit, but it doesn't seem to be having any impact or a large dip in residential building permits, and the construction industry has yet to wait until they file their income taxes to get their tax credits—all signs that this Premier has officially killed the economic horse. *[interjection]*

While he laughs here—for Manitobans, you can probably hear him laughing with his arrogance and his demeanour, where Manitobans are actually serious about the economy. Premier thinks it's a joke. We don't. We don't.

An Honourable Member: No, I think the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) is a joke.

Mr. Khan: It's unfortunate that the Premier wants to use such language, but it's okay. Manitobans will see this man—or, this actor—for who he really is. And his smile will only go so far.

So I ask the Premier: What else is he doing to recession-proof our economy and what is he doing to combat these Chinese and American tariffs? What's his plan going forward?

I've asked the Premier numerous times in the House; refuses to answer any questions in the House. And here, Manitobans, he won't answer any questions either. Serious questions on our economy, on our growth, on Chinese tariffs, on American tariffs—no answers.

So I ask him to provide some detail on how many new residential rental units are being created, how many builders are receiving his tax credit for these rental properties and what is he going to do to

incentivize the building of new homes for first-time home buyers in Manitoba?

An Honourable Member: That's it?

Mr. Khan: That's it.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): What a joke. The Leader of the Opposition is the leader of a morally bankrupt political party on a day when history has been made for all the wrong reasons. And he comes in here to read documents that have been prepared by his team that walk him into a trap and he doesn't even see it coming.

The first thing I'm going to do is I'm not going to thank Donald Trump. I'm not going to go on a podcast and say, I would say thank you to Mr. Trump; I would say thank you. And then I'm not going to come into the House and then repeat it six more times or eight more times.

First time he's raised Chinese tariffs ever, even though we've been talking about this for many months, working with the ag sector and exporters. Is he going to thank you for those tariffs too? I don't know; we'll see.

Put the head in the sand, turn to your right and pretend to be engaged in an important conversation—doesn't work when you have to face up to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's report.

The member made some comments about being in government—yes; no, I know. Let's go to the report. And I quote directly from the executive summary: On October 3, 2023, Manitobans voted in a Provincial general election.

I was there. Think all the members of the committee were there. Think we remember it quite well.

Let's continue on: The sitting government of the Progressive Conservative party was defeated.

Oh, I love that first clause. Oh, it's so good. What could be better than that?

Oh, here, the next clause: And a new government of the New Democratic Party was sworn in on October 18, 2023. Cabinet ministers of the defeated government remained in office between these two dates.

You know who the person asking the questions is? A Cabinet minister who remained in office between those dates.

So I guess what I'm trying to say here is, does the member know David Filmon?

Mr. Khan: Thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for—actually, I don't thank the Premier. And Manitobans won't thank the Premier, for he's not answering any questions. I asked specific questions on economic growth, on development of units in the province, how many permits he's issued, why building permits are down under this NDP, and he doesn't want to answer.

He wants to talk about a joke. Well, if he wanted to talk about what is a joke, I think the Premier just needs to look in the mirror. And he won't see his own record too far behind him. I will go on the Premier's criminal record. If we want to talk about records and we want to talk about the past, then we can talk about the Premier's criminal record—

The Chairperson: Order, please.

Can you please tie the commentary back to the topic at hand in Estimates, please?

Thank you.

Mr. Khan: You know, we'll tie it back to the relevant comment because we're talking about past. We're talking about past, and where we're at today and this past shapes to where the Premier is and his ability to answer the questions here today.

The Premier's criminal record will speak to himself on his ability to answer questions and think this is a joke. His ability to attack members and bully members while we're sitting here, while he's heckling us here. You can see in the Chamber where he does it over and over again. He wants to heckle and control and bully and intimate. It's exactly what's happening here today.

The purpose of committee is to answer—ask questions—[*interjection*] And he's heckling me here, again. Let's move this mic over here so maybe we can get the Premier caught on there. There you go, so now Manitobans can hear the Premier, and we'll hear the Premier heckle some more in committee here today.

* (15:50)

Asking serious questions about the economy. Manitobans are worried under this NDP government. We've tabled in the House dozens and dozens of reports where Manitobans are paying more under this NDP government; where the Finance Minister himself—where the media has called him a sloppy, end quote, for not including the rebates for Manitobans; where Manitobans are paying more now under this NDP government; where building permits, as I mentioned, are down, year—month over month, year over year, under this NDP; where unemployment is up to 6 per cent

under this NDP; where non-residential building permits are down under this NDP.

Education property taxes are up under this NDP—over \$300 million taxed under this NDP government—[*interjection*] I hope Manitobans can hear their Premier heckling again, once again, on the mic. That's who he is, he's a bully. He's a bully. It's clear as day he's a bully. Manitobans will see this.

He operates his caucus this way, he operates his personal life this way. We can just look back to the Premier's past and see this. He's nothing but a bully. He's nothing but a bully.

An Honourable Member: Like when you cried in the scrum.

Mr. Khan: That the Premier wants to say now—the Premier is trying to, I don't know, emotionally attack me for saying that I've cried in the House. Yes, I don't care. So what?

He's actually—there's nothing wrong with a man having emotions. There's nothing wrong with a man—I mean this is the toxicity that his own friend—former friend said about him—has says about him: the toxicity, the bullying, by this Premier.

The member from Fort Garry said it over and over again that he's a bully, he's toxic. That's who he is. And he's trying to shame me here for saying that, yes, I've cried in the Chamber. So what? So what?

An Honourable Member: Crocodile tears. Liar.

Mr. Khan: And now he's calling me a liar, saying crocodile tears. I mean, Manitobans are really going to see this Premier for who he is. And just two weeks on the job, I'm already under his skin, already in his head. Already he can see the wheels falling off the bus, and he wants to go on a report where I'm not mentioned in it, I'm not listed in it, and yet he wants to attack me for it.

And it's embarrassing to see—[*interjection*] Now they've got the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) here heckling, you've got all these guys standing or sitting on the other side that they think they can bully and they think they can intimidate. It's not going to work. The numbers are clear as day.

Manitoba is worse off under this NDP. Life is less affordable under this NDP. People are paying more under this NDP. Crime is up; health-care wait times are higher. The Minister of Health has a D- from one of their biggest supporters—the nurses union gave them a D-.

So I'll ask the Premier (Mr. Kinew) again: Can he please provide some details on residential units? How many residential units are being created, and how many builders are receiving his fake, I guess, tax credits, since they haven't got them yet for the rental properties?

Mr. Kinew: Oh, man, I feel for the PC caucus, you know? Your party stuck you with this leader, and wow. Yes, no, I really feel for the members of the PC caucus.

I mean, basic policy issues. The rebate on the retail sales tax for people building rental units is different than the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit. These are important policy considerations that somebody who wants to lead a province should be able to distinguish.

Heckling comes from the opposite side. That's fine, that's all they got. What are they going to say about the fact that Heather Stefanson, the person that they all supported as leader, was just fined 18 grand today?

Unemployment: Manitoba ranks well compared to the other provinces. We talk about inflation: it's way better today than it was under the PCs. Let those words sink in.

Crime down. And that's why the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen) has been sitting down for the past four weeks. Every day was getting up. Every day, he was getting up. Hasn't been a question on crime in weeks. Health care? Thousands more people working on the front lines.

Confidence in government, which is the foundation for an effective economy. To have a capitalist system you need to have a government that can appropriately enforce contract law. That is a requirement. The ability for a government to enforce contract law comes from them having moral standing. Yes, that is accurate.

And for a government to lose that moral standing by, say, violating constitutional principles and conventions, is a severe threat to the Manitoba and Canadian economy.

So, again, this Conflict of Interest Commissioner's report which does invoke the member opposite—I hate to break it to him; hasn't seen it yet, I guess. But sort of talking in circles in a scrum without knowing what to make of it. He should know that this report says that every single Cabinet minister, himself included, was required to know what the caretaker convention was in the summer of 2023.

So every single member of the PC caucus who sat in the Cabinet knew what the caretaker convention was. They were specifically briefed on it, they were specifically reminded of it and they were directed that they had to understand that it was their responsibility to uphold the caretaker convention. And yet, it was violated multiple times, we see today.

So I ask the member opposite, the economy's really strong and in good hands because we don't thank Donald Trump, unlike him. He loves Donald Trump because—well, one minute, when Justin Trudeau was in the blackface scandal, he was posting selfies with him because maybe he thought that was going to get him some support at the time, but then two years later, he's running around with the PCs, they don't like Justin Trudeau, so he changes his colours and all of a sudden: oh, thank you, Donald Trump. Whatever.

I mean, the words of an irrelevant actor still bear repeating on the record in the case of the Leader of the Opposition because this report of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner said that it was his responsibility to uphold the caretaker convention and he was specifically briefed and reminded of this in August, 2023.

An Honourable Member: I'm going to call relevance on this.

Mr. Kinew: It's a global discussion and there is no formal intervention here. There's not a point of order; no matter of privilege, and so this is very relevant. We are in Executive Council; I'm talking about the president of the Executive Council who just broke the law; 18-grand fine—first time in history.

So the member opposite filibustering himself, getting worked up, describing his internal emotional states, better known as qualia when we're talking about the philosophical inquiries of the mind—bring it back to brass tacks: Do you know David Filmon, through the Chair?

Does he know David Filmon? Why is David Filmon in this report?

Mr. Khan: I guess the Premier still thinks he's in opposition. He wants to ask questions and not answer any questions. Maybe he should start answering questions.

I mean, he'll be back in opposition shortly, so another two years he'll be back in. He'll be right back at it: the pit bull, attack dog that he is, the toxic, bullying leader that he is. From his own members, from former members, from past relationships, from

cab drivers to ex-partners, to MLAs: everyone can see that this Premier is nothing but a bully.

He wants to talk. He talks about heckling and—in the House, well, it's funny to note, maybe the Premier (Mr. Kinew) can go back or his nightmare chief of staff, as he likes to call him, can go—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: Order.

The First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: Point of order. I just want to point out that the title is not nightmare chief of staff, it's in reference to the—our chief of staff who is the Tories' worst nightmare. And I encourage all the members opposite grinning or looking dejected as they do, to read the report and you'll see plenty of proof as to why he is your worst nightmare.

The Chairperson: The Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), would you like to respond to this alleged point of order?

Sorry, we're still on that point of order. *[interjection]* Okay, sorry.

Mr. Khan: In our last committee here, it was clear that we—the Premier can make up whatever names he wants for his staff, so we call him the—Manitoba's nightmare because he is Manitoba's nightmare. He's advising this Premier, so if the Premier can make up a title for him we will also make up a title for him and call him Manitoba's worst nightmare who leads the puppet strings on this Premier.

So no point of order. The Premier admits himself it's not a point of order.

The Chairperson: So, as already established, just officially on record, that was not a point of order.

* * *

The Chairperson: Moving back to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Khan: Like I said, the Premier's chief of staff, Manitoba's worst nightmare, who, under his leadership, has made cost of living higher than it's ever been in this province, increased education property taxes to historic rates, all under this nightmare of a chief of staff for Manitobans who advised this Premier directly.

* (16:00)

So when we talk about heckling and moral standing and moral high ground, coming from a Premier who has numerous run-ins with the law, numerous run-ins with the justice system, and he wants to stand up here and talk about moral high ground and standings.

It's interesting to note the behaviour of his colleagues—over 20 heckling points of order called to one—20 to one. *[interjection]* And here we go again. The Premier's still heckling—still heckling, still talking, trying to overtalk me.

But that's okay; that's what he does. What he needs to realize is I actually don't care how much he heckles me. He can heckle me all he wants, I think it's fantastic. And now he wants to bully and talk about facial expressions and, you know, insult me for whatever he feels like he thinks he can insult me for. That's fine. We're going to take the high ground. I don't need to insult him. I'm just going to talk about the facts, and the facts on him—the facts on him are, he's a bully. The facts on him: he's not answering any questions.

And we want to talk about moral and moral high ground and ethics, let's take a look at some of these by this NDP government. Let's take a look at the NDP pointing fingers on ethics. The Natural Resources Minister—and Indigenous Futures—violated ethics rules when his store received government contracts. Can maybe the Premier comment on if he sold those stores like he said he would?

The NDP have no business pointing the finger on ethics when their leader has received a complaint for creating a toxic workplace environment through bullying and abusive language—exactly what we're seeing here today. Has he taken anti-harassment training yet? We'll find out if he answers that question.

And still, before the Ethics Commissioner, there's still a report waiting to come out from the Ethics Commissioner that the leader confessed he flew on a private chartered jet twice and never once reported that. That's a violation; talk about ethics moral high ground.

And when I asked the Premier numerous times in the last committee, will he provide proof of payment? No. Will he show Manitobans that he paid for it personally? No. Will he show an invoice? No. Will he show a cheque that he wrote that was cashed? No.

I mean, when you want to talk about morality and high grounds and ethics, I think the Premier, again, once again should just look in the mirror, and when he looks in the mirror tonight and he sees that smug, arrogant smile looking back at him he will say:

Wow, I am not the right person for this job. I have no morality as the Premier of Manitoba.

I mean, this—on and on, but we only have a minute left here, so I'm going to move onto the question and then we can get back to more, because I've got about five pages of ethics violations against this Premier (Mr. Kinew), so we can go into that—we can go into that afterwards.

I'll ask the Premier a question on hiring he's done here in Manitoba. So the Premier, can he confirm for us if Daniel Blaikie is still an employee of the government and Executive Council, and what his salary is? What does he do for the Premier, and how does he advise the Premier?

Very simple question—there's been multiple questions throughout this, and maybe he wants to take a stab at if he's going to provide Manitobans with proof of his payment for taking a private plane; maybe he's going to talk about, you know, the economy and unemployment at 6 per cent under the Premier. But simple: Is Daniel Blaikie still an employee, how much does he make, and how does he advise the Premier?

The Chairperson: So I didn't want to interrupt the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), but earlier there was made reference to political staff, and just a general guidance to everyone on both sides that political staff should not be drawn into the debate.

Mr. Kinew: Thank you, honourable Chair, for that direction, there.

Okay, so here's how it's going to go, guys. I'm going to go waste a bunch of time in Estimates asking these questions I'm reading from a script, and then when I get the heat put back on me by the Premier, I'm going to turn and pretend to be engaged deeply in conversation, and then as long as he talks, just no matter what's going on, just keep engaging me in conversation.

Seemed like a good strategy, I guess, when you're working it up in the PC caucus room. But I think, today of all days, let's have a real discussion about issues that matter.

You want to talk about the economy? Great. In order for contract law to be enforced there needs to be a government with proper moral standing. The PCs destroyed their own ability through the landfill ads and the anti-trans ads, and then Manitobans rejected them.

And then even after they lost power, what did they do? Well, very clear, painstaking detail, they violated the caretaker convention. When the member gets an

opportunity to read the report, he's going to see the Conflict of Interest Commissioner say that this undermines the legitimacy of government.

If you want to talk about the economy, I would say through the Chair, anyone needs to be able to explain why a Progressive Conservative government would undermine the legitimacy of government and therefore call into question their ability to enforce the proper functioning of the market.

There's a lot that the member is going to learn in the coming months as leader—maybe years, if he's lucky. He doesn't currently have the amount of support necessary to survive a leadership review at a political convention, but maybe that will change in time.

And so what I would say is there's a couple good rules of thumb that he should keep in mind. One would be no staff. You could attack me all you want. I kind of enjoy it; I like the back and forth, the cut and thrust and jibe of question period. I'm—I signed up for it. I enjoy it. But when you invoke people who can't respond on the record, it's a low blow, plus it sets a dangerous precedent.

Inevitably, the winds will—of political change will blow, probably more than a decade from now based on the current trajectory of the PCs and their abysmal fundraising, but at some point, it will change. And at that future date, you don't want your staffers to become a target. It's kind of like the golden rule, right. So whether you abide by the golden rule or not, I think it's a good strategy; just leave the staff out of it. Take all the shots you want at myself.

Similarly, no kids. Don't bring up people's kids in question period; don't bring up people's kids on the record; don't bring up people's kids in ads; don't bring up people's kids when you're doing political hits. I'm saying this to the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen) through you, the Chair.

I understand that, last week, the member for Brandon West asked a number of inappropriate questions, saying on the record: those members which have children. He's new here, so perhaps he doesn't appreciate how dangerous it is to invoke—

The Chairperson: Order. Order, please.

Due to the fact that this matter is currently under advisement with the Speaker, we can't address it here in Estimates.

Back to the Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, a hundred per cent.

No, the point is made and, you know, everyone can learn. Everyone can learn. And so the member, from the outside, looks like a decent person, but again, sitting there with a smug expression trying to heckle back now, like, doesn't make any sense. Just take the L. He got some bad advice. He asked a question that was inappropriate. Don't do it again.

Now I'm going to table the slides that the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) was provided about the caretaker convention. He knew. He was told by the former clerk of the Executive Council that it was his responsibility to uphold this; every single member of that former Cabinet was. So why'd they do it? Why did they participate?

The member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), you know, he would know something about this as well, too. He was there: minister of the Crown in August 2023—shameful. Shameful violation of the core principle of our democracy.

So the member opposite knew full well about the caretaker convention; stands to reason that he knew very well about all these violations that are documented in this report. But again, does he know David Filmon? I think the people of Manitoba should know an answer to that.

We see a long list of donors year over year with the PCs who continue to persist and, I got to say, the fact that every time a PC government leaves office, they do so under a cloud of suspicion, and in this case, outright wrongdoing, proved beyond a shadow of a doubt. There's probably certain narratives that form in the minds of people here in Manitoba.

So, yes, let's have a fulsome discussion of these issues. Does the member know David Filmon?

Mr. Khan: I actually appreciate the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) comments on that and I will follow suit; if the Premier wants to leave staff out of it, then I have no problem leaving staff out of it.

I believe the Premier's the one that brought his chief of staff into this conversation when he first introduced him. A point of order was made at that point with the title he had given him. It was ruled it wasn't a point of order, so another name was given to him by our side; Premier gave him a name.

But if he wants to leave the chief of staff out of this and staff out of it, that's no problem. I think it's actually the right thing to do, and we don't have to go that way again if the Premier commits today to leaving staff out of it. So that's fine. We can do that.

When it comes to asking questions and answering questions, I—Premier is the one that is supposed to be answering questions for Manitobans. Manitobans have a right to know. I've asked him dozens of questions in here, in the Chamber—refuses to answer the last one; it was a very simple one. It was about Daniel Blaikie. Made a press announcement, went out when he was hired.

* (16:10)

I've asked the Premier if Daniel Blaikie is still an employee of the government and Executive Council and what his salary is. What does he do for the Premier and how does he advise the Premier? Not a very hard question if you hire someone. Not a hard question when the Premier has gone out and made a big announcement about hiring him, and yet, doesn't want to engage in that question.

I've asked the Premier, again, questions on developments, permits, GDP, education property taxes, how seniors are going to pay their property bills—education property tax bills under this government when the \$1,500 tax credit was left off. Premier doesn't want to answer any of those questions.

So Manitobans can see that this Premier is truly just wasting time. He wants to bring up the caretaking convention and talk about a report that was just tabled today, and he wants to bring me into that. I—from the quick glance that I've had out of the hundred-plus pages, I don't believe I'm mentioned in it; maybe the Premier can say if I'm mentioned in it. I don't think that I'm mentioned in it. I don't know if he's read it or not, or if his staff has read it. If they can advise that—I'm not in the report.

I have said that we accept the rulings of the commissioner. I don't know what else the Premier is asking when it comes to that question. I don't know where he's going on this. Maybe he can clarify that and stop his obsession with PC members—or PC donors in the past. I don't understand where he's going with that but what I do know is that it is our job as the opposition to ask questions of this government, to get answers for Manitobans.

So I'll ask the Premier again if he can comment—please confirm if Daniel Blaikie is still an employee of the government and Executive Council and what his salary is. What does he do for the Premier and how does he advise the Premier?

A very simple question. Premier can hopefully answer that, we can move forward. We can leave staff

out of this and we can have a fulsome discussion at committee like we're supposed to do.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, it's sad when the opposition filibusters their own time in Estimates. It's a testament to the weakness of preparation or strategy on their side.

Daniel Blaikie, yes, we put out a message to the public saying we hired him and he still works for us; he does a great job. Salary is publicly disclosed.

I mean, what are we doing here? You're filibustering your own time. The opposition, I'm saying royally to you as a collective. You show up late. What more do you want? I mean, we can keep doing this for sure, but again, all the people who violated the caretaker convention, the member opposite included, would know that running a government takes a lot of hours out of the day. I think this time would better be spent serving the people of Manitoba.

But, hey, that's just me. I'll keep coming back if you want to keep doing this over and over again. And cede your time to members from other political persuasions, you know, you could filibuster yourself, that's fine. Can keep asking questions with long preambles to filibuster your own time. Questionable public value.

But, again, all Cabinet ministers were reminded by the clerk's office that it was their responsibility to review the presentation and to understand its requirements, quote, end quote. It's verbatim from the report. The member opposite was a minister of the Crown.

Daniel Blaikie does great work for us. He's bringing home the bag on many topics; North End Water Pollution Control Centre is one example.

What does this member do for the well-connected Tory insiders? Why do we keep hearing names like Filmon and Stefanson over and over again from generation to generation? How does that inspire trust in the general public?

One of these people who's named, they have a whole section in this report with a title header that is attributed as a quote to this person. This person is a large donor to the PC Party last year; after the landfill ads, after the anti-trans ads, this person still decided to donate. Maybe he donated to the member's leadership contest. I don't know. The last name Stefanson shows up in their donations again.

So I can tell you that the NDP is a party about merit. It's a party that's open to everybody. One of my favourite stories is the fact that we had somebody who dropped out of high school to work to support their

family, worked their way up as a shop steward from the manufacturing floor and went on to become the Finance Minister of this province in the 1980s. Eugene Kostyra, great guy.

PCs, though, like one of the takeaways from this report is there's a revolving door of last names in the PC Party that keeps rearing their head generation after generation, and now, just as the Filmon government left office with the MTS scandal hanging over their head, in which a former premier is alleged to have made quite a tidy sum. And also, with the vote-rigging scandal left hanging over their head, now we have the Stefanson government leaving office with this not allegation, but documentation, proof, settled fact that they broke the law and they violated a constitutional principle.

Let's show up and let's have a litigation of these issues. I'm more than game for it. Members opposite want to heckle, they want to taunt. I don't mind taking a few shots to my personal reputation in order to stand up for our democracy. You want to make personal animus a part of this game? Great. I've been called worse things by far better people. Brian Pallister, he called me terrible things in this very same committee, right. I think everybody remembers that.

I'm fine. I'm happy to continue on with this, because there is a fundamental problem with the PCs. It is exposed here. We see it each and every day with the, oh, today, a new day starts, and let me start heckling two seconds later in QP; to the, oh, tough on crime, law and order; to, I've got nothing to say about Heather Stefanson's violations.

There's a rot and there's a hypocrisy that is made worse by the moral attitude of condescension towards other Manitobans that we see on display from the PC Party. There is a repugnant character to the violation of our Constitution that is amplified by the fact that this amazing Charter that we have that is supposed to empower the rights of all people is repeatedly targeted by the PCs to vilify Indigenous people and to bully, to use the member's terminology, members of the LGBTQ community.

Mr. Khan: So I asked the Premier (Mr. Kinew) a question on Daniel Blaikie, a staffer of his. He didn't say how much he makes, but a quick glance, he makes—it started at \$130,000. That was eight months ago.

So he does work for the Premier, does report to the Premier and he is delivering, is exactly what the Premier has said, quote, in his last answer.

So if he works for the Premier (Mr. Kinew), gets paid over \$100,000 to work for the Premier, you would think that there'd be some sort of correspondence or communication with the Premier and his office. Makes sense, I think. The Premier just said he works for him, that he reports to him.

So I will read from a FIPPA request. Requested a FIPPA request for all briefing notes, reports and correspondence between the Premier, senior adviser on intergovernmental affairs, Daniel Blaikie and the Premier Wab Kinew himself.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Khan: But—

Point of Order

The Chairperson: Point of order. The First Minister, on this point of order.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. No, thanks, Chair. I think you know where I'm going with this one, but just want to remind the member, by asking you for a ruling, that you're not to refer to people who are members of the Chamber, members of the Legislative Assembly, by their given names.

You're supposed to use their ministerial title, constituency, MLA name. I know it's a difficult day to be a member of the PC caucus and so, you know, you get a little rattled and you forget some of these basic rules of engagement. But I just want to softly and gently put that reminder on to the record by asking that that rule be respected.

The Chairperson: The Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), would you like to respond to this point of order? Okay, we'll just take a moment, thank you.

So that is, in fact, a point of order. And just—I'd like to remind the Leader of the Official Opposition that it's Honourable First Minister or the Premier.

So back to—Leader of Official Opposition, back to you and your time.

* * *

Mr. Khan: So as I was saying, a FIPPA request was put in for briefing notes, reports and correspondence between the Premier, senior adviser and intergovernmental affairs, Daniel Blaikie and the Premier.

* (16:20)

But the response came back saying that there were no records between April 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024.

So paying Mr. Blaikie over \$100,000 for over eight months has not produced a single document, according to his own government.

So I ask the Premier—because he said, in his last answer, he said Mr. Blaikie is working for him, Mr. Blaikie is doing work; I said—question, follow-up is: What type of work is Mr. Blaikie doing if there hasn't been one document from Mr. Blaikie and the Premier's office? Why is there no paper trail for all the work this special adviser is doing? Or is the Premier hiding something from Manitobans? Or is the Premier just paying his friend, Mr. Blaikie, to sit at home and do nothing and collect a paycheck on the backs of Manitobans?

After eight months, you'd think there'd be at least one document. You'd think that there'd be at least one document produced by Mr. Blaikie, and there's nothing. So if the Premier could add some clarity to that, that would be great.

And I know the Premier wants to continue to go on the caretaker convention, and he wants to bring up ministers. I'm not listed in there. The Premier can attack me all he wants. He thinks that he's scoring points by attacking me. I know he wants to fight Heather Stefanson and he wants to fight people that are no longer here. It's in this Premier's blood to fight and assault people and bully people, and that's what he wants to do. It's not going to work on me.

So if the Premier can simply answer the question, when it comes to Mr. Blaikie, the lack of documents and FIPPA requests that showed up with zero communication from Mr. Blaikie and the Premier himself.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I don't know who's going to go tell the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton)—I don't know if the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) is going to break it to him. Is it going to be the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen)? Sorry, pal, the leader of the PC caucus doesn't know that you're still an MLA.

Members there going on and on about, oh, people in the power, da, da, da, da, da. It's his government. He got the briefing on the caretaker convention. A member of his caucus was just fined, first time in Manitoba history. He celebrated Heather Stefanson. Sit in the front row, ask questions of the Premier, embarrass yourself further after losing government.

Yes, we're going to go on the Conflict of Interest Commissioner report, like, for several years to come, I would say—precedent setting, terrible, in all the bad ways.

So, yes, I just want to, you know, apologize to the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) that the leader of your caucus doesn't know that you're still an MLA. That's got to hurt. Surprised he didn't get up to ask a question today; obviously, I'm being a little sarcastic there. But maybe he'll get up in the House soon. We'll see.

Also, while we're sort of kicking the member opposite while he's down, I'll say that, how long ago was it that he agreed not to attack staff before he started asking questions about Mr. Blaikie? Was it two minutes? Five minutes? Seven minutes? I don't know. A second ago, you know, he's going to put his foot forward, his version of moral uprightness and certitude and, yes, no, I'll follow the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) intervention and not attack staff.

By the way, Daniel Blaikie sitting at home—like, what? No, he's not sitting at home. He's working hard every day—the North End Water Pollution Control Centre, critical piece of infrastructure that the PCs were unsuccessful in getting done during their time in office. Daniel Blaikie has brought a very, very complicated, I'll say, piece of funding together to pay for that; many other examples that we could point to.

Point to each of our staff and we could say they're doing a great job, and here are the ways in which they have made a difference for you, the people of Manitoba, predominantly on health care and affordability.

Unfortunately, when we look at the PCs' staff—I'm not talking about anyone today, but it's the people in this report, like—gee, I don't know. Going to take some time, work our way through all this stuff—pretty rough.

So, yes, the members opposite, again, haven't won an election without Brian Pallister in something like 30 years, leave office under a cloud of scandal. Every time, Manitobans show them the door. Like, what is it about the PC Party ethos that makes that happen time and time again?

Well, again, you read this report here today, improperly advancing a private interest. A section: "Did we get it done today?" Direct quote. Who's asking the question? PC Party donor. PC Party donor who shares the last name of a former premier. Why does the PC Party continue to just recycle the same old, same old? Well, again, I think a lot of people get involved in politics because they think it's bad, when it's just the same old, tired insiders doing things for each other; scratching each other's backs. So it's a pretty conclusive piece of evidence right here.

And what's changed since the terrible landfill ad election campaign? Same candidates, same campaign staff—won't mention their names, but everybody knows what I'm talking about. So, again, oh, nothing to do with me. Like, we saw the member opposite start off with this when, you know, they were still in government. We'd be like, oh, yes, Brian Pallister—nope, I didn't close the emergency room; I had nothing to do with it.

It's always the, like, me-first mentality, you know? Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) saw that; his leader doesn't even know he's still an MLA. Having a tough enough day as it is, gets kicked while he's down by his leader. It's tough.

And, again, when we're talking about insiders, people doing things to scratch each other's back, let's not forget this member decided to run after getting a sweetheart deal from Heather Stefanson: 500K when other businesses were really, really struggling because the government was shutting them down.

French spoken

Plus ça change, plus ça reste la même.

Translation

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Mr. Khan: It's funny how the Premier thinks that asking a question in opposition is somewhat attacking staff. Asking a question about what's the staff done for him, how much does the staff make, by this NDP government and members opposite: it's an attack.

It's our job to ask questions. They don't like answering questions, then don't take the job. It's our job to—it's not attack to ask a question on if he works for you, what does he do? He gets paid over \$130,000; what does he do? And if he reports to you, like you said he does, where are the reports? Where's the information? Nothing in eight months with the FIPPA request.

It's not an attack; it's asking a question. We're asking questions; Premier doesn't want to talk about it. Premier wants to continue on what he believes to be his moral high horse or ethics, given his riddled past himself—given the past of his members on his side of the House.

We've gone through a few of them, but let's bring them back again; there's new ones. This Premier himself seems to forget that he is currently being investigated by the Ethics Commissioner.

The Chairperson: Order.

Since that matter is currently under advisement, I need to ask the member to refrain from referring to it here in Estimates. Okay?

Mr. Khan: Thank you, honourable Chair, and to quote the Premier (Mr. Kinew): point's been made. So I'll move on to the next one.

An Honourable Member: Dad. Call me Dad.

Mr. Khan: This Premier himself wants to continue to heckle and bully and now, I know you can't hear it at home, but he's sitting there saying, call him Dad, call him Dad. I don't know; maybe that's what he gets his members to call him. Maybe that's what he gets, you know, people around Manitoba to call him—maybe staffers call him Dad.

You know, we know when he has said to people who trained in MMA with him, which, talk to his leadership and his toxicity. His comments that he said about jiu-jitsu fighters and MMA fighters when they're wrestling. I don't know if the Premier wants to go down that path—maybe he can repeat them here today for everybody?

If the Premier feels so inclined to take a trip down memory lane, maybe some of his colleagues want to talk about the language the Premier uses. I've never used that type of language. The language I've used is that I love my son. I love my son more than anything, and parents love their kids more than anything, and as a parent, we have a right to know what's going on in our children's lives. I love my kid. I won't comment on anyone else, but that's where we'll go with that.

Premier wants to talk about taking a moral high ground, and yet he just continues to insult and attack and put falsehoods on the record, and he just wants to avoid asking—answering any questions. Asked about education property taxes, won't answer. Asked about GDP growth, won't answer. Asked about investments in the province, he won't answer.

Asked about building permits, he won't answer. Asked about what staff do, he won't answer. Asked about simple things, like will he provide a proof of payment for a flight he took, won't provide it. What is the Premier hiding?

He wants to talk about ethics and morals and yet he won't answer any of the questions themselves, so you have to ask yourself, what is he doing?

* (16:30)

An Honourable Member: Yes, you really got me here.

Mr. Khan: Yes. He says I really got him here—yes. Well, until he tables those things, until he brings those items forward, no matter what he says, no one actually knows what he's doing.

So we'll get to another question here, and maybe the Premier can actually answer this one. The Premier's Finance Minister is making Manitobans wait for their \$1,500 homeowners affordability rebate until they can fix their sloppy rollout of this. It's sad that Manitobans are now being hit with bills at historical highs and not getting the rebates that this Premier talked about.

The Premier was on the record and said, in Toronto—maybe he was trying to impress his newfound love for Conservative leader Doug Ford, I don't know. Maybe the Premier is making a run for federal leadership and he wants to warm up with everybody here. Who knows? But he did say every Manitoban will get a \$1,600 paycheque—or, \$1,600 cheque. Asked him today in question period, will every Manitoban get that—just repeated his quote; won't answer it. Maybe he'll answer it today. Maybe he'll tell us today, is every Manitoban getting a \$1,600 cheque.

When the Premier and his Finance Minister—sorry, yes, I guess we'll—I understood reset the clock, so I'll just end on: Will the Premier tell Manitobans today, as he said in Toronto, that every Manitoban will get a \$1,600 rebate cheque? Simple question for the Premier, it's a simple yes or no answer.

Mr. Kinew: Every time I see Doug Ford, he's always, like, Wab, you're actually a PC, I'm going to convince you of it.

But after today, like, no. Like, the PCs in Manitoba are terrible. Look at this report. Yuck. Heather Stefanson? How did it turn so dark and mean-spirited, you know what I mean? Like, you meet Heather, whatever, and then next thing you know, they're running anti-trans ads and the landfill ads and then they're violating a constitutional principle to respect the electorate, respect your votes? How did that happen? That's so bizarre. It's really dark.

I do—like, on the question of morality, I do want to call the member out, though, when he's, like, aw shucks, I'm just talking about myself as a parent. No; he knows exactly what he's doing. He knows exactly what he's doing with the parental rights, anti-trans campaign.

And I'll tell you first-hand from having knocked on doors in swing ridings in the last election—which, for the record, are not going to be swing ridings any more; we're looking at swing ridings in rural Manitoba this time around—they say anti-trans, but when you get to the doorstep, it's LGBT.

They don't have the courage to go out and say something anti-LGBT. They won't say something offensive to a gay man. They won't say something offensive to a bisexual person. They won't say something offensive to a lesbian. But they detect a vulnerability when it comes to trans people, and they use that as the thin edge of the wedge to get in there.

And so, yes, I do call out the member purposely trying to misrepresent, mislead—I'll search for your guidance on the appropriate verbiage here—but there is an awareness of the cynical nature of what is going on.

Manitobans see through it. They saw those ads and they said, no, it's not for us. And now it's, oh, you know, I'm just talking about myself as a parent.

Look down the committee. He is your colleague. He is a Manitoban. Now hang your head in shame. Shakes his head no, because he wants to be able to go back to the anti-trans rhetoric in the next campaign.

We defeated them on the landfill issue because we recovered the bodies of two women. They were biting their tongue and remaining quiet because they wanted to say that the landfill search was a failure a few years from now. Thankfully—thankfully, Creator willing, that was not the case and we are bringing these two women home.

And now the member opposite, same thing with the anti-trans stuff. But the thing about him, the same guy—selfie with Justin Trudeau one day, thank you Donald Trump the next day—you know what's going to happen, right? When you're at the PC gala—well, it's probably not a gala any more, it's probably like a PC basement party, whatever that—you know, is going on there. A lot smaller because Wally's not the leader. Soon it'll be, oh, trans and, you know, kids, and da, da, da, da, da, blowing that same dog whistle that was blown about gay men in the 1980s, the exact same allegations.

Not true. Trans people? Good people. Moral leaders have a responsibility to bring people together in society. You know who failed them? Heather Stefanson. Smoking gun. Documentation. Now the member newly squeaked by the convoluted leadership strata that was designed by the same donors to make sure that a city

PC would get in instead of the rural base. Oh, yes, no, we got the strategy. We're going to keep asking these same questions and da, da, da, da, da, like, no, man.

You picked the wrong guy. You're going to talk about quotes from past, I'll tell you about a quote from about an hour ago. This member asked about the mine being jammed through by a government that lost power, and I quote: I honestly can't comment on the mining project because I wasn't a minister. End quote.

I wasn't a minister. I wasn't a minister. This is public commentary. I'm sure it'll be in the media: Confused PC leader does not remember being a minister of the Crown. That would be the headline, except nobody cares.

What is serious? They violated the caretaker principle.

Mr. Khan: I mean, the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) just spent five minutes talking about absolutely nothing.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Khan: Didn't answer any of the questions that—

The Chairperson: On a point of—order. Order.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: The Honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to say that, you know, although I recognize at the outset this is not a point of order, I think it's important when we call out bigotry, including anti-trans rhetoric, that we acknowledge that that's not nothing. The member can engage in the wedge politics that he has so far failed to use effectively, and I'll keep calling him out.

And then, again, with his posted selfie with Justin Trudeau one day, thank Donald Trump the next day, you know what's going to happen next? He's going to try and show up at the Pride parade. Oh, you got to understand what it's like. Oh, no, Heather made me do it, da, da, da. Please let me be at the Pride parade.

So I'm just saying I want these words on the record.

The Chairperson: The Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), on the point of order.

Mr. Khan: If the Premier will let me finish, and to his own acknowledgment, he recognizes this is not a point of order, if he'd let me finish this, this is absolutely nothing about the question I asked.

But in his bullying fashion like he always does, he cut me off before I could finish the sentence, just like he does with the quotes he wants to read—

half-truths, smoke and mirrors by this Premier (Mr. Kinew). It's not a point of order, according to him himself, it's not a point of order. Period.

The Chairperson: So, as already mentioned, this is not a point of order.

* * *

The Chairperson: Back to the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan).

Mr. Khan: I would like to cede the floor to the member from Fort Garry until 5 p.m. today.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Now, premier-yesterday, in queen's-in question period, the Premier had said this, and I'll quote: "When it comes to folks across Manitoba, a hundred per cent of Manitobans are better off today because you've got a government that adequately funds education."

Now, the Premier would know that Manitoba used to fund about 80 per cent of the education system through general revenue, and the last 20 per cent came from education property taxes. There used to be teacher librarians in every school, there used to be nurses in every school, there used to be lab technicians in high school science labs, class sizes were much smaller. And, in fact, if you compare 20 years ago the education system to now, it's night and day.

And the reason it's like that it's because of chronic underfunding, which has been going on for years, and school boards have had to raise education property taxes to make up provincial shortfalls.

And over the years, education property taxes have become a larger part of how we fund education. And in my riding, Pembina Trails, the parents now pay more in education property tax to fund their children's schools than the Province actually contributes from general revenue. It's now over 50 per cent that they pay through education property taxes. The same is true with St. James-Assiniboia.

* (16:40)

So when school divisions have to use education property taxes to pay for more of their school system than the Province contributes, my question to the Premier is: Does he still consider that adequately funded education?

Mr. Kinew: The questions that come to a government are ones that have to be answered in a specific context. And in this context, we're taking office after years of underfunding and cuts by the morally bankrupt former PC administration.

And, so, again, we're increasing funding. If you look at many of the school divisions since taking office, they've received double-digit increases, and on top of that, you can add the universal school food program funding.

Repairing the damage of an irresponsible, morally bankrupt Progressive Conservative administration will not be accomplished overnight. It's a balancing act of looking at what the needs are for the education system with what the affordability challenges are for the average homeowner and Manitoban, looking at what the other needs are across government. And so when we come to questions in education specifically, which the member's asking about, or in other important priority areas like health care, for example, we have to strive to strike a balance between responsible fiscal stewardship and improving the public services that have been decimated by the former PC government.

Why exactly the PCs did this—like, what exactly did they believe in for so many years? They went off with Brian Pallister and they cut all these public health services and public education services. They went so far as to bring in bill 64, which would've made the situation dramatically worse by centralizing—over-centralizing—a lot of these issues. And then in the last year of their mandate, May, the last six months of their mandate, they go on an unprecedented spending spree and rack up a \$2-billion deficit.

So did they actually believe in fiscal conservatism? Doesn't look like it, because they were willing to betray that principle after seven years of austerity and try to fix it all in one fell swoop. But you can't fix costs held in abeyance for that long in a simple six-month spending spree. And that's part of the challenge that our government has had.

The member will know, because he pays close attention to the education system, that not only are we looking at a situation where the education system was starved, we're also talking about public service deliverers in the form of the educators, the teachers, the EAs, the school leaders, who, themselves, their salaries, their wages, were kept artificially low and then tossed into a situation of province-wide bargaining, which created a new bargaining dynamic for them collectively at the same time that they were trying to get their wages met.

So, again, these are situations where we're trying to, I guess, respond with a multi-variable calculus that says we know that we need to increase education funding so, yes, a hundred per cent of Manitobans are

better off because we're doing that, because the kids will be the benefactors of that in the future.

At the same time, we're trying to do right by the educators because in order for us to maintain morale and increase retention, we have to have adequate compensation and the possibility of career advancement for people. At the same time there's certain targeted areas that educators and those in the profession have been talking about for years. The member will know the school food program is one of those things help kids deal with the barriers that they face before they even come to the classroom, being a refrain that I heard many times.

So you put all those things together, we're making progress; still lot more to do. But the biggest risk we could face is if the members opposite get back in power. And you see why in this report that is the subject of the political discourse today. Not only did they betray their root principles espoused as Conservatives in not being fiscally responsible in any fashion whatsoever during the Heather Stefanson era, they then violated the basic democratic principles that anybody in the public sphere should respect. And it's all the same people. It's all the same people in caucus; it's all the same people in their political apparatus.

Member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, may not be aware that the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) is still on his team, but he is. So, again, these folks get into power after years of causing damage to the education system, with the exclamation point being a disrespect of the fundamental value of people's participation in elections, to me, that's pretty bad.

So we're going to keep talking about it. I know the member's going to ask important questions about education, which are his right to do so, and I will endeavour to answer, but I'm going to keep talking about the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's report because it's very, very crucial that Manitobans understand just how deep and dark things got with the Heather Stefanson administration.

And why you would want to take a career in the public sphere that you were respected on, or maybe the private sphere, and attach yourself to that? Tough. And I don't mean tough like the kids say—

The Chairperson: Member's time has expired.

Before acknowledging the next speaker, I want to take a moment to clarify something for the committee as this has come up once or twice this afternoon.

For clarity, matters being considered by the Ethics Commissioner are not the same as matters under advisement by the Speaker. Matters under advisement by the Speaker, like the point of order raised last week in the House, may not be referred to during debate in the House or committee until the Speaker delivers his ruling. Matters being considered by the Ethics Commissioner may be discussed in debate as there is no such 'prohibition'—prohibition on those matters being mentioned in the House or committee.

Mr. Wasyliw: I appreciate some of the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) analysis. I certainly agree with some of it. But the words he used in the Chamber was that, in his opinion, Manitoba adequately funded education.

We've now seen with school boards 10 to 25 per cent increases in education funding. I was a three-term school trustee and never saw double-digit increases like that; that's unprecedented. You would have to go back to the history books to see that. And they're not doing it because they're greedy; they're doing it because they have to cover their costs, which means that they're not getting enough from the Province to support the education system. And, yes, it's complicated, because they went to central bargaining and that basically lifted up a lot of school divisions that were not paying as much as some of the urban divisions, and there's a cost to that. But right now, the homeowners are bearing that cost.

And the difference between general revenue—it's progressive taxation. School—property tax is not progressive taxation, and you have a lot of seniors who are on fixed incomes or you have newcomer families that are, you know, have three generations in a home in Waverley that are just getting by. And getting these big, massive 10 to 25 per cent hits is tough, and people are struggling.

And I know that this Premier is sympathetic. I know that he cares about these people, and he wants to do right by them, but he had a choice. He had a policy choice. He could've upped the funding of provincial education in order to reduce the requirement for education property taxes to go up 10 to 25 per cent, and he chose not to do that. And yet, he borrowed \$340 million for a gas tax holiday that went mostly to corporations and wealthy people.

So I'm wondering if the Premier can explain why he's shifting the burden onto working families of taxation and why he's making our education system still underfunded and less fair tax-wise.

Mr. Kinew: So when we talk about progressive taxation and regressive taxation, regressive tax would be something like the PCs did, where people with the biggest houses got the biggest cheques. Famously, a company on Bay Street, with a market cap of about \$20 billion at the time, got a million-dollar cheque from the government. That's regressive—regressive, of course, in both senses of the word: regressive in bad, but also regressive in terms of a description of how the burden falls disproportionately on the poor and then, obviously, the benefits disproportionately to the well off.

Progressive taxation seeks to do the opposite. The Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit is an example of progressive taxation, which is why, in trying to move away from the cheques-for-billionaires model that we used to criticize the PCs for, we opted to go with this approach.

So if you have folks who are on the lower side of the property ladder, we'll call it just for colloquial use, those folks are going to get the biggest benefit. There are more Manitobans who are not going to have to pay any sort of education property tax as a result. You can see this most clearly illustrated in rural communities. If you go to the constituencies of many of the members opposite who are trying to make noise about this, the reason why they ask about urban constituencies is because if they were to ask about their own constituencies, they'd find that 99 per cent of their constituents would be better off. And it has to do with the differential property values in communities relative to Winnipeg.

* (16:50)

When we come to the city of Winnipeg, this progressive taxation situation is something that still makes sense. However, we have to recognize the impacts of inflation over time, the need for school funding to be addressed over time and that's why we've taken the decision to increase the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit to \$1,600 in the coming year.

So it'll still be an example of progressive taxation by offering a tax credit to kind of address the inequity in the way that the property tax credit was previously being applied, but the ceiling of that effect will be moved upwards to help compensate for some of the effects that the member's asking about, as well as inflationary impacts and things like that.

So when we're talking about adequacy, I think we have to take a global view. Yes, we put money into people's pockets by reducing the price of gas in

Manitoba. The inelasticity that we see of demand for gasoline is enough to say that over the 12-month period where this measure was in effect, emissions were not going to be impacted in a negative fashion when we're talking climate change. But affordability would be positively helped; people would have that extra 20 bucks or 50 bucks or however much that would work out to based on the time period that we're talking about.

But, again, the members in the PC caucus, what did they do to answer these questions? They mail cheques out to people. Can anyone tell you what the value of any of those cheques were at this point?

They spent several billions dollars of taxpayer money to try and curry favour in the lead up to the election. They made a bizarre decision to pivot away from economic issues into campaign on niche wedge issues like the landfill search and the parental rights search. And I know the member knows, he was just as disgusted by these ads as everyone else in the province was.

And then we see in the report today that they compounded all of that disgrace and self-imposed humiliation by violating the constitutional principle of the caretaker convention. That's all pretty bad.

And then they've chosen a leader who, like, shows up flummoxed, unprepared, easily rattled, prattles on to filibuster his own time in here, presumably just to fly the flag that he showed up for Estimates, and then he takes off.

So, like, what mission was accomplished there? When we have an opposition that asks questions that are all answered by the public record before they show up. You have a leader who cannot maintain a coherent line of inquiry—

The Chairperson: Order.

We can't refer to a member's presence or absence.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I think what I was—I appreciate your direction. And I think how I should've phrased is that the member is unable to sustain a line of inquiry and we see that from the absence of questions that are being posed by the member.

So it's all pretty shameful. We're fixing the damage. We're fixing that damage when it comes to education, when it comes to affordability. But I do invite the member to take a close look at this. Precedent is being set in many important ways and this cloud is going to hang over the PCs for a long, long time, and rightfully

so. This—actions that were taken to advance a private interest? Terrible.

The Chairperson: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wasyliw: So when the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit was initially proposed, the government made the claim that 84 per cent of Manitoba homeowners would be sort of, better off under this plan. But it was based on the average home being \$285,000 or below.

In April of 2025, the average home price is \$403,000 and—plus. And an increased 5.5 per cent from the previous year. And we're seeing that, every year, five, six per cent increases on home values, which means nobody lives in a \$285,000 home, or very few people do. And we heard a stat from the City of Winnipeg that 130,000 properties now in the city of Winnipeg alone is above the threshold, which means people are paying a lot more.

So I'm wondering—I have two questions here for the Premier (Mr. Kinew). The 84 per cent number is no longer valid. What is the accurate number given the math of how many homes would be better off under this plan? And in the next couple of years, with increasing home prices, that number is going to shrink and get smaller and smaller.

And then my second follow-up question is: Will the Premier commit to returning education funding to 80 per cent from general revenue and getting it back down to 20 per cent for education property taxes?

Mr. Kinew: I appreciate the question. The member's asking about education, which is an important priority for both of us.

I would offer, just at the outset, before I get into the substance of it, just a bit of caution on one of the stats that he's citing. The number from the City that is being pointed to there includes commercial properties. So there's a bit of a, I think, mix-up that's happened in some of the reporting there.

So the number—and this is not due to the fault of the member; this has to do with probably how it's being shared in the media or from other channels. We're looping in folks who were not—well, entities, which are not supposed to get the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, so the number is going to be smaller.

Unfortunately, I don't have number at my disposal, because we don't have the City of Winnipeg's data in hand at this point, but we can follow up on that point if there is a desire at the committee to do so.

Now, when it comes to the impacts of rising home prices, when it comes to the impact—related impact of inflation, decisions that are made by the school divisions—the school boards, as we would say colloquially—that is why we're increasing the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, is to respond to those impacts.

So when we were first designing this \$1,500 tax credit—\$1,500, nice round number; it sounds great, who wouldn't want a \$1,500 tax credit? We did the analysis based on, I guess, data that we had from the Finance Department and we compared it.

Okay, first of all, the starting point, this is an example of progressive taxation, because folks on one end of the property ladder will be able to see the greatest benefit relative to their peers who are on the other side—the other end, I should say for consistency.

And then we looked at it further, we compared it to what the PCs were doing with their cheques for billionaires and that approach that we were very critical of in opposition, and so we figured this was a good policy to implement. Because here's a way that we can deliver affordability help related to education property taxes in a way that is fair for people, particularly the people who need the help the most, which—it's not a perfect correlation, but it's a rough correlation that folks who would get the most benefit would be the ones that the \$1,500 number would make a difference for.

From there, okay, how do we address the ongoing nature of rising property values over time and the impact of mill rates and, you know, the overall property tax situation? Okay, let's do \$1,600.

So I think you can see the trajectory, roughly speaking, when it comes to that.

And when it comes to the opposition, like, what are we doing? You know, just look around. I don't need to reflect on anything more than the lack of actions, lack of questions from the opposition. Somebody should draft a really exotic leave request that we pose to the committee right now. Perhaps we should ask for leave to deny all question period questions for the members opposite. Perhaps we should say, you know what, we got better things to do than this; we should dissolve the legislative session until the fall, something like that.

Of course, you know, we'll hit a bit of a snag because this leave request at committee would then have to go to the House and I'm sure the members who are fleeing their responsibility to ask questions would probably hear the bells ringing at some point and

maybe ask one of the clerks, hey, what is this leave request all about? Can you explain this in terms that I could understand.

And then they'll say, well—not the clerks, but just, you know, whoever's talking and advising the PCs would say—well, we explained the caretaker convention to you in very clear terms and you still violated it. How should we do this? Like, are you guys going to, like, wilfully disregard the advice that we're giving, as you did to the former clerk of the Executive Council and you are now doing in a very cute fashion to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner?

Or should we, like, create a diagram for you? No, wait, we did that with the caretaker convention; you forgot, ignored, disregarded. Maybe we can get like a series of dolls and kind of act out the scenario of how this leave request could be responded to: You're going to be on this side of the House and when the Speaker looks at you, you stand up and you say, no, you know.

So there's all different ways that we could help our colleagues across the aisle.

The Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

* (15:40)

The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Good afternoon.

As Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, I'm honoured to be here today to speak to the important work of the department. We are committed to delivering safe, reliable and sustainable infrastructure that meets the needs of all Manitobans.

Our government is prioritizing the development and maintenance of a transportation and infrastructure network that drives trade, facilitates the movement of goods and supports sustainable economic growth across the province.

The department's operating budget is increased by \$41 million, for a total of \$549 million in 2025-26. By supporting key trade corridors and investing in Manitoba's potential as a strategic transportation hub and gateway to national and international markets, we are building our economy and increasing resilience in the face of global uncertainties.

MTI is supporting the CentrePort Canada Rail Park with an increase of grant funding by \$200,000, for a total of \$450,000 to the CentrePort Canada Inc. in 2025-26. Developing CentrePort will help attract trade-based investment and create good jobs for Manitobans.

Budget 2025, with the significant increase of \$55 million in our capital budget, from \$549 million to \$595 million, demonstrates our government's commitment to strategic investments in roads, highways, bridges, airports and flood protection.

I'm very pleased to tell the members of this committee that MTI fully delivered on its part B, capital program of \$540 million last fiscal year. These investments are guided by the department's multi-year infrastructure investment strategy, which outlines how we are connecting communities, providing access to goods and services and helping protect Manitobans from the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Key projects within our strategy include investments under the Trade and Commerce Grid Initiative which enhances an interconnected network of critical, north-south and east-west corridors designed to accommodate the Roads and Transportation Association of Canada loading. We are also moving forward with major corridor improvements, such as the Perimeter freeway initiative and the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway to the Ontario border.

In this new fiscal year, we have doubled the budget to support capital improvements to aging maintenance buildings, weigh scales and transportation equipment, to keep our equipment and roads in safe condition for motorists.

This includes a project to replace the Headingley weigh scale and inspection site, estimated at \$3 million, and a rehabilitation project for the runway, taxiway and apron at Oxford House Airport, estimated at \$22.7 million.

Flood mitigation remains a critical focus for our department. The maintenance and rehabilitation of Manitoba's existing network of flood mitigation infrastructure are key to protecting communities and fostering resilience.

Budget 2025-26, we are more than doubling our investment in water-related infrastructure and flood-mitigation projects, from \$28.5 million in 2024-25 to a total of \$60 million in 2025-26, which will improve Manitoba's climate resiliency and adaptation, and protect Manitobans from more frequent flooding and other extreme weather events.

This includes the new flood mitigation infrastructure program that will inject \$15 million to support infrastructure that increases Manitoba's resiliency to large flood events, including consulting and engaging with Indigenous nations on the Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin Outlet Channels Project.

The department will also increase its funding by \$1.4 million in its operating budget to support hydrological forecasting activities through bilateral agreements, including developing flood risk maps for key Manitoba rivers, lakes and communities.

We are committed to resetting relationships and making meaningful progress on this project with Indigenous nations. We're also proud to support long-standing infrastructure priorities in northern communities. For over 25 years, government has promised a new airport to Wasagamack First Nation. Our government is going to make it happen.

* (15:50)

We're collaborating with Segmack *[phonetic]*—with Wasagamack First Nation on a multi-phase project, building an all-season access road and airport, which will improve access and enhance opportunities both for Wasagamack and other nearby communities.

We're increasing funding for our Northern Airports and Marine Operations infrastructure program, which supports all infrastructure assets that are directly related to airport or marine transportation, including advancing the building of the new airport at Wasagamack First Nation.

Additionally, Manitoba is working with the federal government and Indigenous communities to explore long-term infrastructure solutions and emergency management models to mitigate severe flooding along Fisher River.

Discussions and studies related to flood mitigation along the Fisher River have been ongoing for many years. Manitoba has completed the flood risk mapping study with Canada at a cost of \$227,000 and has also agreed to a 50-50 cost share with Canada at a total cost of \$3 million to move forward with the conceptual design of options for flood mitigation as

well as provincial highway and bridge improvements along the Fisher River, including the communities of Peguis First Nation and Fisher River Cree Nation.

I'm also pleased to share that Manitoba is finalizing improvements to Provincial Road 224 near Peguis First Nation and the Fisher River Cree Nation, and we anticipate completing this work in late fall, 2025.

Developing new highway connections and improving existing transportation infrastructure in and around Indigenous nation communities are also top priorities for our department. MTI continues to support strategies for enhanced highway connectivity to these communities and the operation of the winter road networks serving remote areas.

To that end, we are investing an additional \$1 million in the winter roads network by increasing the contract rates with the 'partning' Indigenous nations by 5 per cent in 2024-25 and 5 per cent in 2025-26. These investments will improve the transportation system to meet Indigenous economic access, safety and mobility needs.

We're also reintroducing rest area services along PTH 6 to northern Manitoba after our very successful pilot project last year. The department will be investing \$500,000 to build permanent rest areas along PTH 6 to continue to serve northern travellers all year round.

In these uncertain times marked by climate change, economic volatility and shifting global economic dynamics, resilient connectivity within our province is key for keeping our economy strong, safe and competitive. By upgrading our roads to accommodate heavy loads, planning strategically on road and water infrastructure investments and prioritizing connectivity across all regions, we are positioning Manitoba to attract more development and trade.

These efforts will capitalize on our geographic advantage and vast natural resources. Our long-term strategy is about more than infrastructure; it is about building an efficient, climate resilient province that plays a key role in Canada's economy.

With that in mind, the Province is providing the ongoing support for the Hudson Bay Railway and Port of Churchill. This initiative not only demonstrates commitment to promoting Indigenous economic reconciliation, but also leverages Manitoba's unique position as Canada's only prairie maritime province while affirming not-northern sovereignty.

Our government is investing \$36.4 million over two years, including \$17.2 million in 2025-26 to Arctic Gateway Group for capital infrastructure projects at the Port of Churchill that will expand international trade and create good jobs for northern Manitobans.

These investments are fueling northern Manitobans' economy, increasing international trade and opening our province to new trading opportunities.

As we continue to implement these initiatives, our department remains committed to meeting the needs of the province. By prioritizing connectivity, safety, sustainability and reconciliation, we are laying the foundation for infrastructure that meets today's needs and supports future generations.

We are committed to working with communities, experts and stakeholders to ensure that all of this is possible. I am confident that our department's strategic infrastructure investments will ensure Manitobans can live and work safely while helping our economic—sorry, our economy grow and thrive. These opportunities pave the way for a stronger, more sustainable and more prosperous future for all.

As I conclude my remarks, I want to thank the clerks, pages and Hansard staff and our Chair for helping to make the Committee of Supply run smoothly today, as well as my department staff and political staff for all their work to prepare for this process.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I'm thankful to have the opportunity to serve as the critic for Infrastructure and Transportation. The infrastructure of our province and its management is something that affects every Manitoban. Whether you live here in Winnipeg, the city of Brandon or any of our rural communities, your life is impacted either in a positive or in a negative way by the condition of our infrastructure. Roads, bridges, water systems, along with flood mitigation and emergency services, aren't just conveniences, they are the backbone of our economy and the quality of our daily lives.

Infrastructure maintenance and investment is critical to Manitoba's future. Every job site, factory and farm in Manitoba depends on reliable transportation. When our highways and roads are in good shape, goods move faster, businesses save money and we remain competitive, not just within our province but also internationally. Investments in infrastructure create jobs, attract businesses and open up opportunities for trade and development.

As we are seeing strong volatility in weather throughout Manitoba, climate resilience is an important part of infrastructure development. As needs—as we've seen with floods and extreme weather, our infrastructure needs to be strong and adaptable. Maintaining dikes, upgrading stormwater systems and modernizing buildings helps us protect communities and minimize the impact of disasters. This isn't just spending, it's preparation and protection for safety of all Manitobans.

Rural and northern access provides the backbone to our economy. Whether it is the manufacturing powerhouse of southern Manitoba, agricultural breadbasket of western Manitoba or the northern remote communities of our province, safe and reliable infrastructure is important for the transportation throughout our province. It is crucial to transporting goods, providing safety and is a lifeline for secluded remote communities.

We may not always realize it but Manitoba infrastructure has a direct impact on nearly every aspect of our lives as Manitobans, and the proper management, maintenance and investment helps to grow our economy to keep Manitobans safe.

I look forward to this opportunity to highlight the management of Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure through this process to show Manitobans an accurate picture of how their tax dollars are being spent to represent their needs and expectations of our highways, roads, bridges and waterways. If we want a thriving, resilient and equitable Manitoba, we must prioritize infrastructure investment and maintenance. It's not just about fixing potholes, it's about building a better future for all Manitobans.

And I'd like to also start by thanking the minister for this opportunity; her staff that assist her in the department. I'd like to thank our staff on the opposition side for helping me, as the critic, hold the government to account on the important investment in Manitoba infrastructure.

So, with that, I conclude.

The Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 15.1(a), contained in resolution 15.1.

* (16:00)

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and I would ask the minister and critic to please introduce their staff in attendance.

Would the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (MLA Naylor) like to introduce her staff?

MLA Naylor: Yes, I would, thank you very much.

I'll start with Deputy Minister Ryan Klos to my right. I'm very pleased to have Amber Zhang here; she's ADM and executive financial officer—ADM of Finance and Administration. And, of course, Ciara Shattuck, who's the director of ministerial affairs.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that.

And would the critic like to introduce his staff?

Mr. Narth: With me today is the talented Mark Stewart.

The Chairperson: In accordance with subrule 77(15), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Narth: I'd like to structure the questions in Estimates to the best of my ability to ease the burden of answering for the department, and I'll start with some basic, broad questions on the staffing organization of the department.

So first question would be if the minister would be able to confirm that the organizational chart in the supplemental Estimates is complete and up to date.

MLA Naylor: Yes, I just took a moment to review the chart, and it is complete and up to date as printed.

Mr. Narth: Would the minister be able to update the committee on what political staff work out of the minister's office or within their purview?

MLA Naylor: There are three political staff that work out of my office—and, sorry, was I supposed to say the titles? I can't—I've forgotten the question now.

The Chairperson: We can ask for clarification.

An Honourable Member: Sure.

Mr. Narth: Yes, and if we're going to—maybe we shouldn't jump ahead too much, but along with the names, could the minister also provide a breakdown of the salaries as well as the pay scale that they're on. So we can answer one at a time though, if—just provides a name.

MLA Naylor: Yes, Ciara Shattuck is the director of ministerial affairs. I introduced her a few minutes ago. Melinda Broomhall is executive assistant to the minister, and Sophie Brandt is tour officer.

And the other question about salaries, that's publicly available. I don't know if that's the best use of our time, but if that's what the opposition wants, we can look up those public documents and share it. But it's—it is publicly available information.

Mr. Narth: Yes, I think most Manitobans find it sometimes hard to navigate public documents, and this is the opportunity for them to follow along with questions related all and consistently to infrastructure and the department.

So, if the minister would be able to provide the salaries and pay schedule for committee today, I would appreciate it.

* (16:10)

MLA Naylor: Well, my critic has a point. It is a little bit challenging to find these public documents and look them up, which is what we needed to do to get access to this information.

So I can say that my executive assistant makes a salary of—started at—their OAC starting salary was \$80,154; Sophie Brandt, \$85,506; and Ciara Shattuck, \$130,198.

Mr. Narth: Thank—I'd like to thank the minister for providing us with that information.

Are there any other technical officers that work with or report to the minister? This would be issues management or press secretary, that type of staff.

MLA Naylor: Yes, I would say that any time that I need support, whether it's for Cabinet communications, policy issues management, there's a team of political staff available to provide that support to myself as minister and each—you know, we work together as a team.

Mr. Narth: So I guess just to clarify—I don't want to dwell on that question but, just to clarify, there is no

permanent staff that would be used by the minister or her department specifically for technical assistance?

MLA Naylor: I think the political staff that the member is referring to, as I mentioned, I do lean heavily on all of those departments. But again, they work as a team. They support Cabinet as a team.

Mr. Narth: In the minister's opening remarks, I had jotted down a claim of \$540 million of expenditure last year, in last year's budget for Infrastructure. And when I go through the supplement to the Estimates document and the Infrastructure budget it seems to be \$506 million, so would the minister be able to clarify the gap between those two numbers and state her claim of \$540-million expenditure?

* (16:20)

MLA Naylor: So I'll invite my critic to turn to page 34 of the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure, and when you look at the total, like, budget, \$540 million, that's the number I'm referring to. That—it's absolutely, you know, one of the things that I'm quite proud of as a minister, is that we have really listened to industry about the importance of getting out early tenders and working really hard to spend our entire budget, something that the previous government didn't do for years and years.

I mean, not only what—did they lower the budget from, you know, where—the high that it was prior to them coming in. I believe 2016 was probably the largest budget for highways that there has been for years, and they decreased it year after year and then underspent and left significant problems in the infrastructure across the province.

But I'm quite excited by the fact that in the year ahead, we have increased that total budget to \$595 million and that, again, we will absolutely endeavour, you know, to work with industry to spend what we budgeted and not to leave unspent money on the project—or, unspent money on the table and projects unattended to and neglected across the province, such as what happened for the past seven and a half years, prior to us coming into government.

Mr. Narth: The minister makes mention of a commitment to spending all of the budgeted amount in each year. We know that, many times, there are barriers unforeseen that arise and that may cause an issue with the completion of a project.

The construction industry has been asking for carry-over budgeting for a number of years, something that our previous PC government had listened to and enacted

in the final couple budgets of infrastructure and transportation.

And I'd like to ask the minister if that is something that her department has committed to if their department isn't able to complete the work projected.

MLA Naylor: I'm really glad for this question because I'm hoping this gives me the chance to kind of clear up, once and for all, some, I guess, mythology that's kind of followed me into this role as a Cabinet minister about how the previous government budgeted and paid for projects.

So there's—and I understand the critic has, you know, has heard from the previous members of his caucus that they carried over things into the next budget, but I know he's also—he's worked as a city councillor. So he knows that at the end of the year when your budget's spent, you don't take the—there's not a leftover several million dollars you just pop in a drawer for next year. That's not how it works, right?

I mean, he's looking like maybe that is how it works. So I guess I shouldn't comment on how he governed. But I will say that's not how we will ever govern. We have committed to industry stable, predictable funding. We are working with industry to set a budget and deliver a budget.

And part of the mythology of the previous—this idea of the carry-over—as everyone who looks at Public Accounts knows, and the previous budgets, that for, I believe six years in a row in their seven-year tenure, the previous government greatly, significantly underspent their budget. And so to say they're carrying over, it's like—I'll just use some, you know, approximate numbers—but let's say they underspent the budget by \$100 million, and said we're carrying it over to next year. Then next year they still underspend the budget, maybe by \$100 million, maybe by \$150 million; that's money not just sitting in a drawer somewhere, right? That is—it's pretend. It didn't really happen.

And so I've kind of inherited this pressure, both from the previous government and kind of the new opposition, as well as some industry folks that were, kind of had this idea, these fictional accounts of what was happening with the money.

* (16:30)

We committed to deliver a budget that—and to set that budget and to deliver on that budget so that we're not concerned about things like carry-over. Our focus is entirely on working 'collaboratey'—collaboratively

with industry in order to fully deliver the program as budgeted. And we're doing a lot of other things to make that happen.

So, you know, the member is correct. Sometimes there are challenges, there are things that delay projects that are out of anybody's control, but there's also a lot of steps that a good, careful government can take to try to prevent some of those challenges. So, certainly, our multi-year strategy has helped to signal to industry projects that are coming. We have endeavoured to meet industry's ask of having 80 per cent of projects tendered by February.

We also are working very hard in the department to make sure, you know, to restaff. I mean, the department was cut. It was overall cut by 30 per cent in—under the previous government, and we're working to build up the staff so that we have the staff to manage projects if we—you know, to have designs done and on the shelf and ready to go.

If one project is going to be delayed for some reason, we now have the ability to move on to another project because we are—you know, we are staffing up our department, we're relying on the expertise of our engineers and we're working so carefully with industry that we are able to be much more successful at delivering our program and spending the dollars that we have budgeted.

Mr. Narth: I can appreciate the minister's comments and desire to fulfill the budgets of her department and this government, but the facts are that under the previous NDP government, the highways and infrastructure department had underspent by over \$1 billion. So that's \$1 billion that Manitobans felt comfortable committing to infrastructure—highways and infrastructure in our province, but the money hadn't been spent, and these were in the final years of the NDP government as they tried to remain in power.

So as a good critic holding the government and minister to account on spending, like I said, I can appreciate that the claim for an entire infrastructure budget spent from what was committed last year, but the industry still has skepticism. Manitobans have skepticism that that will continue through this year's budget into the following year's budget and into a budget leading up to a provincial election.

Further to that, I can appreciate the minister also trying to educate me on basic accounting practices. She made mention that I had served on municipal council, but to supplement that, I also have a degree

in accounting, so I have a fundamental understanding of how budget management works.

So with that being said, I don't expect that herself or her department or Manitobans would think that the money would be tucked in a drawer, as she made reference to, but rather that it's a commitment. It shows a commitment by the government and her department to spend the money that Manitobans had committed to.

So we know the technicalities of the accounting practices, that this money wouldn't be stashed anywhere, but what it shows is when that surplus of funds that were budgeted within the department are not spent, that they do go back into general coffers for the government, but that it's a commitment that whatever would be spent in the following year would also have that additional commitment. This allows industry to know that money budgeted will be money spent and that additionally provides them to hire the staff that they need, invest in equipment and make those commitments.

So again, I would ask the question—and this question is in behalf of the construction industry, but also Manitobans who want to feel certainty in where their tax dollars are spent—if the minister will commit to any money not being spent on infrastructure within her budget, use that as a commitment to add to the budget spent in the next year?

MLA Naylor: I appreciate this question as it's going to give me the opportunity to clear up some misinformation or confusion.

* (16:40)

I mean, I'll start with reiterating that we are spending our budget. We are—we've increased from last year, and we've certainly increased over any expenditures of the previous government, but I hear the member opposite introducing the idea of 'skepticism' into the conversation.

And I—you know, I know during question period—a similar question—the member said that he didn't believe my answer, and I just—I think it's important to remember question period is about theatre; this isn't that. This is really trying to put accurate information on the record for Manitobans.

And, you know, the—introducing the sort of, sowing seeds of division, isn't really helpful to this process. We have this building of one Manitoba, and working together to build up our province. And also, you know, the construction industry has direct access to me,

significantly so. So I get to have these conversations often in meetings and other one-on-one opportunities, and work really closely with them because they have a really important voice in how we do business.

But, as I have been very clear with the industry, and with the member opposite, but I'll say it again: there will never be a carry-over as he's asking for during my tenure as minister.

I do want to clear up some of the misinformation that's been stated. In the last year of the NDP government, \$572 million was spent. That is more money than the PC government spent in any year in the seven and a half years that they were in government—\$572 million. We weren't in a position in our first year to budget that much, but this year we budgeted \$595 million, so we are—we found our way back to the kind of spending and the good work that the NDP was previously doing to build up transportation infrastructure in this province.

And I'm not saying that there's not more to do, there's always more work to be done. You know, in their first year in government, the PC government budgeted \$589 million, and only spent \$385 million, and that kind of pattern was to be repeated year after year that they were in government.

So I think, you know, I'm quite proud of the work of this department, especially given that when I came into this position, as I mentioned, not only was there a 30 per cent vacancy rate overall across the department, in northern Manitoba there was a 46 per cent vacancy rate.

So some of the biggest challenges, and problems, and concerns I hear are from folks in the North, who need the repairs done, who need infrastructure work attended to, who are struggling to get the support that they need, and we are doing our best to fill those positions. But the fact that people were laid off, not replaced, department staff were cut and left our northern member—northern Manitobans with a 46 per cent vacancy rate in this area, I mean it's reprehensible.

We're working very hard to change that, and that is a really important point. It's not just about what—how much money is in the budget, it's about actually having the staff there, the skilled people employed by our department who can implement the program and deliver what is needed to Manitobans for safe, reliable infrastructure across the province.

Mr. Narth: I think, since the minister led into the importance of staffing within the department, we all can recognize the importance of maintenance of our

highways and infrastructure, whether it be the maintenance of our bridges, dikes and dams, water control structures, or also the snow plowing, and salting and sanding of our highways.

So the member had mentioned that a significant vacancy rate was left within the maintenance department of Infrastructure. We all know that we have labour challenges and shortages across not only our province, our country and much of North America, so I think it's important to be brought up what the vacancy rate is within her department and I'd like to be able to dive down deeper into that.

So we'll start with asking the question on what the vacancy rate is within her department.

MLA Naylor: Well, as I previously mentioned, the vacancy rate overall in the department was over 30 per cent when I came into this role and 47 per cent in the North. But I'm very happy with the work we've done. There's been a considerable effort to fill positions and to prioritize the important work of this department.

And so as of March 31, we had reduced the overall vacancy rate to 24 per cent.

Mr. Narth: My question for the minister then would be, just so Manitobans have a clear picture of where the largest struggles are in vacancy throughout the department, which areas of the department would have—or which area has the largest vacancy rate?

* (16:50)

MLA Naylor: I thank the member opposite for that question and bringing to—you know, certainly to attention. There are a lot of challenges in filling staff positions, certainly in my department and really across government.

And I think, you know, we can look back; I mean, we're old enough to remember, both of us, that there was a time the Manitoba government was an employer of choice, right? People were very, very proud to come and work for the Manitoba government. It was something that people aspired to, and that would certainly have been an easier time in terms of filling positions across the province.

And then what we saw over the seven and a half years that the PCs were in government, with not only cuts, you know, not filling vacancies, but an overall disrespecting of public service; an attitude that public servants were expendable and unimportant to the running of the province.

And so, you know, some people certainly left. I had a conversation this morning with a long-time employer of—employee of the department, who was simply pushed out. Close to retirement, but was just pushed out by the then-premier Pallister, and with no package, nothing to support the loss of his career, his career of a lifetime, right towards the end of his career.

And, you know, I could—eight years later hear the pain from him, and I think that that pain and that trauma, really, in some of the conversations I've had with current employees and past employees, that—people felt that. And so it is taking time to rebuild our reputation as a government, as an employer.

When we came into government, the public service was on the verge of a massive strike. It would have been the first in history because of years of wage suppression and because of how they were being treated, frankly. So those are some of the challenges that we have been met with, and so I'm glad that the MLA—the member opposite did identify that there were challenges in hiring, and I just wanted to expand on what some of those challenges have been, and for Manitobans, because I know that he's very aware of that—of those issues.

And to answer his question, we—the—probably the two areas that were most challenged and that we're still working to increase positions and fill vacancies is in transportation operations where we have a 24.5 per cent vacancy rate, and in engineering and technical services, with a 25.9 per cent vacancy rate.

These are the most, you know, front-line, specialized positions in engineering and technical—like the, in—you know, where we need technicians and engineers in the role, and actually one of the other challenges to filling those roles and, you know, to hiring. There was a long-standing relationship called Engineers in Training where students had the opportunity—it was kind of like a pipeline to future jobs for engineering students—and that program was cut or put on hold, discontinued, it's not really clear, but it disappeared under the previous government.

So that's something we reinstated, so it's an opportunity for students to have that—the training that—and the mentoring that they require and, you know, of

course, we all know that in any kind of—that type of co-operative type of program where students have the opportunity to come and work for an employer while they're still a student, there's a much greater chance of them then seeing that employer as a place where they want to make their career.

So very pleased that I was able to reinstate that program and that that will help us as these students get closer to graduation to filling some of these vacancies.

Mr. Narth: I—it's great that the minister has brought up the concerns of engineering within the department and the vacancy challenges, as well as transportation operations.

I, myself, as a result of my connection to just my community and the constituency, have spoken to a number of engineers that work for Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, and they've expressed their concern, not so much with the structure but that the experienced staff have come to an age naturally, not by any outside influence, to—that they've retired, and the department no longer has that mentorship ability. So I can appreciate that the minister feels that reinstating a program of mentorship within the department will be a silver bullet to the solution, but my opinion would be that it's much more complex than that.

The minister had—that just leads me to my question that the minister had mentioned that the positions are no longer competitive with the private sector and not held to the same regard that they may have been in the past.

So my question would be: How much have pay scales increased for transportation operations and engineering, or what additional benefits have been provided to staff that fulfill these roles?

The Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise and call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 21, 2025

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