



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 22, 2025

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 47—The Fair Trade in Canada
(Internal Trade Mutual Recognition) Act and
Amendments to The Commemoration of Days,
Weeks and Months Act
(Buy Manitoba, Buy Canadian Day)**

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation): Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn), that Bill 47, The Fair Trade in Canada (Internal Trade Mutual Recognition) Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act, be now read a first time.

The Speaker: Been moved by the honourable Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture, that Bill 47, The Fair Trade in Canada (Internal Trade Mutual Recognition) Act and Amendments to the Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Buy Manitoba, Buy Canadian Day), be now read a first time.

Mr. Moses: A competitive and open economy within Canada that is open to trade and encourages domestic buying will make sure that we remain the true North strong and free.

This bill will increase the flow of goods, services and investments between Manitoba and the rest of Canada through mutual recognition with reciprocating governments. It will unlock more economic activity, opportunities for Manitobans, and help fulfill our commitment to continue to grow our province's economic resilience and prosperity.

The legislation will also establish June 1 as buy Manitoba, buy Canadian day. The designation of this day is intended to celebrate local businesses and bring Manitobans together to strengthen local economies and support jobs.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 234—The Pride Month Act
(Commemoration of Days, Weeks
and Months Act Amended)**

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière): I move, seconded by the MLA for Radisson, that Bill 234, The Pride Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended); Loi sur le Mois de la fierté (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Blashko: I am proud to rise today to introduce Bill 234, The Pride Month Act. From its roots at the Stonewall riots in 1969 to Winnipeg's first Pride march in 1987, Pride remains part celebration and part call to action. The Pride Month Act will officially designate June as Pride month in Manitoba, honouring the long history of 2SLGBTQIA+ progress in our province and reaffirming our commitment to a future where every Manitoban, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression feels safe, supported and included.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 220—The Criminal Property
Forfeiture Amendment Act**

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I move, seconded by the member from Tyndall Park, that Bill 220, The Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wasyliv: Today I'm proud to introduce Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act, a bill that will change the way we think about building safer communities in Manitoba.

Currently, money seized through Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund can be used to fund law enforcement programs. This amendment expands the scope, allowing funds to support non-profit community organizations, delivering programs like affordable housing, harm reduction, addictions treatment, mental health supports and restorative justice.

This is about more than where the money goes; it's about how we build trust. Safer communities aren't created by enforcement alone; they're built when people have access to the supports they need and when investments are made in long-term solutions that prevent harm before it happens.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

No further introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Honouring the Legacy of Southeast Asian Refugees

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, 50 years ago, on April 30, 1975, the city of Saigon fell, marking the end of the Vietnam War. Fleeing persecution and violence, hundreds of thousands of people from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia escaped in overcrowded, leaky boats, and an estimated 500,000 lives were lost along the way.

Amid this crisis, between 1979 and 1980, Canada welcomed more than 60,000 Southeast Asian refugees and became the first country in the world to implement a large-scale private sponsorship program for refugees. In recognition of this leadership, Canada became the first and remains the only country that was awarded the Nansen Refugee Award by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

One of those lives forever changed by that response is Dr. Stephanie Stobbe, who was born in Laos and came to Canada in 1979 at eight years old.

Today, Dr. Stobbe is an associate professor at the Canadian Mennonite University, specializing in conflict resolution and serving as a respected researcher, educator, and community advocate. Her work ensures that the stories of Southeast Asian refugees in Canada are documented and honoured.

She reminds us that this history is not just the history of refugees; it is Canadian history. It has shaped our national identity and informed our global reputation as a compassionate, multicultural country. There are now second- and third-generation Canadians who find their roots in the refugees who came all those years ago.

As we reflect on this 50-year anniversary and celebrate Asian Heritage Month, let us remember the courage of those who fled, the compassion of those who welcomed, and the legacy of leaders like

Dr. Stephanie Stobbe, who continues to ensure that these stories are never forgotten.

I invite all my colleagues to join me in recognizing Dr. Stobbe and honouring all those who came during these challenging years.

I would like my guests' names to be entered into Hansard.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Patricia Bovey, Art DeFehr, Leona DeFehr, Vinh Huynh, Keo "Sunn" Lengsavath, Tam Nguyen, Dr. Cheryl Pauls, Thongsay "Ken" Phanlouvang, Karl Stobbe, Chanthai Taillefer, Charisse Wurch.

Member's Apology for Breach of Caretaker Convention

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): As I committed to the conversations with the commissioner, I apologize today to the people of Manitoba for my conduct.

As a minister of a Crown, it was my duty to act in the interests of Manitobans, which is what I always endeavour to do. I took my obligations very seriously during my time in Cabinet, and I continue to do so today.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to provide a quote from the commissioner's report, and I quote: It is commonplace for members of the Legislative Assembly, and especially Cabinet ministers, to take actions that further the interests of others. It is precisely what we expect members of government to do. End quote.

However, as the report states, the contravention occurred because of the timing of my actions, during the period of time the caretaker convention was relevant.

It was never my intention to breach any convention or parliamentary tradition. However, the Ethics Commissioner has ruled on this matter and I accept his ruling. I fully co-operated with the investigation, I have learned from it and I am committed to helping others in this House learn from it.

* (13:40)

As I previously stated, Honourable Speaker, I apologize for any of my conduct which was found to fall short of my parliamentary obligations or personal standard of ethics.

As the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself said on Monday, and I quote: Apologies are empty words

without restitution. End quote. That is why I'm ready to move forward today, and I encourage the Premier to call a vote on the commissioner's recommendations today.

And lastly, Honourable Speaker, to all Manitobans and particularly the members from Red River North, the constituents that I have the honour to represent every single day: I am sorry. I will do better.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mike Sutherland

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I rise today to honour Mike Sutherland, an incredible person from my constituency, and I wanted to share just some of the many contributions he's made to our community.

As a child, Mike learned how to hunt for small game and live off the land. This led him joining his grandfather on the trapline at just 12 years old, spending the next 50 years learning to fish, hunt and gather.

His experience inspired him to teach not only his own children and nephews, but all the children in Peguis First Nation about the land.

He then started a land-based learning program to teach kids in his community, eventually helping schools across the province develop their own land-based learning programs.

Mike continues to help others learn how to preserve their land, waters, skies and cultural heritage through his role as director of the Peguis Consultation and Special Projects.

Mike also—is also passionate about seeing every child play the sport they love. When he was young, his family didn't have the means for him to play sports until he was in high school. Inspired by his own experience, he spent the next 40 years volunteering to coach hockey, baseball, lacrosse, to help every child play what they love.

Mike furthers his goal of uplifting young athletes through his work with the North American Indigenous Games and the Manitoba Aboriginal sports council.

He's also hosted the Manitoba Indigenous Summer Games in 2000 and the Manitoba Indigenous Winter Games in 2006, celebrating thousands of Indigenous athletes.

When I could go—while I could go on and on about Mike's contributions about—I should end saying

that it is an honour to know Mike, and I am thankful that Mike is always looking to uplift others.

Mike and his family join us in the gallery today, and I ask that the House please join me in thanking Mike for always sharing his time, knowledge and wisdom.

Ekosi.

Meadows West Students—Tour of the Legislature

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Today is day two of Meadows West students visiting the Legislature, and again I would like to thank my colleagues for allowing leave to be able to accommodate the students' school bus schedule.

The grade 4 students who are here with us today had a very long discussion with their teachers at school when asked what the issues they were passionate about. This is what they had to say.

On the topic of crime and safety, they shared concerns about drug problems in the community. They discussed the need for better security downtown because people don't feel safe walking on the sidewalks, the need for heightened security in convenience stores, as well as patrol cars at all times of the day to better prevent crime.

Another topic the students have a lot to say about is health care, specifically wait times in hospitals, scheduled doctors appointments sometimes being delayed, and the importance of having doctors that can speak different languages.

The last few topics include the concern of forest fires, how there is a lot of litter in and around retention ponds, how roads and potholes need repairing and how sometimes traffic lights take too long to turn green, creating long wait times to cross the street.

Now, Honourable Speaker, on the flip side, when I asked them what they felt was working well in Manitoba, they shared how Manitobans are kind, how there's less crime, how more people are being able to study and find jobs, how we have fair taxes, and how we have advanced technology and, lastly, how well nature grows, especially in our provincial parks.

In closing, I would like to thank the students and teachers who have joined us here today, and we look forward to having their questions answered in question period.

Thank you.

CFB Shilo

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): Honourable Speaker, every day, Manitobans in uniform step up to serve; not just for our province, but for our country and for our allies around the world. Many carry out that service from CFB Shilo, just outside of Brandon.

And right now, Honourable Speaker, nearly 450 members from CFB Shilo are preparing to arrive home from Latvia, where they have served as part of Operation REASSURANCE, Canada's contribution to NATO deterrence activity in the face of Russian aggression in eastern Europe.

Another contingent is preparing to deploy to Poland and Germany under Operation UNIFIER, where they'll assist in training the Armed Forces of Ukraine. And that mission will be led by Lieutenant-Colonel Chelsea Braybrook, the first female commanding officer in the history of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, which is an incredibly important milestone.

Others are serving closer to home, supporting RCMP security operations in Alberta ahead of the upcoming G7 summit.

This is what commitment looks like: Manitobans stepping up, whether it's in Europe, across Canada or right here in our own backyards. And the people of CFB Shilo continue to show us what it means to serve with honour.

And, Honourable Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to recognize Lieutenant-Colonel David Cronk, who has led CFB Shilo with heart, with humility, with a deep respect for both the military and the local community. He'll be heading to Ottawa next month to take on a new role, and we wish him all the best, and his family: nothing but success and gratitude on that journey.

You know, we're so pleased to welcome Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Nguyen as the incoming Base Commander. I know Shilo and Manitoba will be well-served under his leadership.

And to all those who wear the uniform, to the families who serve alongside them: Thank you. We see you, we honour you, and we are so proud to stand with you.

And I would also encourage my fellow Chamber mates here to stand and thank Colonel Cronk for his service, who is watching online today from CFB Shilo.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to question period, there's some few things to take care of.

First, we have seated in the public gallery, from Linden Christian School, 22 grade 9 students under the direction of Nick Janzen, and they're guests of the honourable member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan).

We welcome you here today.

We have seated in the public gallery, Dr. Stephanie Stobbe; Honourable Patricia Bovey, former senator of Canada; Dr. Cheryl Pauls, president of Canadian Mennonite University; Leona DeFehr; Mr. Karl Stobbe, concertmaster of Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra; Mr. Vinh Huynh, principal of Gordon Bell High School; Keo "Sunn" Lengsavath; Mr. Tam Nguyen; Thongsay "Ken" Phanlouvong [*phonetic*]; Chanthai Tallefer [*phonetic*]; Charisse Wurch, who are guests of the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen).

We also have seated—well, we welcome you here today.

We also have seated in the public gallery Mike Sutherland, Sharon Sutherland, Joey Sutherland, Jeff Sutherland, Amy Manningway, Garth Sutton, Wayne Manningway, Heather McCorrister, Terrance Sinclair, Mel Whiteshell, Keenan Stevenson-French, who are guests of the honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin).

And we welcome you all here today.

* * *

The Speaker: And now, on a sadder note, we have another page who's here on her last day, Imogen Zemlak.

Imogen will be continuing her grade 12 year of high school in the fall at Oak Park High school.

* (13:50)

As this chapter of her working here is ending, she would like to thank everyone for the wonderful experience working for the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and getting to be a part of the legislative process.

Imogen has learned so much about politics and the way our province is run. She especially enjoyed watching the debates live. She has many good memories of getting to know the people she has worked with.

Every shift has been a fun experience with everyone being here supportive and helpful, which creates a welcoming atmosphere that she enjoyed being a part of.

Imogen will use the skills she has developed here for her next work environments and through her life. She has learned how to work in a professional environment and is thankful for the support and encouragement she has received here.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Education Property Tax Credit Rollout Concerns from Manitoba Municipalities

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, I want to welcome everybody here today and especially the students from Linden Christian. I really loved your performance of Sound of Music last week.

Honourable Speaker, Tom Brodbeck reports today: The rollout of the Province's new education property tax credit has been nothing short of a disaster. The Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and this Kinew government have increased Manitobans' educational property taxes by over \$330 million in just two years.

The AMM and the Manitoba municipal 'administrasers' sent out an emergency message last night, and I quote: While the Province has acknowledged the issue, it has also publicly attributed part of the problem to municipalities and cited a lack of communication with residents. End quote.

Why is the Premier blaming municipalities for problems created by his own sloppy Finance Minister?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Why isn't the member for Fort Whyte answering the questions at the heart of the commissioner's report this week? Instead, he continues to rise and answer the same old questions week after week, day after day.

There are many unanswered questions to the report that the commissioner released. They have to do, for instance, with whether there were any stocks being held by former Cabinet ministers through brokerages or other third parties.

The member from Red River North rises in his place today, he asked for a vote today? No. There are many unanswered questions that Manitobans know the answers to. Many of them reside with people still sitting in the PC caucus.

What is the member opposite going to do with the knowledge that the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) has, that the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) has, that the report also attributes to the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler)?

The member himself was a minister of the Crown in this disgraced Stefanson government.

When will they answer the questions that Manitobans deserve to know about them trying to ram through a controversial mining project—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, that was a cop-out answer to a real question that we are asking on this side of the House, just like Tom Brodbeck says as well, and I quote: The Province's explanation—or excuse—is a cop-out. It shifts the blame onto individuals rather than acknowledging the government's failure to adequately communicate the new rule. I quote again from AMM—end quote—sorry.

I quote from AMM: We are disappointed in the public messaging and maintain the position that this is a provincial credit and therefore the responsibility for any issues should not have been directed to municipalities.

So I'll ask the Premier again if he will stand up and answer the question—that's his job, to answer questions—why is he passing the blame to municipalities and standing up for his failed Finance Minister?

Mr. Kinew: Well, let's talk about a failure to acknowledge responsibility and to acknowledge the failures of a government. That's what we just saw in members' statements from the member for Red River North.

He didn't simply fall short; he broke the law. And he violated the Canadian Constitution. You want to talk about Sun columnists like Tom Brodbeck, let's talk about the cover story of the Winnipeg Sun today. I brought four copies, maybe more—maybe more if you want to keep going.

Again, this is the full quote from the commissioner's report, picture of the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton): They lacked ethical, constitutional legitimacy. I'll table that for the members opposite.

He reads a quote from the commissioner's report and attempts to portray it as being exculpatory. Here are the following words: Members must not take any of these actions if they will further the interests of others improperly. Improperly is underlined. That's why he's sanctioned; that's why he's fined.

What was improper? You decided to have a new government. They lost their jobs—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, Manitobans, I will keep going on these questions because this Premier has stolen \$330 million from your back pockets, from the back of hard-working Manitobans. This Premier and this Finance Minister have increased your education and property taxes to historic levels. And now they're passing the buck onto municipalities.

I will quote from AMM: Manitoba residents may not receive the credit on their 2025 property tax statements. This situation and the lack of communication from the Province has led to confusion and a concern at a local level, while MMA was not 'initially' consulted on this matter. End quote.

So the answers there are simple, Honourable Speaker. The Premier did not communicate with municipalities. The Premier and Finance Minister have—stole \$330 million from your back pockets.

Will the Premier stand up today and explain why he's attacking municipalities?

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I would just caution the Leader of the Opposition about some of the language he uses that gets very close to crossing the line as to what's parliamentary and what's unparliamentary.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I appreciate the interjection. We don't need to cross the line because we got the facts from the commissioner. A commissioner that they appointed, implementing a law that they passed, found that their premier and their team members broke the law and violated the Canadian Constitution; very serious issues.

Again, we're not talking about stop the steal, we're talking about we legitimately won the election, and they illegitimately—improperly, to use the actual word, tried to ram through a project after they lost government. The commissioner found that the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), and I quote here:

Issues with his credibility in the comments that he made. Specifically, he claimed never to have met the lobbyist from this mining company, and yet there's a phone record in a couple of instances showing his engagement with that person he claimed not to know.

I'll table the relevant sections that show that the members for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler) were also implicated—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Indexing the Basic Personal Tax Bracket Government Intention

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitobans, you saw it there. I asked three serious questions on property taxes; zero answers. If the Premier wants to talk about the report, then it bring it forward today for debate. We are ready to debate this before the House. Premier is playing games. He's playing games with Manitobans, and he's playing games with stealing your money.

It's bad enough that the Premier and the Finance Minister jacked up your property taxes, now the Premier is ending the indexing of tax brackets when he promised—when he promised he was going to do it, when he promised he was going to cut indexing tax credits. The Finance Minister and Premier have broken yet another province—promise with Manitobans.

So will the Premier reverse his tax hikes on middle-class families and fulfill his promise of indexing the tax credits today?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We're making life more affordable; \$1,500 tax credit going up to \$1,600 for your property taxes.

And here's the thing about an oath: every single one of us take an oath when we come into office, and it's a promise that we're going to uphold our democracy. That was broken, the commissioner ruled this week. That's why the member opposite is being fined. It's the first time in Canadian history this has happened. Heather Stefanson, Cliff Cullen, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) are being fined, making history, putting Manitoba into a negative light for their improper actions.

The member stands up today and he doesn't acknowledge the fact of what he said under oath. He describes in the report, the member for Red River North does, in great deal—detail a conversation with

the deputy premier. You know what the commissioner had to say about that conversation? It did not occur. The commissioner had the phone records and, under oath, the description that was taking place was about a call that did not occur.

Parliamentary rules prevent me from ascertaining—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

* (14:00)

Mr. Khan: More games played by this Premier.

He wants to stand up and say he wants to discuss it, he wants to debate it. Well, then, great. Bring it forward. We have said we would debate it if he will bring it forward. We are welcoming that opportunity to discuss it, and we support the conclusions by the commissioner.

But this Premier is too busy playing games, just like he's too busy misleading Manitobans.

The Premier said he would index tax brackets, and now he's changed his mind. The Premier falsely promised not to raise taxes, and he's raised taxes on schools. The Premier falsely promised he would cut the middle tax by indexing it, and now he's increasing your taxes. All broken promises by this NDP and Premier.

So I'll ask him again: Will the Premier stand up by his word—stand with his word, and say what he promised is what he's going to deliver Manitobans—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —or is this Premier's word mean nothing?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, no, let's engage. Let's have the debate right now. Let's do it right now. Let's have the debate right now in question period. Let's hear some answers.

Here's the thing: let's talk about credibility first over the heckling of the members opposite. You want to call my credibility into question? I said I was going to cut the gas tax; I did. I said I was going to hire people in health care; I did. I said I was going to bring women home from the Prairie Green landfill; we have found the women in the landfill.

So let's debate credibility when we're talking about the member for Red River North who, under oath, described a conversation that the commissioner

found did not occur. The reason why these comments under oath are very, very relevant—I'll table the relevant passage of the report that says while he asked these former Cabinet ministers whether they own stock, he could not inquire specifically if they were held through third parties via brokerages.

Now I don't know about you in this day of e-trades and things like that—

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

Order, please.

I would just remind the First Minister that when time is up and I stand up, it's—time is up. So please remember that your mic is off; nobody can hear what you're saying anyway.

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, this Premier has enforced the largest gas tax increase in the history of this province. The largest education property tax increase in this province. And he is actually the only one in this House currently being investigated by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

So if you want to talk about accountability, why doesn't the buck stop with him there?

Honourable Speaker, he says, let's debate—great. Let's debate today. Bring it forward today to the House, not in question period when he knows we're not supposed to. Bring it forward this afternoon if you're such a man of your word, but he won't.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are sick and tired of being misled by this Premier.

So I'll ask him again: Will the Premier stand by his word like he promised on his own platform, and will he index tax brackets today? Yes or no?

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker—*[interjection]* Yes, yes, they're clapping and they're filibustering their own time. Anyway, 27 and a half minutes—27 and a half minutes—let's have the conversation right now.

What did the Leader of the Opposition know about this? If you look at the timeline of events, he was already campaigning for leader when this investigation was under way. Many of the people that he sits in a caucus with who endorsed him in the leadership contest were part of this investigation.

Again, we got 27 minutes right now to start getting to the bottom of this. Keep standing up, and we'll keep engaging with this.

We're talking about facts that the commissioner of the conflict of interest law has found. We're happy to discuss this in public anytime the members opposite want.

But when we're talking about a day of e-trades and we're talking about investment brokerages, I don't know about you, Honourable Speaker, but I don't think too many Manitobans go down in person and buy stocks directly from the company. That was the only kind of holding that the conflict commissioner was able to inquire about.

So there are serious unanswered questions about whether stocks were held by former ministers—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

911 Emergency Services Calls Not Reaching Dispatch

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Dean Switzer died after his wife Susan, family and neighbours called 911 over 20 times and they couldn't get through. The system failed and the family is devastated.

Can the minister stand here today and tell Manitobans, including the Switzer family, if our 911 system is reliable?

Hon. Mike Moroz (Minister of Innovation and New Technology): I want to thank the member opposite for the question.

When someone calls 911, we expect that the answer will be received. That's why we've been looking into the failures of private telecommunications company over the past while. I can review what we've done on this issue. We've spoken with the family, of course, that was directly impacted, to express our condolences and we vowed to hold TELUS to account.

We then demanded that TELUS investigate the incident and work with its partners to ensure that they understand what went wrong. We've reviewed the interim report from TELUS to the CRTC which confirms TELUS outage impacted—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: Susan Switzer did everything right. She called for help over and over but her calls never reached dispatch.

How many 911 calls in Manitoba are failing to connect and how many more families risk a loss like the Switzer family did who's watching today?

MLA Moroz: Again, Honourable Speaker, to remind the member of the work that we've done to this point: we met with TELUS to review the interim report; expressed our deep concern about the gaps that existed and vowed to ensure that they would have the final report to us in a timely manner. We're still waiting on that to arrive.

We've committed to working with the family as well as telecom providers to ensure that systems are in place, to create redundancies, to ensure this never happens again.

I've also reached out to Minister Buckley Belanger, minister of rural development, to begin working with his office to work across both Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta to improve systems—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Johnson: The calls never even reached the call centre. Dean's father, Ray, and their family aren't looking for blame. They just want answers. They want to make sure no one else has to go through the tragedy that this family has.

Will the minister commit to a full, independent inquiry into Manitoba's entire 911 system; from phones to cell providers, to dispatch, first responders and make that inquiry public so Manitobans, including the Switzer family, have answers? And I would also suggest that it should include the TELUS internal report.

MLA Moroz: Again, Honourable Speaker, happy to discuss this matter. I have spoken with the family. I have committed to continuing to do so to make sure they are up to date with the action that we're taking.

But I want to remind the members opposite that when in office, they understood the gaps that existed in cell phone coverage and did nothing about it. I want to recall the incident of a man in Alonsa who died because he didn't have cell phone service to see a tornado warning.

We're taking action. We're talking to the family. That's taking action. We're talking to TELUS and we're going to make sure that the gaps are filled. They should've started sooner.

**Students from Meadows West School
Questions for Government**

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The grade 4 students from Meadows West School have expressed concerns about the safety of our city.

One specific idea they had was heightening security in stores and having more patrol cars to better prevent crime and keep the general public safe.

Could the Premier or Minister of Justice share what types of protective measures are currently in place to keep the general public safe that students can use if needed?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): You know, one of the things I heard from the students, Honourable Speaker, was how much they appreciated the police and the work that our law enforcement does, every single day.

I'm sure they probably had some really positive interactions with police and they know that it's important to have more police on our streets and that's why we're funding our police. We're giving them more money to make sure there's more officers on the street.

* (14:10)

But I also heard from them that they understand that things like drugs and the drug epidemic in our city has a big—plays a big factor in their safety, and so that's why I'm working with other departments—the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness—to make sure we get supports: mental health supports and other supports for those who are suffering with drug addiction.

We could all work together on this. I appreciate the students bringing those good ideas here to the Legislature.

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

MLA Lamoureux: The students of Meadows West have big hearts, and they don't want to see anyone struggling with mental health issues. They have a few ideas where the Province could get involved, including free meditation classes and free food and housing so that people don't have to stress.

What does this Premier or Health Minister recommend students do if they are or they know someone who is struggling with their mental health?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Such a wonderful question from these students.

There's a lot of ways we can take care of our mental health and our well-being. Certainly, I would say that our government taking this step of implementing a universal food program at schools is one great way of making sure that students can be focused on their learning and not be hungry in the classroom.

There are many ways that you can take care of your health. A former athlete here myself, I say being active and moving your body is another great way as well.

And I know that students always feel reassured when they've got a government in place that has their backs and they can trust to be honest and forthcoming, unlike the previous PC government that we now know definitively, based on the Ethics Commissioner's report, was dishonest with Manitobans and didn't value protecting their democracy.

We're going to protect your democracy and make sure that we work in your best interests, as you progress through your life here in Manitoba.

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

MLA Lamoureux: This last question was created by the teachers and the students.

How would one go about passing a law for more opportunities for outdoor learning? The students defended this idea and said it would be good for mental health, that it would be lots of fun to learn outdoors and that there's a lot to learn outdoors, and that being out in nature is good for the soul, it's fun and it's freeing.

Will the Premier please explain the process and how an idea like this could become legislation.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): First thing you do is you got to recognize we've got the best Education Minister in the country here, and set up a meeting with her.

The idea of a bill like this, you know, if the Education Minister was to engage with these kids, you'd engage legal counsel to start drafting up a version. You'd bring it here to the House and every single person who is elected in the last election would have their say, first in debate at the various stages of reading. At committee, the public would get their say.

And then there'd be a vote and potentially royal assent where that was passed into law.

All of that depends on respect for our democracy. The PCs failed very seriously on that front. Democracy is about respecting the will of the people. We respect it when we lose elections; we also, of course, respect it when we win. They did not. After they lost power, after the PCs were pushed out of office, they still tried to ram through a controversial mining project. That's just wrong.

And so, today, they're trying to escape accountability. No, not good enough. Democracy is too important. We'll keep—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Woodridge Community Well Closure Chlorination Requirement

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, last year the community of Woodridge was told by the Office of Drinking Water that they would need to add a chlorination system to their non-potable community well or it would be forced to be shut down, even though it has been identified as a crucial supply for fire crews. The minister forced the closure and now, a year later, wildfires swept the area as people felt helpless without a community water source.

Does the minister stand by the inaction of his predecessor when we raised this important issue in April of last year?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): One of the things that we don't want to have is political interference in the Office of Drinking Water. We believe in the safety of all Manitobans, unlike members opposite who don't believe even in democracy and want to interfere in every single which way.

You know, we would have to actually go back to probably 1995 with the vote-rigging scandal to see such a dark day in democracy here in Manitoba. It's outrageous. I'd like to hear what the member opposite has to say.

Where does he stand on this dark day with his colleagues?

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

Lack of Access for Fire Crews

Mr. Narth: Honourable Speaker, the minister was clearly not on top of the issue and left the community

no choice: an expensive system for a marked, non-potable well or the government would close it.

The well produces some of the most pure water in the country, as it sits on the Sandilands aquifer. In more than 40 years of monthly tests, it has never failed.

With the question of water supply for fire crews top of mind, I'd like to ask the minister: How many more community water sources has this government denied to firefighting efforts because they were not chlorinated?

MLA Moyes: Let's be perfectly clear: we believe in ensuring the safety of all Manitobans, full stop.

When it comes to the wildfire situation I really take offence at the fact that they're trying to muddy the waters, as if we're not working lockstep with the wildfire services. Our Parks department is doing exactly that. Our entire department is doing exactly that. We won't have this—aspersions cast on the good work of our department.

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

Request to Reinstate Licence

Mr. Narth: Honourable Speaker, unfortunately, I can't get an answer for my community.

Drinking water quality is important, but this well was an agriculture bulk fill. And without it, fire crews had to share a single source at the fire hall. I told this House and the minister a year ago that if this well isn't accessible and we have a wildfire, that it could be devastating. This fire destroyed homes and buildings only a few miles away but luckily stopped before town.

Will the minister reinstate the non-potable community well licence today? And what is the minister doing to ensure that this never happens again?

MLA Moyes: The department of—our Office of Drinking Water will always work with municipalities to ensure that they have clean drinking water. We have high standards here in Manitoba. We're not going to interfere and have another Walkerton on our hands.

We need to ensure that Manitobans don't just start drinking out of non-potable water. It's unacceptable to suggest that we can just label something non-potable and that'll be okay.

Now on this issue, in terms of what happened yesterday, I'd like to hear what the member has to say.

Where does he stand? Where does he stand for the member that just sits behind him, in terms of our democracy?

Do you support democracy? Or are you against all of this? Are you against—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I would remind the minister to address his comments through the Chair and not directly to members opposite by saying you.

MLA Moyes: Through you, the Chair, Honourable Speaker, I would ask the member—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Education Property Taxes Homeowners Affordability Rebate

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): This minister is blaming everyone but himself for his own failures. He did something rushed and sloppy and is now blaming others for his skyrocketing education property taxes. Municipalities are now having to clean up his mess.

As some Winnipeggers are 'anxiously' awaiting for their rebate, what is this minister doing for the hundreds of others that he removed the rebate from?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans know they can trust our government to make life more affordable. But what they're learning is that they cannot trust the members opposite.

Yesterday, the Ethics Commissioner spoke very clearly when he said that the members opposite broke the law. And yet, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) went out to the cameras out there and said that this was all in a grey area, that this was up for discussion, that this was not clear.

What can we say with certainty? They broke the trust of Manitobans; they broke the law. That's black and white. Manitobans have seen clearly they cannot trust the members opposite.

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

Spruce Woods Community Co-op Education Property Taxes

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): The Spruce Woods community co-op provides affordable housing in Brandon. This minister has increased the co-op's property taxes by over \$17,387. This minister is

heartlessly targeting hard-working families, fixed-income seniors and now affordable housing.

* (14:20)

I table their 2024 and 2025 tax assessments so the minister can see for himself the consequences of his heartless tax grab.

Will the minister reinstate their rebate today?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): The members opposite have no credibility after yesterday's report came out with—in which it was clearly stated that they worked to undermine our democracy in Manitoba; I mean this is shocking stuff, Honourable Speaker.

And then the Leader of the Official Opposition, again, went out to the cameras and said, nah, this is in a grey area.

Black and white, the commissioner's report showed in black and white, that their team broke the law. They undermined our democracy, and that speaks to their lack of morals and an appropriate 'proach' to being leaders in this province.

Manitobans know they can't trust them, but they can trust this team to get things right.

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

Mrs. Stone: This minister didn't do his homework. It is a botched rollout, it was sloppy, and now it's a heartless tax grab on people living in affordable housing. This community service has had their monthly TIPP payment increased by \$2,275 a month. Affordable housing providers cannot swallow these costs, and residents are already stretched to the max and certainly cannot afford it.

The Spruce Woods co-op is watching today.

Will the minister correct his sloppy, heartless tax grab and reinstate their rebate today, yes or no?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, we're proud to be making life more affordable. Our \$1,500 credit helps to reduce the cost of education and property taxes. We cut income taxes for Manitobans across the province. We brought in a gas tax holiday and now a 10 per cent permanent cut to the gas tax, a tax that the members opposite loved to charge every day for seven and a half years.

Manitobans, again, can trust that we're going to get things right and we're going to make life more affordable. They know they can't trust the members

opposite, and yesterday's commissioner's report shows that in clear terms. Black and white, they broke the law; they can't be trusted.

Will the leader of the members opposite stand in this House and actually take ownership for the actions of his colleagues? *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

The Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) needs to come to order.

Property Taxes for Affordable Housing Request to Reinstate Rebate

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, vulnerable families and seniors are at risk of losing their homes. This government's tax hikes have targeted 80 affordable housing units in just one organization.

To the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), how many other affordable housing units were impacted by this tax hike?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Acting Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): Miigwech for the question.

I find it—just the pure audacity of any member opposite to get up and ask any question on affordable housing in the province of Manitoba, when we know that in their seven and a half years of a failed, cold, callous, incapable government, they sold off social housing. They put at risk Manitobans that are the most vulnerable.

So we will take no lessons from any member opposite there, particularly when what we learned yesterday. And I don't think that the members really appreciate or can actually understand what was tabled in the House yesterday. That's never been tabled in the history of—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a supplementary question.

Mrs. Hiebert: Honourable Speaker, I'm asking about families, the possible difference between them having a roof over their head or being homeless.

The minister has a duty to protect vulnerable families, not leave them caught in the crossfire and struggling because of heartless tax grabs.

Will she do the right thing and reinstate the property tax rebate for all affordable housing units?

MLA Fontaine: Let's talk about families. Let's talk about the families of the murder victims that Heather Stefanson chose to construct a whole election campaign on, while those women, those Manitobans, those most vulnerable and marginalized Manitobans, lay in a landfill.

And that very member, yesterday—that ex-premier, that ex-minister of Families and failed Health minister and all of the things that they had to keep moving her because she's so incompetent—was just noted as breaking the law yesterday.

The first time in our history. She was issued an \$18,000 fine. That's never been—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Hiebert: Honourable Speaker, I'm asking about families who need answers today.

This government promised to go after Bay Street but instill—instead they're hitting vulnerable Manitobans at home.

What is this minister doing today to make these—make sure these tax bills aren't landing on families who simply can't afford higher rent costs because of heartless NDP taxes?

MLA Fontaine: There are many of us in this Chamber that remember year after year after year after year, in those seven and a half years of the dark days of that failed, miserable government, that when we would leave the Manitoba Legislature, we would see our relatives in bus shacks in -40° weather.

Not one single member opposite, including Heather Stefanson, Cliff Cullen, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), cared about those relatives. They didn't care about those Manitobans.

And so the members opposite don't have a leg to stand on in respect of social housing, caring about families or ensuring that our unsheltered relatives get the housing that they need, and they certainly don't have a leg to stand on in protecting democracy.

Ethics Commissioner's Report Findings PC Government Ethical Violations

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): Honourable Speaker, just yesterday, Heather Stefanson was fined \$18,000 for her attempts to violate the Constitution and ram through the Sio Silica project in the days after she lost the election. This demonstrates her utter

disregard for our democracy and the people of Manitoba.

To add to it, when the news broke, she shrugged her shoulders in arrogance and said she was just doing her job. Another normal day at the factory for the Manitoba PCs, I guess.

Can the Premier shed more light on the findings of the report and the ethical violations of the PC government?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I want to thank the member for St. Boniface. We're some 37 minutes into question period, and he's now the first person to ask about the number one political issue in the province right now.

He says, just doing the job—the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton). Said, just doing her job—Heather Stefanson.

No. You lost your jobs. That's what the election was about. You didn't have the authority to do this thing—through you, the Chair. They didn't have the right to ram through a controversial mining project. That decision was up to the next government that you, the people of Manitoba, chose.

And there's no acceptance of responsibility.

I'll table an excerpt of this report. Respectfully, the facts I learned in this investigation simply do not support the assertions made by Ms. Stefanson.

She's been fined. She's found a new level of humiliation. But let's reflect on what that means. Under oath, to the commissioner, she lied. Somebody that they all supported and still are friends with.

Children in CFS Care Inquiry into Hotel Placement

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Last week we learned that this Minister of Families has started placing children in hotels again. Now we're hearing from foster families that arbitrary decisions are being made, splitting up children and their support networks.

Can the Minister of Families explain why children are being removed from the only home they have known for decades?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): As I shared last week—in her questions from last week—it is clear—the CFS standards are clear, and children are not to be placed in hotels. They are sometimes used as stays for family visits, medical appointments or family reunification.

What I think is really important today to put on the record is that when Heather Stefanson was the minister of Families, what did she do for Manitoba children? Nothing.

And that's why she was moved from portfolio to portfolio to portfolio, and that's why she was voted out. And what we learned yesterday is that while she was voted out—she was kicked out of her job because she was completely incompetent and a faithful foot soldier of patriarchy. She broke the law. She—

* (14:30)

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Agassiz, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Byram: What's important here today, Honourable Speaker, is answers for this family that I've heard from, that's being torn apart; siblings that have been in a single placement most of their entire life. There's a system in place that works for both the kids, the family and the mother. Now a caseworker changes and that carefully orchestrated system that worked best for all that were involved is now falling apart.

Will the minister agree that the best interest of the children needs to come first?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): You've got a great Families Minister who is willing to follow up on the details with this family, because you know what? We love the kids. We put the kids first.

I even look across the aisle and I feel sorry for the PCs, you know. They humiliated themselves in the last election. They ran these ads attacking the families of murder victims saying, you know, stand firm against a landfill dig; so disrespectful, purposefully calculated to try and play into racism.

Then the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan), he put himself on anti-trans billboards and then again, oh, he's the victim somehow in all this. Sadly, you know, no surprise, though, the good people of Manitoba showed them the door. And I say sadly sarcastically there, obviously.

But then now, we found out that after they were shown the door, they then compounded that miserable humiliation by breaking the law and violating the Constitution to improperly further private interests. What's more, they've now elected a new leader who can't even sustain a question period and runs away in the middle of Estimates.

When will they stop—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Order. Order.

The time for questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker: And I have a ruling for the Chamber.

Order, please.

Following oral questions on May 15, 2025, the honourable Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) raised a point of order regarding questions that had been asked by the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen) during oral questions that day.

The honourable Government House Leader explained in her point of order that, while understanding that members do have the protection of parliamentary privilege to speak freely in the House, there are lines that should not be crossed; specifically, the Government House Leader stated that members should not be invoking members' families in debate in the House, asserting that there should be a principle in the House that our families, our children, our loved ones are not brought into this Chamber.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Johnson) also spoke to the point of order before I took it under advisement.

Let me say first that the honourable Government House Leader has raised some important concerns in her point of order. Members will know that I have been concerned about decorum in this House for many weeks now, and language used by some members has been a part of those concerns.

In response to another matter raised in this House recently, I spoke about the privilege of freedom of speech shared by all members. I'm going to expand on those comments now, as they are directly relevant to this point of order.

The question of whether language used in the House is unparliamentary or not is related to the fact that, under the protection of parliamentary privilege, members enjoy the right of freedom of speech during legislative proceedings.

Bosc and Gagnon devote considerable attention to this topic in the 3rd edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. On page 89, they state that, "By far, the most important right accorded to Members of the House is the exercise of freedom of speech in parliamentary proceedings."

It has been described as a fundamental right without which members would be hampered in the performance of their duties. It permits them to speak in the House without inhibition, to refer any matter or express any opinion as they see fit, to say what they feel needs to be said in the furtherance of the national interest and the aspirations of their constituents.

However, Bosc and Gagnon also emphasize the need for the judicious use of the privilege of freedom of speech and the necessity to take great care in the exercise of this privilege. On page 97, they address the responsibility that comes with the exercise of freedom of speech, noting that, "The privilege of freedom of speech is an extremely powerful immunity and on occasion Speakers have had to caution Members about its misuse."

Ruling on a question of privilege in 1987, House of Commons Speaker Fraser spoke at length about the importance of freedom of speech and the need for care in what members say.

And here I will quote directly from Speaker Fraser's 1987 ruling: Such a privilege confers grave responsibilities on those who are protected by it. By that I mean specifically the honourable members of this place. The consequences of its abuse can be terrible. All members are conscious of the care they must exercise in availing themselves of the absolute privilege of freedom of speech.

This is the context in which I am considering the point of order raised regarding the comments made by the honourable member for Brandon West. The member has the freedom to make such comments, but I would urge him and other members to consider whether or not they should make such comments. I also echo Speaker Fraser's sentiments and note that the privilege of freedom of speech in this place brings with it a significant responsibility to not abuse that privilege.

Regarding the point of order under consideration: in her comments, the honourable Government House Leader stated that members should not be invoking other members' families in debate in this House. Unfortunately, this was not the first instance of such a thing incurring in the House.

Hansard contains a few references through the years of members mentioning other members' families in various debates. These instances have not been ruled unparliamentary. I would also add that this practice is consistent across other Canadian jurisdictions, though on some occasions a caution has been given in such circumstances.

Accordingly, I am ruling that, while the honourable Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) does make a good point, of which all members should be mindful, under our rules and practices she does not have a point of order. However, I would strongly encourage members to be cautious when referencing family members in debate. *[interjection]*

Order.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: The—*[interjection]*

Order, please.

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 have the names of the guests who have joined us in the gallery included in Hansard following the petition I am about to read as the petition was drafted by one of the guests, Luke Melvie.

The Speaker: Is there leave to have the member for Tyndall Park's guests' names included at the conclusion of her petition as one of the members present was who drafted the petition? Is there leave to have their names included in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

After School Recreation Programs for At-Risk Youth

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) It is a sad fact that children and young people lacking in their needs and resources are often susceptible to street gangs preying on their vulnerabilities.

* (14:40)

(2) Youths in this province have little in terms of outside support, resources and recreation, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment, to the dangerous and toxic environment of Manitoba's street gangs.

(3) There could be a variety of different reasons why youth join gangs, but one common thread is that needs are not being met in their lives.

(4) After school and recreational programming reduces crime by giving children a place to go where they can develop great social and leadership skills, and form strong relationships with role models in the

community, which thereby decreases the risk of their involvement with a gang.

(5) Newcomer communities and Indigenous youth are often lacking the resources and support they need, and are therefore vulnerable to gang recruitment.

(6) Because youth often don't have the support they need at home, it's crucial to focus as much of our attention towards things like after school youth programs and social services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to increase the funding for youth after school and recreation programs; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to increase funding for Indigenous- and newcomer-led programs and organizations that help Indigenous and newcomer communities.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Edwin Andaya, Kristen Collinson, Vinnie Lillie, Dorian M., Luke Melvie, Dean Melvie, Jake Romaniuk, Markus Silpao, Alexa Storozuk.

The Speaker: No further petitions?

GRIEVANCES

Call for Improvements to Wildfire Response

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Gives me an opportunity today to put a few words on the record and ask some questions, since we're unable to get into Estimates with a few of the departments that are specifically involved in the wildfire situation across this great province of ours, Honourable Speaker.

Part of my communication today, and grievance, is more so putting out some questions so that the government—when they're listening, the various different departments that are involved—they can potentially get, specifically my area of the province, the Lac du Bonnet constituency, some answers, but also other areas of the province that probably could use a little bit of tweaking or some improvements on the process.

We know, Honourable Speaker, that the firefighters, the water bombers, EMO services, the emergency management teams that are within the different areas of the province are working tirelessly, the volunteers are working tirelessly. And, of course, the friends and family of all those that I've already mentioned, of course, are at home at times, worrying about those

family members that are putting, at times, their lives at risk.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend reeve of Lac du Bonnet, Loren Schinkel; mayor of the RM of Alexander, Jack Brisco; their councils and their staff; and many of our other municipal teams that are helping fight the fires all over this province.

Also, Honourable Speaker, I would like to commend those that are working hard in our provincial parks, because unlike a couple of the comments that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) had put on the record earlier today, not all are municipalities. And I know that the Premier tries to pat himself on the back, saying that he gets outside of the Perimeter. Well, I know that he does, but at the same time, at times he puts words on the record that are inaccurate.

So I look to three plus ministers—so three ministers, plus the Premier, plus anyone else that is on that side of the Chamber, on the government side, to work with us at times in regards to improving the systems that are already out there. I appreciate the minister who is the—also the MLA for Keewatinook for his bulletins and his updates that are happening within the impacted areas, Honourable Speaker.

There are a few things that I think could be improved, and, again, not being able to get into Estimates and a lot of these questions, again, can be taken as—not as criticism, but as words of potential ways to improve the process.

So, again, we get to down to some communication. Again, the reeve of the RM of Lac du Bonnet, the mayor of the RM of Alexander have done quite an exceptional job on communicating to not only their permanent residents, of course, but those people that call the Lac du Bonnet constituency home during those—during the cottage country and that.

So I do know that a couple notices, and this goes to, you know, some of the other members as well, so we have of course, as I've mentioned, the Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures (Mr. Bushie); we have the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (MLA Naylor); and, of course, we heard earlier today from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, who is also the Minister responsible for Efficiency Manitoba (MLA Moyes); and, of course, the Premier, who put some uneducated words on the record earlier today.

But I do want to commend those three ministers that I spoke about earlier. Couple improvements: when we talk about Manitoba parks, when we have a

notice that is publicly put out in order to lift some of the evacuations, more than one hour's notice would be much greatly appreciated. Because many of the hard-working men and women, business owners in those areas, work hard. They work tirelessly, and many of them had to, of course, evacuate.

And so when there is the lack of communication to those businesses, it unfortunately puts those resources and those supports at a little bit of a—at a bit of a disadvantage, because some of those business owners, who, again, just to remind the members opposite, put capital at risk. And these things, these supports, these services, such as food, water, various different things, are not necessarily locked up in concrete containers in safe spaces less than 50 feet away from their businesses. They do have to co-ordinate with many of the large businesses in the great city of Winnipeg, or even some of our other larger urban centres such as Brandon or Portage la Prairie.

Again, those resources and supports, we're just looking for a little bit more collaboration, co-operation, because in the parks, as the member knows, as the minister knows, there is no reeve or mayor such as the Premier alluded to earlier today.

So it does fall on the minister co-ordinating and having that conversation with the local MLA. Probably wouldn't hurt to—so then we can get that very important information out as quickly as we can to be able to alert those individuals that are impacted.

I also see that, you know, in regards to—I'll just talk about West Hawk—the Whiteshell Provincial Park, West Hawk and Falcon. We know that students—and I know the Education Minister is interested in this as well—students will be going back to school, by the sounds of it, safely on—tomorrow. That being said, some of the teachers that—teachers and staff that occupy that school and that provide that great service to those students are also impacted because of different places that they live. So, again, communication, co-operation, collaboration.

It was interesting to me that some of the last communities to be evacuated out of the provincial park, such as the townsite of West Hawk, is now—those communities are now seeming to be the last ones to be let back in. I know that the ministers that I've mentioned earlier, I know for sure that a couple of them have ventured out there and they have seen—maybe not during this forest fire, because of course we don't want to get in the way of those people, those service providers that are protecting our resources, our businesses, our cottages and that for sure; but I know that

they've been there in the past, and they've seen what is—you know, what type of timelines there are potential, if there has—is a fire that breaks out.

* (14:50)

So again, it's just some of that needs to be a little bit tightened up.

I would also like to know, from the government's standpoint, what type of resources, what type of supports, what type of financial contributions that are going to be made from the Province to those businesses that have been impacted by the loss of business and due to the affected fire areas.

Now in most cases, they have not actually lost the business due to total, you know, fire taking over the whole, entire business. But because of the affected areas, we know that in Manitoba there's a short window of opportunity here. Of course, always have to err on the side of safety, but that's why we have EMO and those services.

So I'm asking today for the ministers who are listening and the departs—departments who are listening to reach out to those various different organizations, whether it's the chambers or individual businesses, to spread the word and to see what type of resources, what type of supports are available through this Knew government to make sure that those businesses are there, operating not only today, not only tomorrow, when they're allowed back in, but also into the future, Honourable Speaker.

Also, some confusion in regards to the supports and the checks and where do impacted individuals actually go to pick up those cheques, whether it's a potential—even an e-transfer situation and those types of things, Honourable Speaker. Confusion—there seems to be a lack of clarity in regards to also mileage of 20 cents kilometre an hour.

Thank you for your time, Honourable Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'd like to table these responses to written questions for the House.

The Speaker: Further business?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, I'd like to table the sequence for

consideration of departmental Estimates in the Committee of Supply for today only.

And then can you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply for the consideration of departmental Estimates.

The Speaker: It has been announced that the House will now dissolve into Committee of Supply for the consideration of Estimates.

Will the Deputy Speaker please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

* (15:10)

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 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): Just to sort of pick up where we left off yesterday. Hopefully, you know, we'll continue on the great line of questioning and hopefully get a little bit better answers, but the answers have been pretty good so far, so we'll sort of continue on that line.

Would just ask the minister if she was able to, over the last few hours, able to find out the answer on how many more French immersion francophone teachers—besides the answer of more—if she was able to get those numbers.

* (15:20)

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Thank you to the member opposite for the question, because it gives me a greater opportunity to talk about the importance of l'éducation française [*French education*] in Manitoba and the proud legacy that we have here in this province, the great work that's being done, both within the department under the leadership of our newly appointed ADM of le Bureau de l'éducation française, René Déquier.

To ADM Déquier, I am so proud of the work that you've accomplished already in this very short time in your position. We are so grateful to have the benefit of your experience and your knowledge and your guidance and your encouragement. So thank you so very much for serving Manitobans in the department and for everything that you bring to our team. Thank you so much.

So the member is curious about the number of francophone teachers that we've added in this last year. So we do have some data about how many positions have been added to the system. Unfortunately, that data is—would require further disaggregation to determine exactly how many of the teachers—the many, many hundreds of teachers that we were able to add to the system since coming into government—how many of those teachers specifically were teachers that were either teaching in l'éducation française [*French education*] or in the French immersion stream.

Based on what we can guess, based on where these positions have been—where these positions are—for example, we can reasonably assume that most, if not all, of the teachers hired into the DSFM would be French-speaking teachers, French-language teachers. We can also assume that—again, we know certain school divisions have a high degree of French immersion programming. So if we look at those school divisions and we make our best guess, I think we can reasonably state to the committee that we have added between 50 and 80 francophone teachers into the system from '24-25 to the '25-26 school year.

So I think it's a great success. Again, a lot of great work has been done. There is a lot of more work to do. Our government believes in the promotion of French language. Our government successfully negotiated a significant agreement regarding the provision of French-language services here in Manitoba, between the federal government and the Province of Manitoba.

I thank my caucus colleagues, my government colleagues, for their help in negotiating that agreement. I think many ministers were involved, but I know that the MLA for Brandon East, Minister Glen Simard, the Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations (Mr. Simard), was instrumental in that negotiation and securing those important funds for Manitoba, which will assist in the provision of French-language services within the education system, within our health-care system and, really, across government.

Again, I'm so proud to work on a team with so many francophones. We have a francophone—we have a couple of francophone educators on the government

bench. The MLA for St. Boniface spent many years before becoming an MLA—was an educator, was a teacher, who taught many francophone students. And also, I just mentioned him, the MLA for Brandon East, the honourable Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations, Glen Simard, was also a French-language—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Just a reminder, you cannot use their first and last names. Just—as minister of municipal and northern affairs.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you very much for your guidance, honourable Chairperson. And that was not intentional, but I appreciate your guidance, and I will endeavour to do better.

Not only do we have members of our caucus that have been francophone educators, but we also have a Premier (Mr. Kinew) who is fluently—I was about to say bilingual, but I wouldn't—not want to disrespect the Premier; I believe he speaks a few more than two languages.

But I'm so proud to be part of a member of a team that values bilingualism and French language here in the province. It's something, as Manitobans, we should all be very proud of, and that we will, as a department, continue to work towards, adding more and more francophone teachers into our system.

Mr. Ewasko: I would like to ask the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister, if you equate credit hours at our post-secondary levels, how many years does it take to become a teacher, and let's just—we're not talking about mature students or people that are, you know, have gone into a profession and then have gone back into post-secondary institution.

Let's just say, student graduates this coming June from secondary school, from high school, wants to become a teacher. How many years does it take to become a teacher in the great province of Manitoba?

MLA Schmidt: Happy to answer the question. It's a peculiar one, however, because I happen to be aware, as he's put on the record many times, that the member opposite is, in fact, a teacher here in Manitoba. I believe he was educated here in Manitoba; however, I'm not certain of that fact. My point being is that the member—this is public information, for which the member—not only is it public information, but it's personal information that the member would have, that he would know.

So I find his question particularly curious. I find it particularly unserious. This committee has gathered here today with the support of the incredible committee

staff, the support of the Department of Education, who are taking time out of their day in which they would regularly be serving Manitobans and working to deliver the best education system that we can. We've gathered here today at Committee of Supply, which is very important.

I'm here to answer questions; happy to speak about education; happy to speak about child care. Would love, in fact, to get some questions on child care. Hopefully, we'll see that from the members opposite.

It wouldn't surprise me if we didn't get any questions on child care, and it wouldn't surprise me because, during their time in office, they paid little to no attention to the sector. So we'll see what they have to come forward with, with their questioning today.

Again, I find this question to be incredibly unserious and a waste of the committee's time. Again, it's public information that anyone could access. You can go onto the website of one of the many institutions that we have here in the province that offers this degree, this amazing degree, which I encourage students that are graduating this June or adult learners—anyone in the province of Manitoba; any internationally educated teachers we might have in the province of Manitoba; anyone who's later in their life thinking about joining the profession, coming back to the profession perhaps, after being driven out after years of neglect and disrespect under the leadership of Heather—oh—Heather Stefanson and the previous Education minister, who joins us here today.

I would encourage all of you to check out the websites of the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg, l'Université de Saint-Boniface; and those websites will tell you how long the degree is. It is a worthwhile degree. You won't regret it; I can tell you that much. It is a noble profession, and we need you here in Manitoba. We need more teachers here in Manitoba to join this excellent profession and to shape the future of our province and to teach the young minds that are in our classrooms.

* (15:30)

So again, this is not only public information that anyone can look up. I think probably even most lay people probably know. You don't have to be a teacher or you don't have to know a teacher to know the answer to this question. It's pretty common knowledge. Most high schoolers, I think, would know it.

And again, it's not just public information; it's personal information that the member has. The member has a bachelor of education and knows full well

how long it took him. He was the minister of Education; he ought to know the answer to this question. It's quite curious that he would pose this question here at committee, wasting all of our time.

I would love to talk about the investments we're making in math—significant investments we're making in math. We have flowed dollars directly to some of the most underserved schools in our province for these last few months of school so that we can have math tutors directly supporting the students that need it the most, so that they can achieve the outcomes that we know they are capable of achieving.

We are extending grade 9 math so that no longer will it be taught over one semester. It's going to be taught over two semesters, giving students more time to engage with the material, more time to engage with their educators and more time to find success—again, the success that we know, as a government, that they can achieve. As long as their schools are properly funded, as long as their teachers feel supported and respected, as long as they have food in their belly, which, again, is another great achievement of this government, Nello's Law, the universal nutrition program.

So please join the teaching profession.

Mr. Ewasko: So, Manitobans, those who've tuned in today again, thank you for joining us in room 254 for the Estimates of Education, Early Childhood Learning.

The minister talks about wasting time. The minister took over five minutes plus however long it took the minister to consult with her department officials on a non-answer. She actually didn't say the answer to the question that I had asked.

Yes, many people in the province, prior to a certain amount of years, were able to enter the teaching profession by going to common school. And then, later on, it was a four-year degree and then they were classified as a class 4, which when I graduated from university, I was a class 4.

Then, after that, you were able to extend your education and get either further degrees and those types of things, and then move up the classes as far as education goes.

Right now, we're graduating class 5 teachers, and the reason for the question, because the minister showed today, again, on the record, after five minutes plus of wasting your time, Manitobans, and not coming up with the answer, is the fact that to become a teacher takes longer than a year and a half.

Why do I put that out—point that out? It's because the minister, even though she said yesterday that she fails to, and she doesn't like to pat herself on the back, but the over 600 claimed new teaching positions in Manitoba, she wants to take credit for, which, if you do the basic math, and I understand that the minister from yesterday—and I do understand from yesterday—*[interjection]* And so the minister wants to heckle me from her chair. She'll have another five minutes of hopefully not wasting your time, Manitobans.

But the point is that it's important to put correct information on the record. And so when we take a look at the different teaching positions that are now entered the teaching profession, it is, you know, considerably more than what was 2023. Why? Because students graduate from post secondary and then go on to the teaching profession.

One of the things that was very disturbing and unsettling, I think, to many Manitobans and to those education partners throughout our great province of ours, specifically school divisions, but not only school divisions, but to area communities that have long waited for schools.

And we saw the Education Minister and her Premier (Mr. Kinew) cancel many schools that, this coming fall, would be the fall of 2025. I know that many schools would be coming online, if not this coming fall, for sure by the following.

And so it's interesting that the minister, again, patting herself on the back, had decided to go and cancel so many of those school projects that were promised by the previous government that, again, whoever won the 2023 election was not actually going to be able to actually go cut the ribbon 'til '25-26.

And a couple of the ribbons that the minister will be able to cut, if she continues to remain in that position, will be, thankfully, to the hard work of our previous government, making sure that we are building bricks and mortar so that we can put those additional students into classrooms.

As opposed to right now, the minister—what she can take credit for is putting up more mobile classrooms. We used to call them huts, but ready-to-move classrooms. And I think, matter of fact, honourable Chairperson, the minister also is now putting students in not only hallways, but in areas of the schools where they at one time took music lessons, at one time took art lessons, at one time sat in a library and read books, or went on the Internet to do some research or whatever else.

It's unfortunate that the minister went and did that, but that will be her legacy, since she wants to talk about legacies. And within those schools that were cancelled, honourable Chairperson, we're also talking about well over 770 child-care spaces, since she wants to also talk about child care.

I've got lots of questions for this minister. I'm just hoping that we'll get some answers as opposed to wasting six-plus minutes on a non-answer in her last—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The time has expired.

MLA Schmidt: There's a saying that I believe in very strongly, that I say often, and that is that we see the world not as it is, we see the world as we are. And I think that that statement is very true here today.

The member opposite really shows his hand when he suggests that I'm patting myself on the back, when really, what he wanted to do, where he got to after accusing me of patting myself on the back, was to pat himself on the back for all of the graduates: the graduates who we are so grateful for, who have chosen the noble profession of teaching. It really is a noble profession; I have so much respect for teachers in this province and the role that they play.

And, again, I take no credit for their success. I do take credit, however, for being a part of a team that has restored faith in the education sector, that has enticed people previously driven away from the education system under the leadership of the former PC government, the disrespect, the stagnant wages, the growing class sizes. Again, I'll remind the committee that it was the previous PC government that repealed legislation that mandated small class sizes for our early learners.

What could be wrong with that? You would repeal a law that means that kids get more one-on-one time with their students—I'm sorry, with their teachers. I'm so confused by it that I've confused myself.

* (15:40)

So the member talks about his failed government's announcements to build schools—and that's really all that they were; they were announcements. We know for a fact that they were not budgeted for. And we know for a fact that none of those imaginary schools that were announced—again, in the dying days of a government that was desperate to be re-elected. They had lost the trust and the faith of Manitobans and, in a desperate effort to try to keep a couple votes, they announced a

bunch of imaginary schools, which is, again, a problem from a political perspective.

But certainly what's really egregious is the false hope that that created in communities. He talked about the schools; he talked about the child-care spaces—it's reprehensible that you would create false hope in these communities. They had no plan; they had no money for whatever imaginary plan that they did have.

We're doing things differently. We've announced, in Budget 2025, that our five-year capital plan and the resources that we have set aside will build 11 new schools for Manitobans in every part of our province. We have announced a K-to-8 Devonshire Park school in River East Transcona; two K-to-8 schools in Pembina Trails School Division: one at Prairie Pointe and one at Bridgwater Lakes; a K-to-8 school in the Meadowlands, and—two K-to-8 schools, I apologize—in Seven Oaks School Division: one at Meadowlands, one at Highland Pointe; a K-to-8 school in southwest Brandon; high schools in Neepawa; high schools in northwest Winnipeg; and high schools in Ste. Anne.

And, again, we were just previously talking about l'éducation française [*French education*] and the DSFM and francophone teachers and our initiative to recruit and retain more French-speaking teachers here in Manitoba. To support their great work, we have also announced two schools for the DSFM: one in the community of Brandon and one in the great constituency of St. Boniface.

So these schools have been budgeted for. They're going to be delivered to Manitobans on budget and on time. I think it's important for the committee to reflect on the true—we're going to build these schools. It's an investment that we're going to make.

The biggest threat to our capital plan is the Trump tariffs. And I want to remind Manitobans and this committee that it was the Leader of the Opposition who thanked Donald Trump for his tariffs. That is a threat to our capital plan; it's a threat to our economy, and Manitobans should be outraged and ashamed.

Mr. Ewasko: Again, the Education Minister can't help herself, but that's okay; that's okay.

So, as far as the schools and that, that have been promised—

An Honourable Member: It's going to keep on coming, Wayne. It's going to keep on coming.

Mr. Ewasko: —well, and the minister is not putting it on the record, but she says that she's going to keep on coming. So that's great. We're going to be here a

while. I've got many questions. My colleagues have many questions. Manitobans have many questions for this Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister.

And when we talk about the fact that this minister is now re-announcing a lot of the schools that her government had cancelled when they first formed government, she could maybe put on the record why did they cancel those schools that were announced and, again, promised to various different communities around this great province of ours.

And, basically, it really shouldn't have taken that long for either her predecessor or herself to get comfortable in the role to be able to then know that those conversations had happened with those school partners, with school divisions and communities and municipalities, and just basically finding where that need was in this great province of ours and committing to building schools. Because again, the Education Minister—I don't know how long the Education Minister will be in her role or had wanted to be in politics, but the historical fact is that for 17 and a half years, we saw the dark days and decay and decline of the Selinger government and then what ended up happening after that—so, we had seven and a half years of our government, and we went through two, two and a half, almost three years of COVID where there were many challenges throughout the province, of course.

And now we've got a year and a half, just over a year and a half of the Kinew government, and basically we're not seeing anything. We're seeing a lot of announcements, we're seeing a lot of things being put on the record, and I'll give the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister some credit to this.

She's putting not a whole lot of things on the record, because I'm not sure if, you know, it's the three political staff that are actually the spokespeople, or if it's the deputy minister, or who is this spokesperson for the department, but I don't see the Education Minister actually going out and saying some of these things. We see some light and fluffy sort of announcements, but with not really any kind of plan.

The nice thing though, I have to share, is that a lot of the great initiatives that are happening—the Education Minister mentioned the financial literacy course pilot project under our government. Why? Because we know, talking with parents, guardians and students, that they could see—and the business community as well—could see that students would definitely benefit from that course. So I'm really happy to see that the Education Minister is moving ahead with it.

I guess what I'd like to ask is: Is this current year—how many students are benefiting from that financial literacy pilot project course, and how much its cost?

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite for the question, because it gives me a chance to talk about financial literacy, which is so important for all of us, and certainly for students in Manitoba. It's such a foundational skill that will really support them in their life.

And just totally anecdotally, I listen to the CBC News in the morning, and just last—wait, was that this week or last week? They were doing a story about what didn't you learn in school that—it was a story about adulting, if anyone's heard that term, and so the theme of the story was when you became an adult, what do you wish you had learned that you hadn't learned before you started adulting.

And a pretty common theme in that news story was about banking and loans and mortgages. A lot of people talked about that, about how they became an adult without having some of those basic skills.

So financial literacy is very important. And again, the member pats himself on the back, so I will, you know, give credit where credit is due, that the previous government—although, again, financial literacy essentials is not—was not offered in the curriculum under the leadership of the PC government.

* (15:50)

There was a small, limited smattering of a pilot project initiated under the previous government where they 'praid' a—they paid a private firm a hefty contract, hundreds of thousands of dollars, to, again, introduce a very limited, very small pilot project on financial literacy. So I will give the member credit for that.

What we have done is something totally different. We're taking a different approach. We are using the internal resources of our department to expand financial literacy curriculum to every single student in Manitoba. So not a pilot project, not just one school here and one school there. Every student in Manitoba, 15,000-plus grade 9 students in Manitoba, every single year will receive an education in financial literacy, the curriculum of which was developed within the department with educators and with expertise. And we are so proud of that. And we know that the impact it's going to have on students and, frankly, on our economy for generations to come.

In his question, however, the member, as he tends to do—he likes to denigrate my position; he likes to

suggest I might not be in this role for a very long time. The member made a comment about—that perhaps I'm not yet comfortable in my role and that's why we paused the school capital plan that they had announced. Again, they had not budgeted for; they had not planned for nine imaginary schools that were all going to be opened in the same year, by the way—virtually impossible to do if you know anything about the construction industry here in Manitoba. But, again, just further evidence that it was an imaginary plan.

The member suggested perhaps I was uncomfortable in my role and that's why we didn't proceed with their plan. The reason I did not proceed with their plan was because Manitobans have serious questions about the ethics and the morality in the way that the PCs govern.

They have serious questions about the leadership of the previous government. Not once, but twice, Heather Stefanson, the premier to which the member answered to, has been proven to have broken the law, to have misled Manitobans, to have—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): I will just call the minister on relevance.

MLA Schmidt: I think it's absolutely relevant when we're talking about how Manitobans and how government is spending Manitobans' tax dollars to talk about who are making those decisions and in whose interest those decisions are being made.

The previous government wanted to build schools under the P3 model, a model that does not serve the interests of taxpayers. It would—I think it would enlighten the committee to know that under the previous government, the price of schools ballooned to the highest in the country. The price per square foot, per student, here in Manitoba, under the failed leadership of the previous minister and the failed premier, Heather Stefanson, ballooned to the highest in the country. It was more expensive to build schools in Manitoba than anywhere else.

Why is that? Whose pockets were they lining? Was it the same pockets they lined when they awarded child-care centres? Was it the same pockets they were lining when they tried to push through the Sio Silica licence? Manitobans deserve answers.

Mr. Ewasko: The minister's not wrong. Manitobans deserve answers.

And that's what we're here—that's why I'm here asking the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt) questions. So far, answers have been very minimal.

But again, many of the things that the minister's put on the record and accusing me of, in regards to her position and that, it's up to the Premier (Mr. Kinew) whether the Premier wants to keep her in that role or not. I mean, it sounds like she's very well versed in infrastructure, as she said, you know, maybe procurement, maybe bricks and mortar, maybe the ag industry, maybe in justice. I don't know.

That's going to be up to her boss, the Premier, to figure out whether the Kinew government wants to have the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning in her role for some more time, or he might give the opportunity to some of the people who do not sit in that privileged front row that the minister was patting herself on the back for about a week and a half ago, and actually turn around and take a look at some of her supportive colleagues in the second and third row.

It was unfortunate that the minister took that position, and for those of you that are watching today, I can, you know, point you towards question period a few—about a week and a half ago, when the minister talked down to her colleagues that were in other seats that are not in the front row in this Chamber.

But, honourable Speaker, it—or, honourable Chairperson, it is a privilege and an honour to have a seat in the Manitoba Legislature, to be able to serve the great constituents that put all 57 of us—well, right now, 56 of us—into the Chamber, and I think we all take that responsibility—doesn't matter of what political stripe—very important in order to move forward the questions and concerns of Manitobans.

So the minister talks about, you know, the fake schools, and I don't even know what she's talking about to be honest with you, when she starts going off topic. But when we start talking about new schools, many of the schools that the Education Minister had mentioned are ones that we actually had announced. I don't quite understand why her and her Premier, her boss, decided to pause or cut those schools, but now they're reannouncing it.

I mean, we do know that the Premier likes to take—try to take some credit and get up in front of that camera and fix his tie and smile to the camera and get those pictures taken. So we do know a lot of that is happening.

For example, we did go out and announce a new school in River East Transcona School Division and to help them purchase some land for the new K-to-8 school in Devonshire Park. Now this minister goes and decides to not put it on the old Sumka gardens spot, but actually put it somewhere else.

Again, it's ideology. It's unfortunate that this Education Minister, and I—you know what, I'm giving the Education Minister credit for this one, but it's more so her boss, the Premier, who is stuck in his ideology to the point where he can't see good plans. And because, majority of the time, the Premier doesn't have his own plans and spent seven and a half years in opposition: nothing, nada. No plans moving forward.

And so they cut the schools or paused the schools that we had planned, and then are now starting to reannounce some of them. The minister talks as if the 3P model is a bad thing. I mean, I don't know if she's ever traveled on Chief Peguis Trail, but hey, there's a 3P project. We want to talk about something a little bit closer to what's happened, I mean, the Charleswood Bridge is a 3P project. And also, you know, distributing menstrual products all through the schools and community centres was a 3P project that we initiated, and I know that the minister continues on that.

So I'd like to ask the minister, what does she have to say about the land purchase for the new school in Brandon School Division?

* (16:00)

MLA Schmidt: There's a lot to disagree with in that question, and I'll get to that. But I wanted to start with what we agree with, and I do agree with the member opposite when he talks about what bench we sit on.

The member talked about—he continues to talk about how long I might be in this role, suggesting that maybe I'm not good enough, that maybe I'll get shuffled out. It is an honour and a privilege to serve Manitobans. I am humbled and privileged to serve as the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning. I would be humbled and privileged to serve in any role that the Premier asked me to serve in, and I would be humbled and privileged to sit in the first row, the second row or the third row.

That's one of the great benefits of being a part of a team and a caucus with so much skill and ability. I'm here with several members of my team. I would have no problem at all handing off my portfolio to any of the members here, and they could all do it just as well or perhaps even better than I could. That is the benefit

of being on a team. We are a team; we are a highly skilled team.

And so I do agree with the member and I do regret the comment that I made in the Chamber last week. And, again, it is an honour to sit in any row in that Chamber. And, again, I would gladly switch seats with any one of my colleagues and I would have full confidence that they would serve Manitobans in this role with just as much care and passion and dedication and earnest goodwill that I put into it. So, again, we agree.

I also want to take a minute to speak about what I feel is a lot of misogyny that happens in this space. And I think it's particularly relevant when we're talking about the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. And that's because for decades—for hundreds of years—the work of teaching our youth, of caring for children, has been left to women. And so it means a lot to me to be a woman and to be the Minister of Education and childhood learning. I believe I'm the first woman to serve in the role since the great honourable Nancy Allan. So it's been quite some time. And I think it's meaningful.

And I think that women deserve to be respected for their role in education, in early childhood learning, in providing child care and education for hundreds of years, for millennia, for our community and the role that that plays not only in forming those young people and their lives, but contributing to our economy. And the members opposite are laughing and giggling. In fact, some of them are leaving. The real misogynists are revealing themselves because they can't even handle to hear about misogyny.

The member opposite has sat here today and he's given credit—he has said perhaps it's the Premier (Mr. Kinew) that's doing the minister's job. Perhaps it's her department that's doing her job. Perhaps it's her political staff.

I know that the member would love to give the credit for my work to every man in this room in the same way that he takes credit for all of the women in his caucus and the great role that they play.

An Honourable Member: That's not true.

MLA Schmidt: We know that it's true. We know that the member does not respect women. We know that the member does not respect educators. We know that the member does not respect the public service. And we know the member does not respect democracy.

The Premier is my boss. Heather Stefanson was his boss. Whose interest was he serving under her

leadership? It was very clear that—the Ethics Commissioner has found that the former premier of Manitoba, Heather Stefanson, broke the law. She's unethical. She led an unethical team, and Manitobans deserve answers.

Whose interests were the previous government serving? Were they serving Manitobans' interests or were they serving private interests?

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Your time has expired.

Mr. Ewasko: Manitobans—unbelievable, what you just heard. Not once did I ever say anything demeaning to not only the minister herself or other women—I've had the pleasure of working in the education field for 17 years prior to getting into this wonderful honourable position. But what is challenging is when colleagues from the other side, from the government side, starts to twist things, and it's unfortunate that the Education Minister feels the way she does.

I can't help how she feels, but it's unfortunate. And again, whether she remains in Education portfolio or not, it's up to the Premier or up to the potential next election, whether her constituents decide to keep her there or not.

Honourable Chairperson, I am going to pass the floor and the time for questioning over to my good friend and colleague, who happens to also to be a woman, the MLA for Roblin, for some questions 'til, you know, no—until she sees fit to pass the questioning back over to me. But the question, just so Manitobans are aware, was about the Brandon School Division, where the Education Minister came nowhere near the city of Brandon.

So, thank you, honourable Chairperson, and I pass the questions over to my good friend and colleague, the MLA for Roblin.

MLA Schmidt: I appreciate the member ceding the floor to his colleague. However, he couldn't help himself to grandstand and put some more words on the record, so thankfully I have the opportunity to respond.

So before he leaves, I would like to remind the member opposite, since he comes here today and feigns that he cares about education, that he feigns that he had planned to fund education; he feigns he had a plan to build schools. I just wanted to remind the committee and remind Manitobans of the record of his failed PC government and of his failure as minister of Education.

So millions—tens of millions of dollars of funding for education was cut under his leadership.

The percentage of operating that the Province pays to school funding increased during his time. Again, the wasted resources: 1 and half million dollars were paid to consultants to promote and advertise bill 64—bill 64, which fell flat—and, in fact, I think that's an understatement—fell flat is perhaps the understatement of the day. It was widely hated. That's a strong a term, but I'll use it.

They had a majority government at the time, if Manitobans recall. They could pass any legislation they want. This legislation was so widely hated that they couldn't even pass their own bill.

And after that, what was their plan? Nothing. Their plan on education was bill 64. It was defunding education. It was getting rid of democracy in education. It was reducing the amount of freedom you have in education. And once the community said, that's not what we want, the minister—the former minister threw up his hands and said, that was it.

For 28 of the 37 school divisions in Manitoba, funding was cut from where it had been prior to the PCs taking office. Funding was cut by 15 to 20 per cent for 15 school divisions.

I mentioned this already on the record, but I'll mention it again, because it's repugnant. The previous government repealed legislation mandating small class sizes in early years. Smaller classes, more one-on-one time with your teachers—the previous government said, that's a bad idea; we don't like that.

* (16:10)

Our government is taking a different approach. We're investing in small class sizes: \$3 million a year investing in small class sizes. Hiring teachers, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of teachers have been added to our system.

We have a lot of more work to do, trust me, we have a mess to clean up. We inherited a system that was not invested in for years; was not properly funded; where educators and school trustees and 'scool' administrators were disrespected.

The member opposite heckles me because he doesn't like the truth, he doesn't like to be reminded of his record; he continues to heckle me, he tries to throw me off. He will not throw me off. I've stood up to bigger bullies than him many times in my life; it's totally fine.

Winnipeg School Division cut close to \$5 million, including their nutrition program; Winnipeg School Division had to cut a nutrition program under the

member's leadership. Under our leadership, under the vision of our Premier (Mr. Kinew), and the vision of Minister Nello Altomare, every student in Manitoba now has a nutrition program that they can rely on.

In Seven Oaks School Division they had to cut 28 educators—the member continues to heckle me, he thinks he's going to throw me off, he doesn't want to hear the truth. St. James-Assiniboia cut 12 full-time teaching positions. Seven Oaks School Division was put into a deficit. Hanover School Division, a \$2.7-million deficit is what they were left with under the leadership of the previous failed government.

On this side of the House, the NDP government, we see education as a worthwhile investment. We're going to continue investing, we're going to continue working with our education partners, educators, administrators, trustees, experts, researchers, post-secondaries: we are here to partner with you in service to Manitoba children.

Thank you.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Thank you, and before I get in to the substance of my question I just want to respond to something that the minister said, and I feel compelled to respond because I don't think any of us in this Legislature, regardless of political stripe—who are women—got here without encountering misogyny at some point in some form. I think we're all familiar with that and what it looks like.

And it's not a term that should be used lightly or thrown around during debate when there isn't substance to back it up. And as somebody who has worked with the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) quite closely over the last year and a half, I can tell you without a doubt he is not a misogynist.

I have never felt anything but supported and lifted up. During his time as interim Leader of the Opposition, he went out of his way to put me in a position of leadership in our caucus; he did everything he could to give me profile in my critic role when he didn't have to.

And—I think—I have a lot of respect for the minister, but her leader is one whose past is undeniably misogynistic. It's the same leader who just weeks ago thought it was funny to table a picture of me, in the Legislature, in front of a doughnut shop and body shame me for it. That's misogyny.

But now I want to get into the substance of my question. I've been in conversation with a number of parents in my constituency. They're concerned because

their kids in Pembina Trails School Division aren't high needs, necessarily—they require some support in terms of literacy and numeracy—and they're concerned with the outcomes that they're achieving, and I think some of those outcomes are reflected in the division's continuous improvement report, which I have read.

Their concern is about EA support in the classroom. So what they're finding, and what they've told me, is that most of the EA support in the classroom ends up going to kids with very acute needs, severe behavioural issues that need to be addressed that require support. But the upshot of that is that it doesn't leave a lot of time for kids who just require a bit more assistance with basic literacy and numeracy.

So, I'm wondering what the department is doing to support those kids with less acute needs and ensure that they don't fall through the cracks when it comes to literacy and numeracy.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member for what I think is a really important question.

I will say to the member that, you know, I appreciate her words and her experiences and I'll certainly reflect on them. I hope that the member knows that I think I understand the seriousness of the term. I don't make statements like that lightly. But again, I appreciate her words.

I, too, have a great deal of respect for the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook), and I would make a friendly suggestion to her not to give so much credit for her high profile to her colleagues, but I digress.

When it comes to the question of how we are supporting students in the classroom when it comes to numeracy and literacy, I mean, we're doing a lot of things. I think the funding of schools is very important. We've made a lot of progress in our first two years: \$170-million increase in just the first two years, more than 3 and a half per cent.

This is something that school divisions have been needing and wanting for a long time. We are here to partner with them, to allow them to grow their budgets and add positions. We know that the best thing for students—the best way for students to gain understanding and improve their assessments and their outcomes is through greater one-on-one time with educators.

So thanks to the healthy funding increases that we've been providing to school divisions, I can update the committee and the member that in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, thanks in part to the funding coming from the Province, that the

St. James-Assiniboia School Division in this year's budget was able to add 16 more teachers, 24 more EAs and one more clinician.

So that's important. Those are real resources—human resources that the school division was able to add into their school system, their school division, thanks to funding increases that they've received from the Province.

So we're adding more educators into the system, more EAs, more clinicians so that students can have more one-on-one time with their teachers. We are also continuing our funding of our small class size initiative; that is funding that goes to schools to, again, allow them to do this sort of hiring to ensure that those early years—those class sizes can stay around 20, ideally.

Again, I've said it before; I'm going to say it again and I'm going to say it a lot: the universal nutrition program is really fundamental for students' learning.

* (16:20)

We know that so many students struggle, whether they're struggling with their attention, whether they're struggling with their behaviour, with the way that they're able to absorb the material, oftentimes, or at least some of the time, can be attributed to not having enough breakfast that day, not having a lunch to look forward to.

So I don't think it can be overstated how important the universal nutrition program is to support all students and their learning.

But we've made some great announcements recently on both literacy on numeracy supports for the classroom. We, last month, announced the universal early reading screener. Many—we know that many divisions, many schools, many teachers, are using these tools already with success. Our announcement is just making sure that those supports, those tools or resources, are available to all teachers, all schools and all school divisions here in Manitoba.

And we know that that early screening tool is just one part of the solution that's going to help us identify barriers, challenges that students might be facing, and so that we can help address their need and provide them the supports that they need.

We've also added financial literacy to grade 9, something that's going to be very important for students' learning. And we have expanded the grade 9 math course so that it's taught over a full year.

So these are a few things we're doing. Happy to get into more detail or answer whatever questions the members might have.

Mrs. Cook: I appreciate the updated stats for St. James. I do have one school in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, but most of the schools in my constituency are in Pembina Trails.

And, you know, it's tricky to talk about this issue because I certainly support inclusion in the classroom; I think it's very important. But I had a group of parents who approached me recently because their kid's classroom had to be evacuated for a full hour. And, fortunately, it's nice weather; they were able to go outside. But it had to be evacuated because of an issue with one student that ended up requiring most of the support staff in the school to de-escalate.

And so these parents are a little bit concerned about, you know, the impact on overall student learning when we're dealing with situations like this; and the availability of support for their kids, as well, who have less acute needs.

So I'm just wondering if there are any steps under way, through the department, that would then trickle down to the school divisions—and you'll have to forgive me because I'm not as familiar with how the education system works as I am with how the health-care system works—in terms of dealing with the need for additional support in the classroom beyond just the most acute needs, if I'm making that clear.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member for her question—for the question. I also appreciate the member's recognition that this is a—it's a challenging topic. It's challenging to talk about. We're talking about inclusion, right.

And the ultimate goal of the department is that every child be in school every day for a full day. That's sort of the gold standard. Of course, we know that's not always possible for all learners, that learners across Manitoba have different needs; and that schools and teachers and divisions need the appropriate supports and resources to be able to address those different learning needs.

So when it comes to individual cases of students, obviously students are assessed on an individual basis. Their education plans are developed individually in consultation with the classroom teacher, with the family, with clinicians if those clinicians are engaged on the file. And the schools really do their best to be able to provide that inclusive atmosphere for everybody.

But again, it's a difficult conversation, because what does inclusion mean? Inclusion might mean different things in different circumstances. So we want to make sure every day that all students feel included. And so that can be a tricky balance sometimes, for sure. And I think schools are challenged to find that balance sometimes.

We know that, again, and I said—I'm repeating a bit of what I said in my previous answer, but that the best way to support students in the classroom, whether the—regardless of the—their need and their different abilities and their different learning abilities—is to have more one-on-one time with educators, more teachers in the classroom, more EAs in the classroom, more clinicians in the school and school division.

That's why our government has provided predictable and stable funding for school divisions—healthy, robust funding for school divisions. No school division, since we've come into government, has seen a cut. Every school division has seen an increase.

It's challenging to do. We are committed to our path to balance. We were left with a deficit, a \$2-billion deficit. We're committed to our path to balance. We're committing to fixing health care. But all those things take money.

But we've stepped up. We've stepped up to partner with our education partners. We are funding school divisions. And we're seeing those results. And so I did read into the record on my last question some update about the St. James school division. I don't know if we have any update on the Pembina Trails School Division I might be able to provide with—the member with.

But as we search out that data, I can advise the member that currently, the department, on a three-year cycle, meets with every single school division across the province and performs a full audit when it comes to special education, special needs, additional supports.

* (16:30)

So they do a full audit, a real comprehensive audit on site with school divisions in schools, assessing what additional needs those schools and those divisions have, what supports that they have and where they need to be, again, with the aim of inclusion. We want to make sure that all students in Manitoba are included, feel included and have the support and the resources they need in the classroom, and that includes kids with additional needs and those that find themselves without additional needs.

So, I'm just hoping to provide the member with a little bit of an update about Pembina Trails. That's right. So, this year—this is this year?

So this year, thanks to the funding increase from the government, Pembina Trails, in their '25-26 budget was able to add 73 teachers, 81 EAs and two clinicians.

I will note that Pembina Trails did have a significant enrolment so they had a significant budgetary increase, which is great, which is what we want to see, which is what we're partnering with them to do. We're partnering with all school divisions to be able to grow their budgets, grow their teaching complement, hire more teachers, hire more educators.

Sorry, I'm kind of watching the clock.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that. I have another question that I'm going to try to combine two questions into one because they're very related. And it has to do with the community of Headingley, and I know the minister's probably aware of what I'm going to ask because I've been reading petitions on it for weeks.

Phoenix School in Headingley is very, very, very, very full. And they need an expansion. And there was a project under way that the current government has deferred, and there are a lot of questions in the community about the status of that project and if it's going to move forward at some point in the future.

Part of that project included adding space for child care which is desperately needed in the community of Headingley. It's a growing community; tons of young families there, currently hundreds of kids on the wait-list at Bright Beginnings Educare, which is the only licensed child-care facility of its kind in the community. They operate a couple of sites including school-age spaces on site at Phoenix school.

In fact, just this morning I got an email from a mother of a child heading into kindergarten—and I get emails like this multiple times a week, and I'm sure the minister does too—stressed and unsure of how she's going to continue working in the fall if she can't find school-age child care for her child.

I, too, am a working parent who relies on child care to be able to come here every day. I believe the minister's in the same boat, so I think she probably understands how stressful that is for families.

The school is bursting at the seams. The need for child care is immense, so I'm—my—first I'm going to urge the minister to make the Phoenix School project a priority within her department and secondly I'm going

to ask if there is an update that I can provide to my constituents on that.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member for the question. And yes. I mean, I appreciate the member's advocacy for her community. It's a privilege to get to do that as an MLA and so I thank her and recognize her for that.

The need is great across the province. Schools have been underfunded. Teachers have been underpaid. Class sizes have ballooned. Schools have filled. And just as the member from Lac du Bonnet pointed out earlier, that, you know, people don't graduate from university right away, nor do schools become full right away.

So there's a lot of catch-up to do and a lot of catching up to do. We have announced a capital plan for this year where we have committed to build 11 new schools over the next five years. Part of that capital plan also includes, on top of the 11 new schools, some major projects and renovations, some deferred maintenance which was neglected under the leadership of the previous government. And so we're making a lot of great investments.

But again, we know the need is also great. I know the need in her community—and again, I appreciate her advocacy for her constituents.

I'll remind the committee, as I mentioned previously in one of my previous answers, that the cost of building new schools and renovating new schools ballooned under the previous government. They were not responsible with the public purse, and we see that with the deficit that we were left, a \$2-billion deficit our government inherited due to the lack of fiscal conservatism that they run on and that they espouse.

The truth is that they spent very irresponsibly in their last year in government to try to win votes after losing the trust and the confidence of Manitobans. They tried to spend, spend, spend on their way out the door hoping that it might get them a few votes, but it didn't work.

So our government has the monumental task of balancing investments that are needed in education, that we're proud to make in education. But we need to balance those investments against affordability for Manitobans and making sure that we're building schools responsibly.

Under the previous government, schools were being built to the tune of \$80 million. It was outrageous. Again, I'll remind the committee, under the leadership of Heather Stefanson, the cost per student,

the cost per square foot was higher in Manitoba than it really was anywhere else in the country.

You can ask yourself why. I have many questions as to why that is, as to who they were hiring, whose interest they were serving. It was not the Manitoba taxpayer's interest; it was someone else's interest. I'll leave the committee to ponder about that.

But—so, again, we have to balance investing versus affordability. We want to make sure that we're providing affordability for Manitobans and that we're spending in a responsible way and we're using their tax dollars responsibly.

* (16:40)

So we will continue to work with the St. James-Assiniboia School Division on the need at Phoenix School. We know that there is a need; we are working with them to address that need. Different solutions are being explored, and we will continue to show up and work with the division, with the senior administration and with the elected board to make sure that the needs of the community are met.

But, again, there are needs across communities here in Manitoba after seven and a half years of a government who failed to prioritize education, failed to fund education and failed to deliver for students and their families.

When it comes to child care, which, again, I know is something that's very important to the member opposite. It's something I'm very passionate and I find very important as well. As she mentioned, I, too, am a parent; I have struggled with child care and what that means to my life and my job. So it's something I feel very passionately about, and it's something that I know our department is working very, very closely with St. James-Assiniboia School Division on, to make sure that we are expanding child care, whether it's in Phoenix School or whether it's somewhere else.

We have a aggressive capital project campaign led by our assistant deputy minister, and we are expanding child care across the province as quickly as we can. But again, there's a lot of catching up to do.

So I hear the member. We've heard the petitions. We're aware of the need. Our department is happy to continue working with her in her advocacy for her community, and we'll continue to work for communities across the province.

Mr. Ewasko: I want to thank my good friend and colleague, the MLA for Roblin, who absolutely stands absolutely on her own, on her own credibility and the

hard work and everything that she has put in, not only into the position that she holds within our caucus, but within her community and definitely within her family.

And I think there's many people that could take a lesson from the MLA for Roblin. Also her character and her poise, and just on how she serves the people that elected her as the MLA for Roblin. So I'd like to thank her, and thank her for bringing forward some very important topics to the Estimates process here in Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Now, I listened to, intently—because that's my job, is to listen to the Education Minister, and, unfortunately, the Education Minister decides to put—I'm not even sure what percentage I can give it as far as the facts on the record; it's not very high.

But the nice thing that the Education Minister does is put things on the record that helps me prove the point to you, Manitobans, that they are putting misinformation on the record. And I don't want to be called out of order, but I would say that it's to the point of, you know, because she sits there and talks straight to the camera, with a straight face, and puts things on the record that are absolutely not true. But I appreciate her doing that because it gives me an opportunity to correct the record and to point out the fact of the hypocrisy that is being said by the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister.

So, on—we have a committee here at the Manitoba Legislature. It's called Public Accounts Committee. And the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which met on Wednesday, May 14, and some of the members opposite had the pleasure of being part of that committee, and whether you're—doesn't matter on what political stripe, it is a great committee because you get to learn a whole lot about Public Accounts and you get to sit and listen to the Auditor General and his staff and other highly respected individuals.

And so I know that on that committee we do have the MLA for Burrows; we also have the MLA for Radisson. We have the, of course the vice-chair of the committee, the MLA for Elmwood; we've got the great chairperson of the committee, the MLA for Borderland. We have also the MLA for Fort Richmond, myself and we've got the MLA for Midland and the MLA for Kirkfield Park. Just taking a quick look to see if I missed anybody—I don't think I did.

But on that evening, it says that the Auditor General, which her colleagues, the colleagues—the members of the NDP government—had approved the Public Accounts for that evening, where the Auditor General

confirmed that the \$373-million surplus left to the Kinew government was, in fact—was factually correct.

So what I'm saying is that the information that the Education Minister puts on the record today about this fictitious—that the Progressive Conservatives left a \$2-billion deficit. No, no, no, no. Almost \$1.6-billion deficit was on the backs of the Kinew government. And so this Education Minister should do a bit of a shoulder check with her colleagues because it was her colleagues that absolutely passed that Auditor General's report.

And here, I quote, from the Auditor General, especially since we're talking about Estimates here in the Education and Early Childhood Learning, because we're talking about money; it's very important to make sure we have the truth on the record.

So the Auditor General, and I quote, from May 14—Wednesday, May 14, 2025, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and I quote: "In my history with the office and involvement in the Public Accounts audit, the number of errors—" I will have to continue—

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

MLA Schmidt: Let's talk about the Office of the Auditor General. I'd be glad to. I'm so glad that the member brought it up.

He might want to share with the committee and with Manitobans about the fact that some of the decision making that he made as the minister of Education has recently been referred to the Office of the Auditor General for investigation. I wonder if the member would like to update the committee about that.

There's a lot of questions that Manitobans have about how the previous PC government governed. They had a lot of questions. Manitobans thought they knew. They thought they knew—they thought that they had found the depths of the PC caucus. They thought when they saw the billboards and the garbage cans attacking trans youth, they thought that they had saw the bottom of the barrel of the PC government.

But they hadn't. Thank goodness Manitobans had the good sense to elect a new government. And what we've discovered since coming into government is that the Tories are exactly who you think they are. I spent a year knocking on doors, talking to Manitobans. And, unfortunately, something that we hear a lot from Manitobans, from Canadians, from Americans, from people around the world, is this distrust in politicians. I heard that a lot on the doorstep, unfortunately.

I heard people say: I'm not sure I could vote for you. I don't know if I can vote for anybody. I don't know if I can trust any politician anymore. Government, you know what they do? They tell you one thing; they do another. They get into power. They scratch their friends' backs. I don't want any part of that.

And I couldn't agree more. It's disheartening and frustrating to feel that that's how your government would operate. But I'm an optimist. I like to give people the benefit of the doubt. I like to think that that's not actually how anyone would govern. If given the great privilege of governing a province, of being given that great privilege, you would hope that anyone that was given that privilege would make decisions only in the best interests of the constituents that they serve.

* (16:50)

That's what you would hope. That's what I, deep in my heart, believed, even of the Tories. I believed that—I disagree with the decisions they make but they must, actually, in some weird, twisted way that I don't understand, actually believe that what they're doing is in the best interests of Manitobans. That's what the good-natured person in me believed.

But guess what we've discovered since coming into office? You were right, Manitoba. That is how they govern. They govern for their friends. They get into power and they govern for the interests of their friends and for themselves. They govern in the interests of the Filmons. That's what the Ethics Commissioner told us this week.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): We've gotten a little off topic from the Estimates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. I would ask the minister and the critic to please focus their questions and answers on the Estimates. Thank you.

Sorry—the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt).

MLA Schmidt: In his question, the member wanted to talk about the importance of the truth. And I think it's important for Manitobans to know the truth. They need to know that we had to pause the new schools that the previous government had announced—again, they hadn't planned for, they hadn't budgeted for.

We had to pause them and ask some serious questions. Who's benefiting from this? How are these taxpayer dollars being respected? Are taxpayers getting value for dollar? Are these contracts going to the friends of the PC Party? Are they going to Marnie Larkin,

the person who was in charge of running the election for the PCs?

These are incredible facts that we have learned this week. These aren't allegations any longer. These are facts. This is the truth. And Manitobans need to know the difference between electing a PC government and electing an NDP government.

The PCs are exactly who you think they are. They are the worst of what we see in government, people that take power for themselves and spread it amongst their already privileged friends. The NDP will and will continue to and we have—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): If the minister could just bring it back to the Estimates.

MLA Schmidt: This government will always spend your tax dollars in your interest. We'll always make sure that you are getting value for money. And I can say so proudly that myself as minister and no one else on our team has ever been guided by anything else but serving Manitobans and serving their interests.

Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: Manitobans, you're hearing it here again. The minister had five minutes to—the minister had the opportunity to apologize and to correct the record of her mistake.

And I'm not sure if it's just because in her caucus, much like the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) was in there, but then shed light on what actually happens in their caucus, I don't think there's many debriefs about many of the standing committees, especially when we're talking about finances, especially when we're getting into Education and Early Childhood Learning, especially when we're talking about Public Accounts and the use of money.

So, as I was saying, the Auditor General had pointed out that when the Kinew government took over power—because we lost the election, not because they won it—they were sitting at a \$373-million surplus. And, again, the Minister of Education talks about the \$2 billion. In fact, it was a \$1.6-billion deficit that this Kinew government came into government with no plans.

They still have no plans. Many of the announcements that the Education Minister talks about is recycled announcements that we had, but then we also had plans backed with dollars and cents to move forward on those projects.

So the Auditor General had said, and I quote: "In my history with the office and involvement in the

Public Accounts audit, the number of errors we identified and the amount of the adjustments required was, in my view, unprecedented. I hadn't been part of an audit where there were that many identified errors brought forward for correction." End quote.

That's the Auditor General talking about—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Order, please.

I would just like to remind the member of Lac du Bonnet that we are here to discuss the Estimates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. Could the member please tie his question back to the Estimates for this department specifically?

Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: As we're talking about finances, again, for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, it's very important to know where the finances of the Province are sitting at.

And, as we move forward on procurement and capital projects, whether that's schools that were cancelled under this Kinew government, early childhood education spaces which were cancelled under this Kinew government, it is important to know where the Auditor General stands in regards to the finances and the bookkeeping of this Kinew government.

So my last quote, before I get on to the specific question to the minister. The Auditor General said, and I quote, and this was May 14—Wednesday, May 14, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which her colleagues had all voted in favour of passing it. I quote: "In my report to the Legislature in the year ended December 31, 2024, I identify a number of weaknesses in financial statement preparation on the part of the Province."

Kinew government. I better back up. Now I'll continue the quote: including a lack of understanding of what info is required to support amounts in financial records, a lack of review of information that was prepared to support the amounts in the records and noted weak controls over some of the financial reporting process. End quote.

So, again, we get to the fact that the Education Minister is talking about new schools. No plans, has taken some reannouncements. I just want to remind the minister that we, the Progressive Conservative government, which was in government for seven and a half years, had finished 14 of 22 schools promised. Now, it's unfortunate that she is so stuck in her ideology—including with her boss, the Premier (Mr. Kinew)—that

they can't see, moving forward to benefit the children that she sees—says that she's here to support.

We need to build the schools; we need to make sure that there's room. I want her opinion on the new school in the Brandon School Division with the land purchase for the southwest school in Brandon.

MLA Schmidt: So the member would like to talk about my boss, the great Premier (Mr. Kinew) of Manitoba, Premier Kinew, and read quotes into the record. Let's read some quotes that were put onto the record that are—Manitobans, I know, are horrified and shocked about.

Read some quotes into the record from the Ethics Commissioner about his boss. And I know the member can't stand to listen because he's—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Point of—point of order, sorry.

Can you tie it back to the Estimates of the Education and Early Childhood Learning portfolio, please.

An Honourable Member: I think it's important to know the record—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Oh, sorry—honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt).

MLA Schmidt: The member, in his question, called into credibility the leader of my party and of my government, and I will respond by questioning the credibility of his government. And he can't even stand to listen because he's such a coward he has to run away.

Quote: More importantly, those 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 the respect for the wishes of voters, to be disheartening.

I would like to read some other quotes into the record from the Ethics Commissioner report, written about the failed PC government. Disheartening. Truly—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Minister, please tie it back to the Education Estimates.

MLA Schmidt: Our government was left when an—with an incredible deficit, which limits our ability to deliver on school funding and school capital to the tune that we would like to.

We would like to be able to support school divisions on a greater basis, but unfortunately, we've been left with a deficit from a government that cannot

be trusted, a government who has been shown to lack ethical and constitutional legitimacy.

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

ROOM 255

FINANCE

* (15:00)

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 the Estimates of Finance. Questions will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I think today I'll start off with where we left off a couple days ago, just with a few more questions on the rental housing construction tax credit.

So, the minister announced in his budget last year that he was implementing a new rental housing construction tax credit. I believe it would cost around \$37 million for the full year.

Can the minister tell us how many new rental builds there have been over the past year that received this rental housing construction tax credit and is the department tracking that?

* (15:10)

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Thanks to the critic for the question.

So—happy to talk about the credit that we brought forward to help stimulate the development of more rental housing in Manitoba, both market and affordable. We—when we talk about affordable housing and housing—rental housing in general in Manitoba, it's hard to ignore what happened over the last seven and a half years, which was a complete and total failure on the part of the former government to actually move forward with developing new social and affordable housing.

I think about—there's a project—or, sorry, an address close to here, 185 Smith St., that I believe had somewhere in the range of 380 units—rental units—that were available for lower-income Manitobans, participants in the Manitoba Housing social and affordable housing programs. Well, the former government sold that building for profit and left us with 390 less units to provide to Manitobans in need.

When I think about the homelessness crisis that Manitoba faced for many years under the former government, and I think about the number of folks that were left to sleep rough in bus shelters and around our communities, it really pains me to think about the fact that we took a building that had 390 units in it, again, just a stone's throw from the Legislature here, right downtown, and they sold it off for profit at a time when we arguably needed that housing in a really desperate way.

And beyond the fact that they sold off that housing, along with other housing, and privatized it, while they did that they failed to develop new stock and to support the development of new social and affordable housing. And I cannot point to a single example of them moving us forward in terms of ensuring that Manitobans had access—low-income Manitobans had access to the housing—social and affordable housing that they needed.

So they really left us in a very precarious position, as they did on so many other files when it comes to the state of our health-care system, the state of our child-care system, the state of overall—our overall energy landscape. They just, in every single one of these areas, left us in a really bad spot. So I think it's important just to highlight just how tough of a position Manitobans were left in due to the, you know, the failure on the part of the former government to do what was needed there and to protect social housing that we had.

And I think it's really—it's a shameful record because, again, we know that—and when it comes to social and affordable housing—and we hear this from developers—it's very challenging for developers to move forward in getting social or affordable housing built, and really this is an area where government has to play an important role in acting as a partner, and the former government failed to do that.

So turning the page and moving forward to our government and the work that we've done so far in response to that, I'm unbelievably proud to be on a team with Minister Smith, our minister responsible for housing and addictions whose done a tremendous job right from the get-go, in starting the work—the important work, beginning to see new social and affordable housing investments move forward.

That's thanks to her and our Premier (Mr. Kinew) identifying this as a key area of importance and, of course, a key area where we need to make sure that just on the basis of ensuring Manitobans who are in these challenging positions could access, in a dignified

way, reasonable housing. This was such an important thing and she's done a great job moving that forward.

We've also worked to complement her important work with this tax credit, which was the subject of the question that was asked. That tax credit will bring \$8,500 to developers who complete, you know, the construction of a market rate unit, and \$13,500 for those who complete construction on affordable units.

That tax credit is available retroactive back to January 1 of 2024. We know that projects first need to be completed in order to get the credit. Most construction projects are—you know, overall these are larger developments, multi-unit residential buildings—takes somewhere in the range of two years to get built.

So we are, you know, excited to continue to support the growth of more rental housing. We know that it's not only social and affordable housing we need; we need all—in all categories. And we know that by increasing market rental housing, that will soften some of the stress on our lower-income rental categories, and so our government's doing that work of advancing access to social and affordable housing while we expand access to market housing in Manitoba.

Mrs. Stone: Chairperson, if the minister wants to talk about affordable housing today, then maybe he could explain why he has charged \$17,387 on the Spruce Woods community co-op, which provides affordable housing in Brandon.

This leads to the minister's botched and sloppy roll-out of his \$1,500 education property tax rebate, or homeowner's education tax rebate that many homeowners didn't get, including—now, that we've heard—the Spruce Woods community co-op. And unfortunately for this minister, that community co-op is now paying in TIPP payments an additional \$2,275 a month.

So this minister says one thing and then does another, and as we've seen, he's specifically targeting affordable housing units with his sloppy tax plan and tax scheme, which is individuals that are stretched to the max already, can't afford for their rent to go up, and certainly these affordable-housing providers can't absorb the costs either. So today is really not the day for this minister to brag about affordable housing, when he is targetting those individuals who are providing just that.

My question was specific to rental builds, so I'm going to ask the minister very clearly if he can provide a specific number of how many new rental builds there have been since January 1 of 2024—since that credit is retroactive—and whether the department is

tracking that. It's a very simple yes or no question, and how many builds?

* (15:20)

MLA Sala: I would ask the critic—she can turn to page 122 of our 2024 budget where she can see the estimated full-year value of that rental housing construction tax credit. It's listed at \$36.9 million.

As I mentioned in my previous response, projects are still being developed, so right now we don't have a specific number, because again, projects take longer than a year to build.

So assuming, you know, in a year's time we'll have a lot more accurate number, but we've estimated there that the total value of a full year of those credits is going to be \$36.9 million and, again, more to come once we start to see those projects be finalized and actually built, at which point we're going to pay those dollars out.

So, you know, that, I think, speaks again—the scope of that commitment speaks to the important work that our government is doing to help expand access to rental housing, which will ensure that not only Manitobans can get access to the housing they need, but will also help to depressurize the market and through that, ultimately, lead to less pressure on rental costs, saving people money.

So we know that those investments are important, just like the investments we've made to support lower rental costs through our renters tax credit which we have committed to increase back up to the \$700 value that it was at prior to the PCs deciding to increase taxes on renters by \$175. And we're making good on that commitment. We started with our first budget, where we increased that by \$50. We know that our most recent budget, we were proud to continue increasing the size of that credit. And, again, we're committed to doing what we said we were going to do, which was to lower those costs for renters.

And I am happy to say for the critic that those increases to the renters tax credit are also going to benefit people living in co-operatives. And so we know that, you know, folks living in co-operatives had their costs increase by \$175 a year because the former government saw fit to raise taxes on renters and folks in those types of situations. We're helping to make life more affordable for them through those improvements.

And again, we know that right now it's an importantly—or it's an incredibly important time. Manitobans are facing those affordability challenges, and so not only are we bringing forward those benefits for renters,

but, of course, the long list of other really important things we've done to support improving affordability for Manitobans like our hydro rate freeze, like our 10 per cent permanent cut to the gas tax, like our personal income tax cuts. Again, our government has a record, since coming in, of doing the work of reducing costs in—for Manitobans in a huge number of categories, be it energy, personal income taxes, their housing costs.

We're getting it done. And, again, that stands in stark contrast to what Manitobans experienced under the former government, where they worked to raise costs on Manitobans and especially on those that were struggling the most with, for example, renters, who tend to be seniors, people on fixed incomes, when they raised their taxes by \$175. We're reversing that damage, and, again, that's a credit that we're proud to say is available to folks living in co-operatives.

So the member wants to talk about raising costs for them. She should ensure that she, you know, takes responsibility and is held to account for the work of the former government in raising costs for those very same people that she's referencing in co-operatives who her former government raised taxes on individually, \$175 a year. We're reversing that mistake that they made and, again, proud to be doing that work of making life more affordable for Manitobans.

Mrs. Stone: Just a follow-up to my previous question on rental builds.

So as we saw this week, the bureau—Manitoba Bureau of Statistics came out indicating that the value of Manitoba's building permits for March '25 was down \$309 million, which is 11 per cent from February and down almost 35 per cent from March of last year. In addition, Manitoba's residential 'birning'—building permits from March were down 16.5 per cent from February and 10 per cent compared to last March. And the value of non-residential building permits from March of 2025, \$117.1 million, is down 2.1 per cent from February and down almost 61 per cent compared to last March.

So, to date, with these statistics, it doesn't appear that the tax credit seems to be working, at least not yet. So I understand the minister is saying that it takes some time for those units to be built, but just based on these statistics, since his budget was released, how many units does the minister project will be built with that \$37 million that he has set aside? We looking at 100 units or 500 units? You know, what is that number that he's projected for that \$37 million?

* (15:30)

MLA Sala: So, you know, I appreciate the question and there—I think it is important to highlight some really positive stats we are seeing here—and I got the number here.

Housing starts in all areas up 24.8 per cent, so we're seeing a lot of, I think, you know, strong activity there reflecting confidence in our provincial economy and the work that our government is doing.

Again, building permits—which are something very different—this month, are down as the critic stated, but I think, you know, we all have a pretty good sense of what's happening over the last couple months, and that is a lot of uncertainty tied to Trump tariffs—Trump tariffs that her leader has come out and said he supports.

And so, you know, we want to talk about, again, one of the biggest threats to our provincial economy and our Canadian economy? Right now, that threat is certainly the Trump tariffs that we're all deeply concerned about.

And, again, we continue to await some kind of summary from the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) or a member of his team as to what was really intended or what he really meant when he made those comments. We've heard sort of a variety of explanations. You know, the one summary that he did offer in the House said: I didn't actually mean to say I supported the tariffs; I just supported the interference in our sovereignty. Which—I mean, again—is not really a great explanation to begin with. And so he still has not clarified with Manitobans why he has spoken supportively of those tariffs and that's a deep concern.

And so, you know, the very heart of the question, which is why are we seeing right now somewhat of a downturn in those permits? It's because of that uncertainty that's been created by the tariffs that her leader supports.

And so, again, what are we trying to do as a government? We're working very hard to ensure that we offer that clarity and certainty for Manitobans and Manitoba businesses that our government is here to try to do it and will do everything we can to increase resilience of our provincial economy and to make Manitoba one of the strongest economies in Canada.

And I'm so proud of what we announced in our budget. We did some, I think, really important—we moved forward some very important initiatives there, are committed to a \$3.7-billion capital plan being the centrepiece of the budget to ensure that Manitobans can get to work, estimating 18,000 jobs will be created

through those investments. Again, those investments are focused on building things that the former government, in some cases, said they were going to do but actually had no plan to do; for example, schools for our kids or PCHs, which they never got done; NEWPCC, which is an incredibly important supporter of our economic engine here in Winnipeg; energy infrastructure. I mean, just on so many fronts the former government failed to move us forward.

This budget responds to the threat of the moment, again, the threat that the former government or—and the current Leader of the PCs seems to support that threat. We're responding to it. And so we had that, I think, very important commitment to significant capital investments, the biggest in our province's history.

There was very important commitments made around advancing work on reducing interprovincial trade barriers, and we know that, you know, last week, our Premier (Mr. Kinew) went out to Ontario and made a very exciting announcement alongside Premier Ford that we are signing an MOU to reduce barriers between Manitoba and the biggest economy in Canada. That is, you know, I think, a sure sign for Manitobans and Manitoba businesses that our government is focused on ensuring that we can, you know, create the strongest economy possible in Manitoba. More work to do in reducing those barriers, but we're making progress.

And then, of course, there's a number of other really important commitments that we made as well that are all focused, I think, on really creating more business opportunity, building that confidence and responding to the worry of the moment that Manitobans are facing.

And, again, I would invite the critic—I'd love to hear, you know, what her thoughts are about what he said and how she would characterize, you know, his support for the tariffs. I haven't really had a chance to hear her share her own personal reflections on that. I think that would be something that we would benefit from hearing more about because it's concerning to know that, again, the Leader of the Official Opposition of Manitoba supports what most Manitobans view as the biggest threat to our economy.

Mrs. Stone: You know, I know this minister likes to play this game of going back to his typical talking points and attacks when he doesn't want to be transparent with Manitobans in very direct questions about what he plans to do with \$37 million—maybe I'm giving the minister too much credit where he didn't take \$37 million out of thin air and he actually had a projection of how many new builds that would apply

for that credit, so maybe I am giving him too much credit for that. But I will ask again and hopefully that I can get a direct answer because it is a simple answer—or question that I'm asking.

You have \$37 million set aside; it's his budget, he wrote it. Presumably, he didn't pull that number out of thin air and that he would've had a projected number of new builds and new units that would apply to that program for that \$37 million.

So I'm asking how many he is expecting: Is it going to be 300, 500, 1,000 new units? How many of those are affordable units? How many of those does he expect to be market rate rental units?

Essentially, I'm asking is, what are Manitobans getting for that \$37 million that he set aside?

MLA Sala: So, as I said in an earlier answer—and I think it was quite clear, I'm happy to repeat it here, though—we're estimating \$36.9 million in expenditures. We've outlined that it's \$13,500 per unit for affordable units; \$8,500 for a new market unit; and, again, at this point we are still waiting to see. We're only a year and a bit into that credit having been issued. I think the member knows that housing is not built overnight, that it takes upwards of two years for multi-unit residential buildings to be created. And so this is the estimated number.

I invite her to, you know, again, you can very easily work backwards there to identify what the values I summarized there on affordable and new market units, an estimated number. But this is the estimated total that we're offering here, and this is—reflects our important investment, again, in helping to get more rental housing built in Manitoba.

* (15:40)

The member did raise the question of transparency, and I think that does give us a pretty, you know, important opportunity to talk about their failure to be transparent during their tenure. And this is something I—you know, I've spoken to in this committee many times, and, again, when we're talking about transparency it's important that we, on the record, summarize the failures of the former government, because it's important for Manitobans to be very aware of what happened during their tenure when it came to a lack of transparency.

And, of course, we did have, as the member knows, an independent accounting firm review the decisions that were made, and one of the biggest take-aways from this report is that the former government was not

transparent. That was not—those are not words of, you know, a partisan actor. This is really what a report—this report summarizes clearly, is that the former government failed to behave in a transparent manner and to really have Manitobans understand our real fiscal position. And they left us in a really bad position as a result of that, a \$2-billion hole.

This was, again, something that when we look at what they did July 28, which is a day—a date I'll never forget, when they went out and revealed their first-quarter update. And, you know, I think, as the Finance Minister, the importance of that day, and I think about—reflect on my own tenure about what it means when you go out to Manitobans and you're reporting on your fiscal position and just how important that is, that moment, in terms of a moment of transparency and accountability.

You're—you know, you're informing Manitobans about your progress to budget, and that July 28 report out, that they provided, distorted the facts. And, you know what, there's other less parliamentary language I could use about what they did that day, but what we can say is that this report shows they failed to budget properly; they engaged in a lot of decisions that constituted high-budgetary risk, and they misled Manitobans and ultimately made a number of commitments after they created a budget, that were not reflected in the numbers they shared.

And why is that so concerning? Because, again, in addition to, you know, the fact that it was just plain misleading, they did this in advance of an election where they were seeking to do everything they could to create an appearance of being in a good fiscal position when the reality was otherwise.

That—for any Manitoban who hears that and who sees this independently written report, that is super worrisome. And, you know, it builds on some of the themes that I think we are hearing about yesterday and today in terms of the report that came out from the Ethics Commissioner, which I'm—

The Chairperson: Order.

Matters contained with the recent reports from the Ethics Commissioner are not relevant to the Estimates of the Department of Finance. Could the minister please tie their comments back to the matter before the committee?

Thank you.

MLA Sala: Apologies, Chair. Thanks for flagging that.

So again, there is a pattern of decision making from the former government that, you know, shows their lack of transparency, in many cases a lack of proper ethics, when it comes to being transparent with Manitobans, showing us where we really were. That is not at the standard that Manitobans deserve. We know that they deserve honest, transparent government that, you know, respects the rules and works fairly and works honestly. And that's what we're bringing, after many long years of Manitobans suffering through the opposite.

Mrs. Stone: Yes, so there's another report that this minister fails to recognize and that was a report by the Auditor General on the 2023 Public Accounts that confirmed that the restated surplus left by the former PC government was \$373 million.

Now, there is another report that this minister also fails to recognize as well, and that was a report from when he took over from government and he was in charge of the Province's finances, that the AG indicated that there was an unprecedented number of errors and that he had not been part of an audit where there were that many identified errors brought forward for correction.

So in the time that this minister was overseeing the books and the Public Accounts at that time, there was an unprecedented number of accounting errors, in contrast—in comparison to the previous Public Accounts report, where the PCs left this NDP government with a \$373-million surplus.

Now, in the spirit of transparency—and I ask this question of the minister and, of course, he didn't answer, so I'll give him another opportunity to answer the question today.

What we've seen is we've seen a number of Winnipeggers with skyrocketing property taxes as a result of his sloppy homework and botched rollout in communication on his changes to this tax scheme and tax grab that this minister has now created—has created a significant number of confusion for Winnipeggers and homeowners across this entire province: individuals that are nervous that they can't afford their tax bills; individuals that were missing their rebate; in addition, individuals that were receiving a tax hike compared to their 2024 assessment specific to education property taxes, along with no rebate, along with an NDP political insert that claimed that they were saving that—those individuals money.

I don't see how an \$1,100 tax hike this year is saving that individual money, so that was certainly misleading.

It was also a slap in the face of those many homeowners that were struggling to figure out how to pay their bills for June.

So, I know very well—and the minister knows very well—that the Province oversees those property tax bills that go out. It was the Province that put that misleading insert into those property tax bills, not the municipalities, so the minister can stop blaming the municipalities for that, although I know he'd love to shift the blame with all the negative attention he's getting on this issue.

So I have to ask a very simple question of this minister: How much were those misleading ads that were inserted into the property tax bills for Winnipeg—how much did that cost the department and the Finance Minister, and taxpayers as a result?

* (15:50)

MLA Sala: Couple things that need to be corrected on the record here. The first was that the member continues to repeat this falsehood that they left Manitobans with a surplus.

We inherited their budget. I don't know what's not clear about that timeline, but it is very clear to Manitobans that our government received and came halfway through—came into government halfway through the former government's budget, again, which was developed without clear planning, was developed without vision and which was developed, of course, in a way that was intended to create, again, a greater sense that Manitoba was in a better fiscal position than it really was.

And so that hole that they left us, that \$2-billion deficit, is real, and again, we need to be very clear on the record about what the PCs left Manitobans to deal with and clean up.

It also, I think, is important to just clarify on the record here that the member said that the Province sends out all tax bills. That's not true. In Winnipeg and Brandon, send out their own municipal tax bills to their residents. And, again, that's just an important statement of fact.

You know, we're talking here again, broadly, about affordability improvements that our government is making. The Homeowner Affordability Tax Credit in Carman, which is located in the riding that the member hails from, is improving or reducing costs for 97 per cent of residents in that community.

So I have to ask, like, when she goes to the grocery store and she sees community members, friends, 97 out of 100 people in that grocery store are better

off; so, you know, you look ahead of you, look behind you, look beside you, look all around, 97 out of 100 people are better off. So I really do hope that she recognizes that for almost everybody in her hometown of Carman and in that constituency are better off.

And I think that's just a—that's just the reality that is in place here. So she does need to, I think, reflect on the fact that when you go back to her home community, almost everybody's better off because of those changes we brought in. And I think her community members probably would like to know why she's fighting against making their lives more affordable.

And that's—that affordability work, of course, doesn't end in Carman. It's—we've done a lot of important work improving affordability in a key—a number of key areas including, of course, personal income taxes. I was very proud to bring in reductions to personal income taxes through an increase to basic personal exemption, to increases to our brackets that are bringing hundreds of dollars back into people's pockets.

We were very proud to bring in a permanent gas tax cut, a 10 per cent cut, and that was after a one-year holiday that benefited Manitobans, especially rural Manitobans and folks living in communities like Carman, who have to drive longer distances sometimes to get to work, to get to the hockey game.

That's something that their team never did for seven and a half years. Instead, they gleefully charged the full max amount on Manitobans and they did that during an affordability crisis, especially during the last years of their tenure.

You know, almost adding insult to injury, they fought to bring in a carbon tax to Manitoba. The member may not have been there during the tenure of the former PC government, but she should know that they fought to bring in a carbon tax that was going to increase costs on Manitobans even further.

And instead of actually taking any type of real action to reduce their energy costs, what they did is they, you know, later, after fighting for the carbon tax, decided that they were going to do something to try to appear to be working against it, and they spent millions of Manitoban taxpayer fighting a losing legal battle in Ottawa instead of actually taking action.

So they have a very confused and difficult record when it comes to supporting affordability on energy. That extends to their hydro rate increases. Again, the first time in Manitoba's history that we've ever seen a hydro rate increase be put forward through a BITSA

bill, where it didn't have the benefit of being assessed by the Public Utilities Board.

That's how they approached, you know, increasing costs on Manitobans, lacking transparency, lacking a focus on understanding how it was going to impact and hurt Manitobans.

The Chairperson: Before I introduce the next member, I would just like to caution everyone with the use of the term falsehood.

Mrs. Stone: Just to correct a couple things that the minister has said: certainly my constituents in Carman would like to see no education property tax on their bills; and my home community of La Salle, with the Seine River double-digit school division hikes, many of us in my community and my neighbours are certainly not going to be better off under this NDP's tax scheme. So to clarify, that is my home community, and my neighbours and constituents in my home community are certainly not going to be better off, to clarify that for the minister.

I do want to clarify one thing that the minister had said in his previous comments. Is the minister suggesting that the City of Winnipeg is to blame, and the City of Winnipeg are the ones that put the NDP insert claiming that homeowners would be better off with the rebate?

* (16:00)

MLA Sala: I'm happy to say that we're working co-operatively with municipal partners. And over the weekend, I had great conversations with the mayor of Winnipeg, mayor of Brandon, and what we did is we worked together to make sure that we had a solve for those rare instances where somebody had not filled out their principal residence form in advance of those deadlines. And it's because we want to make sure that Manitobans get that help that they deserve and that they, you know, that they merit.

We brought in this \$1,500 credit because, again, we're working to reduce costs for Manitobans, and proud to say that, you know, again, we're working hard and working with our partners to get that done. And I noted that Councillor Browaty mentioned that their team was working over the weekend. And there's good collaboration happening here to make sure, again, that those folks that ended up in this situation, that things are made right.

And so if you are an individual out there that happens to fall into that bucket and for whatever reason you didn't get your property—your residence

registered as your principal residence in advance of the deadline, know that we're going to ensure that you get the 1,500 bucks, and if you've already paid your tax bill, you're going to get a cheque for 1,500 bucks.

So this is a problem that, again, we're happy to have worked on collaboratively because that's the way our government works. And again, I think about the absolute disaster that was the former government under Pallister, in terms of the way that they worked with—well, any number of other groups. I think about the relationship with the former mayor of Winnipeg.

Famously, for years, the premier of our province was not speaking to the mayor of the biggest city in Manitoba. That is absolutely bananas, given the importance of those two individuals and the need for those individuals to work closely together, to collaborate, to have the best interests of citizens in mind. So can you imagine a universe where a premier was just unwilling to talk to the mayor of our biggest city? And, you know, that's just one example of their approach. We're talking about collaboration and their failure to work with other parties in a good way.

Manitobans all remember when the entire Hydro board resigned all at once because of the inability of their PC team to work collaboratively with Hydro. So, you know, entire Hydro board resigns, not talking to the mayor of the biggest city in the province: that's the reality of life under the PCs, and that's what we experienced for many years.

And as a result, Manitoba was held back. We're held back when you don't have discussion and communication between the premier of the province and the mayor of Winnipeg. That's absolutely bananas, and that's the way that things used to be done under the former government.

Our team, we're going to work collaboratively with the—and we're always going to centre the interests of Manitobans first; first and foremost, their interests will be centred in all of our decision making, and that's how we're approaching every single decision. And so, proud of, again, our ability to work collaboratively with the City, to be able to have those open lines of communication to make sure that we work together with the best interests of citizens in mind, and that's the way we're going to keep working.

Mrs. Stone: Well, and as the minister knows, just today AMM came out with a notice suggesting that the communication from the Province in public messaging was unfortunate and disappointing and that it is the responsibility of the Province for—to take responsibility

for their botched rollout of this \$1,500 rebate. So it seems that the minister and AMM are not on the same page with how AMM perceives this issue.

I do want to clearly ask the minister yet again—this is the third time I'm asking because he has not answered: there were inserts—political, misleading inserts—attached to property tax bills within the city of Winnipeg that came from this Province and this NDP government.

How much in taxpayer dollars did this minister and the department spend on those misleading advertisements that were included in the City of Winnipeg property tax bills?

* (16:10)

MLA Sala: Apologies. That took a little while to get the information I was seeking.

I am happy to share some information about some of the spending here that the critic is referencing, and what I can share is that, relative to the overall spend between—compared between our government and their government, we're spending significantly less overall on advertising.

And I think, you know, that's—again, we can point to some of the decisions that the former government made when it came to self-promotion, sending out cheques with the premier's name on it and so forth. Some of those desperate measures that they took, those are expensive.

And we can say that for a similar campaign to the one that we just undertook, where we were then proud to notify Manitobans that—and communicate with them about the work we're doing to reduce their education and property tax costs, the same—a similar campaign under the former government costs seven times the amount in terms of advertising dollars.

So, again, you have the former government's approach, which was seven times more expensive when it came to advertising. We're taking a much more modest approach in terms of expenditures for communicating with Manitobans, and you can see how you get to \$2-billion deficit with that kind of decision making.

You know, this is just one of many examples of the types of approaches that the PCs took that was fundamentally irresponsible and contributed to, again, a ballooning deficit number that they left Manitobans with before they were shown the door.

Mrs. Stone: I mean, I still didn't hear a figure from this minister of how much he has spent. But speaking of his pattern of misleading advertisements, earlier this year, Manitobans saw a number of billboards that went up advertising this minister's phony hydro rate freeze. And so I'm wondering if the minister can speak to who paid for that advertisement.

Was it the Department of Finance, or was it Manitoba Hydro? And if it was the Department of Finance, how much did his department spend on that?

MLA Sala: To the question, the Department of Finance, under the Communications and Engagement division, paid for that advertising.

And, again, I think it's important to put on the record here that when we're talking about the campaign, the advertising campaign for a similar type of campaign that the former government undertook, they spent seven times as much as we did on our campaign. And again, we can see that's just one of many things that left Manitoba in a more challenging position.

The critic kicked off her question by talking about misleading reporting. You know, it is—it does give me occasion to speak to what I think was one of the most misleading bits of reporting that Manitoba saw in recent memory which was that Q1 report where they came out and said there was going to be no change to our fiscal position. Looking at the MNP report reminds me that when they came out, they reported in their Q1 that they did not forecast any changes to their budgeted deficit of \$363 million.

So let's remind the critic that they said that when they came out on July 28, we were only going to have a deficit of \$363 million. We ended up with a \$2-billion deficit number.

And, you know, as the Hydro minister, I look at what they did when we talk about their projections around net income on Hydro where they projected, I think, revenues that were far in excess—or, net income far in excess of \$500 million. I could tell you, as somebody who's become quite familiar with Hydro's typical yearly net incomes, that was like, 3X what we would expect to see in a normal year.

And they came out on July 28 and just told Manitobans that, again, it's going to be a—everything's status quo; we're going to hit our target that we announced in our budget. And they did that straight-faced when they knew that we were experiencing a drought, when there was no possible chance that we were going to hit a 500-plus-million-dollar net income year at Hydro.

And, in fact, where did we end up at Hydro in that year? We ended up at about negative \$150 million. And that trajectory and that path for water that year was very clear to the members opposite when they came out.

* (16:20)

So we want to talk about misleading reporting. I think one of the worst instances of misleading reporting occurred on July 28 when they came out and pretended that all was well in Manitobaland [*phonetic*], and what we saw was, in fact, the extent to which Manitobans had been misinformed about where we were.

So, again, very important here in committee, when we're talking on the record, to speak with facts, and I think when we're talking about misleading reporting, the member—the critic—needs to, I think, really account for that unfortunate decision that her former government made to mislead Manitobans with that July 28 first-quarter update.

Mrs. Stone: Sorry—can I just request that we take a five-minute break to go to the bathroom?

The Chairperson: The honourable member for Midland (Mrs. Stone), would you be able to make your request on record, please?

Mrs. Stone: Yes. Just to take a five-minute bathroom break.

The Chairperson: It has been requested that we take a five-minute recess, and all members are in accordance with this.

The committee recessed at 4:21 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:27 p.m.

The Chairperson: The Committee of Supply will now resume.

Mrs. Stone: Yes, thank you. Forgot where we were now.

This year's budget increased income taxes on Manitobans by stopping the indexing of tax brackets to inflation, otherwise we all—known as bracket creep. And as the minister very well knows, as inflation increases and as wage increases, many Manitobans will be bumped into a higher tax bracket as a result. This minister's budget directly states that he'll be collecting \$82 million in income tax revenues from this tax grab.

So can the minister please provide the number of Manitobans that this income tax grab will impact? I'm asking for a specific number as to where this \$82 million is coming from. Are we looking at hundreds of Manitobans? And if the minister could please provide a breakdown of the number of Manitobans in each of those tax brackets from 2024.

* (16:30)

MLA Sala: Again, appreciate the question from the critic.

The biggest tax threat that Manitobans are facing right now is, as the critic knows, the Trump tariff tax threat, which, again, we continue to all wonder, you know, why the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) supports the tariffs. Again, we haven't heard much clarity on that or any attempt at providing clarity today, but that is unquestionably the biggest threat to our provincial economy and to Manitobans and Canadians at this point.

And, again, our team continues to work for team Canada and to fight to protect Manitobans against those tariff taxes that the members opposite seem to support and want to have applied to our province for some unknown reason.

You know, we talk about the personal income taxes. The changes that we brought in are putting a significant number of dollars back into Manitobans' pockets. On the basic personal exemption lift alone, it's \$330 million per year estimated dollars going back into Manitobans' pockets. On the bracket changes, it's \$160 million total per year. So there we're looking at a total of \$490 million that our government is returning into the wallets of Manitoban taxpayers. That is an enormous sum that we're saving.

And we're very proud to do that and we know, again, after many years of the former government not taking action to focus on reducing costs, how important it was that our government delivered on that.

You know, adding to that, the fuel-tax holiday—we know the average person—I don't have the number here—but the average family, I think, saved approximately—a two-car family saved approximately \$500 over the course of the year that we had that holiday in.

And then beyond that we know that that action brought the lowest inflation in all of Canada, and that that had impacts in lowering costs across the economy. And we know that Manitobans wanted to see those savings be sustained. And so when that fuel-tax holiday ended, we continued those savings by bringing in

a permanent 10 per cent cut. And that's, again, more evidence of our government's hard work to make sure that we're bringing the savings where it counts.

The previous government, of course, did not do that important work. They also left us this giant fiscal hole—a \$2-billion deficit. And we know that, you know, a lot of that was due to decisions made by the former premier—Premier Stefanson is, of course, now moved on—but also the former Finance minister, who took a lot of risks that led to that \$2-billion deficit number and ultimately showed improper oversight in the development of that budget.

And I would say that improper oversight and that improper conduct extended to decision making we heard about yesterday, where the former Finance minister was fined \$12,000 for his role in trying to ram through a project that ultimately was not—I [*interjection*]

The Chairperson: Order.

Can you please tie this back to the matter at hand for the committee? The report from the Ethics Commissioner is not relevant to the Estimates of the Department of Finance.

MLA Sala: Apologies, Chair. I was connecting a pattern of inappropriate conduct from the former Finance minister, who, again, was at the helm of the last budget that they created that left us with a \$2-billion deficit. And I was extending that argument about his decision making and conduct and approach to what we just learned about yesterday. But I'm happy to move on from that, but again, I do think that that argument holds.

Look, at the end of the day, the—what we—going back to personal-income-tax changes, \$490 million more are in Manitobans' pockets thanks to the decisions that our government has made. Manitobans are, this tax season, feeling the benefits of those changes and are saving hundreds and hundreds of dollars for working-class families. This is a huge, huge reduction to the tax burden that Manitobans are facing.

Again, we know that now is the time to continue to do the work of lowering costs. Proud of the work our government has done and I think we've got a very clear record of reducing costs, starting with 21 ways to save in our first budget; and our last budget, 2025, a beautiful list of 25 ways to save during this fiscal year.

Mrs. Stone: So there's a few issues with the minister's response. First thing is the former PC government was

the one that increased tax brackets and the basic personal amount. That was done in Budget 2023.

The second issue is this minister promised to bring in indexing and now he's abandoning that promise.

And the third issue is that he's actually taxing more Manitobans by the tune of \$82 million by bumping Manitobans into higher tax brackets and therefore puffing this minister's coffers with \$82 million. The NDP want to keep taxing low-income people by ending the indexing; another broken promise, and we can keep adding that to the list of many broken promises that are coming out and being made clear by this NDP government.

But I do have—I just want to shift to another question here. In the short time that the NDP has jacked up taxes on landlords specifically, because it's not deemed a primary residence, how many have come—how many landlords specifically have come to the Residential Tenancy Board to increase rents on low-income Manitobans?

* (16:40)

MLA Sala: Just again have to make sure we set the record straight.

The member made a false claim about the former government's purported role in changing taxes in Manitoba, and again, I don't know why there's confusion there, but what I was—I can say with clarity is that our team received a call from the CRA after we were in government, confirming a path forward on personal income taxes.

That was not the decision of the former government; that was a decision made by our government. And, you know, the Canada Revenue Agency—that work that we did with them, it confirmed that we were making those changes—that our government was making—we knew, again, was important and it was going to bring an estimated \$490 million in savings to Manitobans.

So, again, it's very important that, when we're in committee here, that we speak accurately and that we put facts on the record, and it is a statement of fact that our government was the government that reduced personal income taxes for Manitobans. And, again, that was—that's made clear by the fact that we had to confirm a path forward with the CRA. And that was a very important moment in time that confirmed our government's commitment to reducing costs for Manitobans.

Again, when it comes to, you know, the costs of rental housing in Manitoba, the former government has a black eye when it comes to reducing costs for renters. And we know that for some reason—and it's lost on me—but for some reason they decided and saw fit to raise taxes on renters by \$175. And that was, again, in the midst of an affordability crisis that was after, you know, a long list—or, a number of hydro rate increases that were done in a questionable manner. This was—this is their record.

And, again, when it comes to our commitment to reducing those costs, we started in our first budget to reduce costs for renters, and we did more of that important work with our recent budget because, again, we're committed to making sure that we make life more affordable. And there's a long list of, I think, things that can be celebrated, and I would invite the critic to actually just, you know, consider that these changes might actually be good for Manitobans and that we're actually lowering their costs.

She can celebrate the fact that our government cut personal income taxes for Manitobans. This is a positive thing and it was something that our government was proud to do. There's no need to resist or fight against it and really just for the sake of being seen to do that. This is something I think we can celebrate together that we've done.

You know, our government has done good work of lowering costs in a number of important ways, and I hope that she sees that those efforts are genuine, that we've brought forward a number of important measures to lower costs, and our government remains committed to that.

Mrs. Stone: What I do see is this minister and an NDP government that repeatedly take credit for others' work.

But I do have a question related to intergovernment relations. So the budget for intergovernment relations falls under the Department of Finance, so my question to the minister is: Will the Washington trade office that was announced by this government fall under his department, and how much has been budgeted for it?

* (16:50)

MLA Sala: So I'm very pleased that we are re-establishing a presence in Washington after the former government cut that office and ultimately disconnected us from having a presence and having Manitoba's voice be heard. And I—you can imagine right now,

boy, is this ever an important time for us to make sure that our voice—Manitoban voice is heard in Washington.

So clearly a serious lack of foresight on the part of the former PC government to cut that and to, again, you know, reduce Manitoba's standing and role and voice in the United States. So we are proud to be working, again, to re-establish that presence through that investment in that Washington office.

The funds for this are, indeed, going to be paid by IGA, but funds for this are held currently in our ISA budget. Can share with the member that that ISA budget total is \$550 million. I can also tell her that the cost associated with this office will be nowhere close to that total.

But right now, sharing—[interjection]—glad to hear you—you support that.

The very important, I think, consideration here is that we're still undergoing a process, and we—I think our—it's in our best interest to not identify any specific cost. Because, again, we want to make sure that we're getting the best value for Manitobans when it comes to the establishment of this very important presence in Washington, again, something that we, unfortunately, lost due to cuts from the members opposite.

Mrs. Stone: As the minister's three-month tax deferral is coming to a close, can the minister tell us how many Manitoba businesses have applied to defer their payroll taxes?

MLA Sala: Appreciate the question.

The measure we took, you know, right—sort of right out of the gate when Manitobans and Manitoba businesses were facing the Trump tariff threat, I think, was very important. And what we brought in was a commitment to provide tax deferrals for businesses to help offer them liquidity and make sure that during that initial period when we were all sort of, you know, processing and working through the implications of the tariff threat that we were facing, that we were taking immediate action and responding to provide one tool, at least, immediately for businesses.

And I remember very fondly standing in front of the Legislature with our team with an absolutely beautiful, ginormous Canadian flag that was put on the front of the Legislature that I think everybody felt quite proud of. It was a beautiful, beautiful thing to see. And I think that was a great moment for our team when we showed, without question, that we are focused on providing immediate supports as needed to

help businesses work through the challenge that they're facing right now.

Those liquidity supports were provided on RST and payroll taxes. And what I can share with the member is that the most recent number I have is that there's over 760 accounts participating and that, you know, we are seeing some significant uptake and businesses taking advantage of those liquidity supports.

And we wanted to make sure that as that was coming to an end, that given the number of businesses who are leveraging those liquidity supports, that we continue to provide those. So that has been extended for three more months, again, as a reflection of the uptake and the number of businesses that are benefiting from those liquidity supports.

Again, why did we do this in response to the Trump tariff threat that the Leader of the Opposition strangely supports? We're fighting on the side of team Manitoba and team Canada.

The Chairperson: Order, please.

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

CHAMBER

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

* (15:00)

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—for the Department of Public Service Delivery.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): No.

The Chairperson: Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): No.

The Chairperson: Okay. 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 8.1(a) contained in resolution 8.1.

At this time, we invite ministerial opposition—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 like to introduce the—his staff in attendance?

The honourable minister of—oh.

* (15:10)

MLA Sandhu: I have with me today Deputy Minister Joseph Dunford, Assistant Deputy Minister Paris Frangkoulis, Executive Financial Officer Jason Perez, Director of Ministerial Affairs Julia Antonyshyn.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: And would the critic like to introduce his staff in attendance?

Mr. Guenter: We're pleased to have Mr. Mark Stewart with PC caucus staff with us in Estimates today.

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. Guenter: One of the responsibilities of the Minister of Public Service Delivery (MLA Sandhu) is consumer protection, I believe lies within the department. Last December there were photos of valid passports, staff payroll information and credit card statements that were all among the data stolen from the Pembina Trails School Division during the cyberattack.

When was the minister first made aware of this breach affecting thousands of staff and students?

MLA Sandhu: The member that asked me the question is—actually on November 13, 2024, that department is moved over to Innovation and New Technology.

Mr. Guenter: I thank the minister for that.

So the data that was stolen and is now available on the dark web includes names, dates of birth, confidential business data, personal health information, email addresses and who knows what else. These individuals now face years of vigilance protecting their identities and their credit.

Has the minister reached out to the victims of this cyberattack, and what is his department's policy for providing free long-term credit and identity monitoring?

* (15:20)

MLA Sandhu: Thank you to the member opposite, and this is a good question. And we take, you know, this kind of incident very seriously. And we understand there is lots of students were impacted and our government takes cybersecurity, as I said, very, very seriously.

To get to the best answer, the member should direct his question to the appropriate department and which is—in this case, is both Innovation and New Technology and Education.

Thank you.

Mr. Guenter: The minister will know that I have raised this matter in question period. I've asked the government for answers on behalf of those Manitobans who've been made victims by this deeply concerning cyberattack.

And, unfortunately, there's been no answer, and unfortunately, you know, the Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz) hasn't been able to provide any answers. The Minister for Public Service Delivery hasn't taken up these questions, either.

This is a very serious—very serious matter. We have staff and students, many of them—thousands of them—who are affected by this. Again, this is photos of valid passports; this is staff payroll information; this is credit card statements. This is deeply personal information that's now out on the dark web: names, dates of birth, confidential business data, personal health information, email addresses.

Frankly, this is—this incident is—has put and will continue to put these innocent victims through a very terrible, terrible ordeal. And I know there are parliamentary restrictions around the kind of language we can use and, you know, not that I'm one prone to use strong language, but I think in this incident, it's warranted.

These individuals are going through a terrible time and will face that for quite some time. There's been no answer on what kind of assurance or what kind of help this government has been able to provide them. There's been nothing.

And so it's my job here as the critic to hold the minister who is responsible for consumer protection and for standing up for the interests of Manitobans, to ask these questions of him. And I think Manitobans would expect an answer.

And so I think they're looking for answers, and I'm bringing them to the floor of this very Chamber, the place where these questions deserve to be asked

and Manitobans deserve to hear answers. And I know the media, as well, has picked up on this as well, and they're interested. These are—this, again, is a very serious matter.

So it's been seven months since the cyberattack. There has been no policy issued from this government. We have victims, thousands of them affected. Victims are scared and frustrated at this breach of data.

Can the minister tell this—tell us how many publicly funded institutions have been subject to a cyberattack since this minister took over, and will the minister provide a provincial policy on the provision of monitoring services to protect exposed Manitobans?

MLA Sandhu: Thank you, honourable Chair, and also thanks to the member once again.

And as I replied earlier, we take cybersecurity very seriously here in our core department, also wherever in Manitoba. And we don't want to see this happen.

And that's why, as I said earlier, you know, the member is asking the question at the wrong department. Like, he should be—I'm sure the Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz) will come in front of the committee again—not again, actually; the first time—and he will have the chance to ask those questions.

For right now, again, as I said, the Minister of Innovation and New Technology will—in front of the committee, and also, right now, the Minister of Education is also in the committee answering those questions. And maybe the member can direct those questions to those two departments.

Again, on November 13, 2024, the department was split into two. So the member was asking questions is—falls under those two departments.

Thank you.

Mr. Guenter: Today we heard about the impact of the sloppy property tax grab on affordable housing, and—how many multi-unit residential units had their taxes jump with this property tax hike, and does the residential tenancies board consider government tax overreach when considering approving rent increases?

* (15:30)

MLA Sandhu: Thanks to the member for the question. I just want to remind the member, he might have seen my mandate letter, which is talking about reviewing the RTA, Residential Tenancies Act.

The heart of the member's question is about affordability, actually, you know, and I know under their watch when they were in government for seven and a half years—those dark seven and a half years—they raised hydro rates at the Cabinet table. And that was during the Christmastime—close to the Christmastime. I still remember sitting in opposition at that time.

There is taxes on the renters, you know. They cut renters' tax credit from \$700 to \$525. And on those—who are those renters? These are the people on low income, newcomers and the seniors, so they were trying to hurt those vulnerable people.

They said feeding the kids was a bad idea. They forced workers to go on strike. So there's so many things they did in their seven and a half year—dark—half—seven and a half dark years.

So I just want to remind the members and—our incredible Finance Minister just brought an incredible budget, you know. I remember in 2024, there were 21 ways to save money, and in 2025, there are 25 ways to save money. So I probably mentioned a few of those to the member.

Our permanent relief for the 10 per cent cut to the gas tax. Again, we did it, holiday tax credit for the whole year, and then after that we made a permanent 10 per cent cut to the gas tax.

Hydro rate freeze for a year. And under their watch, during the Christmastime they raised the hydro rates, and here we are making—looking at affordability. We know there are challenges, and that's why we are freezing the hydro rate for a year.

Increasing the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit: last year it was \$1,500, and next year it's going to be \$1,600. Free birth control, including Plan B. A cut to the payroll tax so we can help small businesses.

And, again, we are listening to Manitobans. Manitobans are our priority. Unlike the member opposite, who only hurt those members who need the support during their time, seven and a half years, and also today. And the question that I'm seeing—they're not talking about affordability; all they're talking about is, you know, sorry, you guys—like, they're talking about how to make life less—I'll go back again. So they are trying to hurt Manitobans.

Today, where we are, our Finance Minister had brought an incredible budget, 25 ways to save money, and we are doing that incredible work. And, again, I'll—I know they made life harder for Manitobans. They are saying, like, make—we made life harder for

Manitobans; can you make those quickly changes so Manitobans can feel comfortable.

We are listening to Manitobans. We are listening to everyday Manitobans to deliver on their priorities, and also our election commitments that we have made. We are delivering on those ones.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Mr. Guenter: The question to the minister was: Does the residential tenancies board consider government tax overreach when considering approving rent increases?

The short answer—I think the minister, it's unfortunate, wasn't able to answer, but he should have been able to answer that. He's—you know, he should be well informed enough of his own file and confident enough of his own file to be able to answer that question.

Because the answer is yes, and the reality is that this NDP government has so botched the education property tax file by eliminating the previous PC government's education tax rebate, 50 per cent rebate. It's a 50 per cent education property tax rebate that Manitobans—all Manitobans—received.

This NDP government eliminated that. And after two years of—two budgets, two consecutive budgets—they have increased the property taxes, education property taxes on Manitobans by \$330 million. And so the reality is that these costs are being passed down to renters, to the most vulnerable in Manitoba. The minister should know that.

And I would like to cite—read an article done by the Manitoba CBC, Ian Froese. It was posted on April 4, 2025. The headline is: Higher rents likely, Manitoba landlords warn after Province removes education property tax rebates.

And I think this article lays the groundwork for—explains what we're seeing today in terms of tax increases and rent increases: Some Manitoba landlords say they'll have no choice but to raise rents, after the provincial government—this NDP government—promised to—promised tax relief for at least some rental property owners under its overhaul of the education property tax system but failed to deliver.

This is the first year in which the NDP government is providing homeowners with a credit, valued at up to \$1,500, on their school taxes.

Under the former Progressive Conservative government, the Province instead offered a 50 per cent rebate on school taxes, but all residential property owners were eligible—not just homeowners.

* (15:40)

And that's important. All residential property owners were eligible and received an education property tax rebate under the previous PC government's 50 per cent rebate plan, which the NDP government then eliminated.

The new education funding model was scrapped, seemingly along with any tax breaks for landlords and commercial property owners, specific to education property levies. Avrom Charach, spokesperson for the Professional Property Managers Association said the landlords his group represents aren't pleased. They're mad because we're absorbing the added costs this year and because it'll pass on to the tenants.

And that's the concern. Landlords will be passing these costs on to the tenants, and this minister is doing nothing about it.

Charach said higher rents are inevitable, and his business, Kay Four Properties, is likely to apply next year for rent increases above the government's cap.

So that just makes a complete mockery of anything this government talks about when it comes to affordability for renters. They have absolutely no credibility on that front. They are increasing the cost of living across Manitoba, on all Manitobans. And, unfortunately, it's renters, those who are most vulnerable, the lowest income earners, who are being forced to pay for these tax hikes. Rent hikes this year are generally limited to 1.7 per cent.

Charach says that cap is well below other cost increases to city and school taxes, water and sewer rates and waste collection. It's not just the landlord raising rent. It's that we're being forced into raising the rents.

The article goes on. It says that the Finance Minister wouldn't acknowledge, in an interview Thursday, his earlier pledge—

The Chairperson: Member's time has expired.

* (15:50)

MLA Sandhu: I think there wasn't any question. Member didn't ask the question, but thank you for rambling for five minutes and not really asking a question. But it's given me an opportunity to really talk about rentals and affordable housing. You know, we're—it is my mandate—in my mandate letter, is talking about reviewing the RTA and that review is under view—under way. And we are talking to stakeholders and we are listening to Manitobans.

And also, when we talk about PC's seven and a half years and—actually they have no credibility when it comes to affordability and protecting renters. They failed them for seven and a half years. What they did, as I mentioned earlier, they raised Hydro rates at the Cabinet table, and that was also during Christmastime. They raised taxes on renters; they cut their renter tax credit from \$700 to \$525. They said feeding the kids was a bad idea.

They sent cheques to out-of-province billionaires, you know. Again, that was—those people like Polo Park mall having—over a billion-dollar cheque was sent to them. And do they really ask for it? I don't think so, they ask for it. But still, Heather Stefanson said: Hey, you know what, here's a \$1-billion gift to you. And out here—and they're telling feeding the kids was a bad idea.

And, you know, at the end for the elections, they tried to throw money anywhere that can stick. So they can win the government back. And they left us with \$2-billion deficit. That's \$2 billion. That money could have been spent on very good programming. But again, they were trying to win the government.

But then also, you know, they not only tried to do that, then they—the conflict of interest thing like we were—they tried to rush through—not rush through, actually. After they lost the government, they want to approve the Sio Silica sand mine. And as we have seen yesterday, in the House, and their—Heather Stefanson was fined—

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Chair.

MLA Sandhu: Cliff Cullen was fined.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: We have a point of order from the member from Borderland.

Mr. Guenter: I have a point of order. I think the minister needs to be drawn back to relevant remarks. We're meeting here today to discuss the Estimates of Expenditure of the public—of the Department of Public Service Delivery.

The minister is here very clearly to answer questions about their department. That's his responsibility; that's the purpose of this process. He's undermining that by not doing that, and I'd urge the minister to put down—to set aside his talking points that were written for him by the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) political staff

and to answer the questions, so that Manitobans have answers to very important issues affecting them today.

The Chairperson: The Minister of Public Service Delivery (MLA Sandhu), on the same point of order.

MLA Sandhu: Same point of order.

It's not a point of order, honourable Chair. And what we are talking about today is accountability. Accountability to Manitobans, accountability to the renters. And, again, as the member—what they did the other day, this is—again, they broke The Conflict of Interest Act and Heather Stefanson was fined, Cliff Cullen was fined, and the Red River North member was still sitting behind him.

And is he going to ask the member—is he going to still sit with that member or is he ask—going to ask that member to resign today because he broke the trust that Manitobans has put into our institutions by not respecting it?

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Chairperson: So there was not a point of order, but I would encourage both the minister and the critic to tie comments, questions back to the supplemental booklet—to the Estimates of the Expenditures for this department because that is the session in which we're in, is to speak to the Department of Public Service Delivery.

* * *

The Chairperson: And with two minutes left in his response, the Minister for Public Service Delivery.

MLA Sandhu: As I was saying, our NDP government is making life more affordable, and we have increased the renters' tax credit to \$625 where the previous PC government cut that from \$700 to \$525. And, again, it could be increased in our first budget and now we can increase it again in our second budget.

And, again, free park passes for one year. You know, Manitobans love going to the parks, and it's a good day in Manitoba that we have NDP government and we are thinking about affordability. And I also love parks and I—last week, even though it was cold, I was at Birds Hill park and enjoying the lovely walk, even though it was a little bit colder, though.

So, thank you, honourable Speaker.

Mr. Guenter: The minister referenced the NDP \$2-billion deficit, and he's right on that point; the NDP did run a \$2-billion deficit in their very first year in office.

But he fails to remember, or conveniently forgets, that they were left—the NDP were left with a \$373-million surplus by the previous PC government, and that \$373-million surplus was confirmed by the Auditor General just last week. So that point is beyond contention. I think is—we all have to agree that those are the facts.

And so—but I think it's also important to acknowledge that when the minister is talking about affordability, that his—he's part of a government that's going in the wrong direction on that issue.

And landlords have come forward and said, again, in this article, the headline is: Higher rents likely, Manitoba landlords warn after Province removes education property tax rebates. And these landlords are being forced to apply for above-guideline rent increases because of the, in some cases, up to 50 per cent property tax hikes on them.

And we saw—we heard just today in question period about an 80-unit complex in Brandon that is actually an affordable housing complex in Brandon—80-unit—that is now facing—staring down a 50 per cent increase in their property tax—property education tax hike.

* (16:00)

So, again, that's 80 units, and that's an affordable housing complex in Brandon. So this is happening across the province, and it's hugely concerning because, as I said, it's renters that are bearing—that are being forced to pay the tab here that are—pick up the costs here.

And there's one quote in this article, which I think is very relevant: It's not just the landlord raising rent. It's that we're being forced into raising the rents. And who's doing the forcing? It's this NDP government. That's the direct result; that's the \$330 million in property tax hikes that this NDP government has levied on Manitobans. That's what this landlord is talking about.

The article goes on to say that he pointed to a 48-unit apartment complex owned by Kay Four Properties on Jefferson Avenue in Winnipeg, which is losing out on a rebate that last year was worth more than \$19,000. The only choice we have as property managers is to continually apply for these rent increases above the

guideline because we're always catching up. The Finance Minister wouldn't acknowledge in an interview Thursday his earlier pledge to help small businesses with their education property taxes.

And the article goes on to quote many more landlords that are facing challenges because of the difficult market that the NDP has created through their extreme—their excessive property tax hikes. And so that's a huge concern.

So I wonder if the minister would take any responsibility or accepting accountability, and if he would ask the Premier (Mr. Kinew) to do so as well. If he's hearing these concerns—and I know he is from his own constituents in The Maples, and his colleagues are talking about that and how they're going to deal with the challenge of all these Manitobans with tax bills landing on the kitchen table, as I said, in some cases, up to 50 per cent—will they accept responsibility for their NDP property tax hikes, and will they reverse course?

MLA Sandhu: Thank you to the member for the question.

As I said earlier, my 'mandlet'—mandate letter is pretty clear. I am reviewing the RT act, so this is where we are strengthening renters' rights and protecting affordable housing. That's in my mandate letter, and this is what we are doing. And, again, we brought a bill forward to protect renters.

And we have also brought in a bill which is, you know, a very good bill. I think this is the first-ever bill brought forward to the House, not in Manitoba but in Canada. First time ever.

And this is, again, controlling—property control for groceries. This is where—because the member's asking about affordability, what the government is doing. This is what we are doing, is we brought this bill forward so we can open more market for the grocery stores, and there's more competition so we can stabilize the grocery prices.

And, you know, as I said earlier, and also brought in a bill to protect renters. Sometimes things happen where the whole unit might need be to be evacuated, and if the landlord is not keeping their building up to date, and they will be responsible for certain of the costs. So again, my Premier's message is pretty clear to me and to my department, and I want to thank my department for working hard on—to deliver on those priorities.

And I'd like to repeat these ones again, and this is, again, what an incredible Finance Minister and, you know, 2024, 21 ways to save, and 2025, 25 ways to save. So I don't know where he coming up those—from those savings, like he brought an incredible savings.

So I would like to highlight a few of those more: saving families \$2,800 a year for extending \$10-a-day child care all year. Under the previous government, they had only a certain period of time, but we extended it to all year round. Again, feeding our kids with a permanent universal school nutrition program so kids can go to school. They don't have to think about that they're hungry so they can concentrate on the study, so they can be proud of themselves.

And also I want to thank our colleague who's not with us anymore, Nello Altomare. He did an incredible job for bringing this child nutrition program to here in Manitoba. Canada is following our lead, you know, and I'm very proud of our former colleague, and we miss that—we miss you, Nello.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

* (16:10)

Mr. Guenter: The minister's—notice that the minister's actually not answering any questions here, and he's taking excessive amounts of time to consult on very straightforward answers that he should be able to provide in very swift fashion because he should know his file; he should know his department. And he should understand that he is responsible for these issues and he should be able to provide those answers very quickly, and we're getting no answers.

Very unfortunate—undermines the process—for all the talk of democracy, they're sure doing a very good job of undermining it here by refusing to give any answers to the duly elected members of the official opposition and to the responsibility that we have to ask questions and to hold this government accountable on behalf of all Manitobans.

It's what we're trying to do here today. And, unfortunately, this government, and this minister in particular, is refusing to provide any answers and yet, ironically, he's taking all kinds of time to not provide answers. And so that's frustrating.

So I'll ask him very directly: What percentage of above-guideline rent applications were approved for fiscal year 2024-2025?

MLA Sandhu: Thanks to the member for that question, where he's talking about democracy.

You know, honourable Chair, the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) said that Trump—I want to quote: wants a win. I think one of the—his clear wins, and lots of Canadians' win, was a change in federal government. He wanted Justin Trudeau gone and thank God he's gone. How much of an influence did the 25 per cent of—tariff threat have on that? I would say a lot, and I would say thank you—I would say thank you, he's gone now. End quote.

Honourable Speaker—honourable Chair, this is where we are seeing a leader of the Conservative Party—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

MLA Sandhu: Progressive Conservative Party—

Point of Order

The Chairperson: Point of order from the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter).

Mr. Guenter: Yes, once again, the minister is not at all relevant, has gone out and hit the ditch, swerving around and he's out in the field somewhere and not likely to return to the highway; but I'd implore you, Chair, to direct him that way.

* (16:20)

We're—it took him seven minutes to try to answer the question. My question was very direct, and this is the kind of drivel that we're getting.

So, Chair, I think it's important that we call this minister to relevance.

The Chairperson: Would the minister like to speak on the same point of order?

MLA Sandhu: Member from Borderland, he started with talking about democracy. So this is—I'm answering his question on democracy: how is it impacting and how is it, you know, their leader is asking the foreign government to interfere in our democracy, a 'democratically' elected government to be thrown by a foreign leader.

This is serious, honourable Speaker, and the member from Borderland wants to be the 51st state of the—of America, which I will say never will going to happen, you know. Chair—honourable Chair—and it was a dark day yesterday. I'll probably, when I respond

to my question, I'll bring that one back, because the member asked the question on democracy.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

The Chairperson: So there was a point of order. While there is room for preamble in our responses and in our questions, we do have to tie it back to the contents of the Estimates book. So I would ask the minister to keep responses connected, while also allowing some leeway for preamble.

* * *

MLA Sandhu: As I was saying, the member asked about affordability, and we are reviewing the RTA. The member talked about protecting the renters, and we are strengthening the renters' rights by reviewing the RTA. And the member also talks about democracy.

Honourable Speaker, yesterday was a dark day here in the House, and when we are talking about democracy, and in 2023, after the Conservatives lost their elections, what did they try to do? They undermined—tried to undermine the democracy.

People put their trust in our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and this team, and they tried to undermine that trust. They tried to ram through their Sio Silica mine by—this is, again, as the member said, democracy, you know. In democracy—but they are not respecting the democracy.

The member wants to be the 51st state, which is not going to happen.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Mr. Guenter: I did not bring up democracy, but this minister sure is undermining it by stalling and refusing—stonewalling and refusing to provide reasonable answers to reasonable questions that I think any Manitoban would want to know of the Minister for Public Service Delivery, and this minister refuses to provide any answers whatsoever and goes on long diatribes that have—that are not at all relevant: not relevant to the truth and not relevant to his department.

And so I would ask the minister again: What percentage of above-guideline rent applications were approved for fiscal year 2024? If you can't answer that, will the minister take it as undertaking to get this information for Manitobans?

And what impact has the NDP removal of education property tax rebates on apartments and other

multi-family units had on housing prices in Manitoba? If the minister doesn't have an answer, will he take it as an undertaking to get this information for Manitobans?

* (16:30)

MLA Sandhu: Thanks to the member for the question. I'm happy to answer about the impact of our new Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit. First, we are not sending cheques to billionaires—out-of-province billionaires. And the vast majority of Manitobans are better off with our new tax credit.

And the member was also talking about affordability. You know, the biggest threat to affordability is Donald Trump, and the leader of opposition is thanking Trump for putting a tariff on us. And he's thanking Trump for undermining our democracy. He's thanking Trump for interfering in our democratically elected government.

And when it comes to affordability, honourable Chair, you know there is 25 ways to save money. You know, I was halfway through the list, because the list is pretty long, which is 25 ways.

So we brought in a \$300 security rebate for families, you know. We will be bringing in more programs like this in the near future. And increasing the seniors' top-up. Where they failed, we will fix it. And also I'm very, very happy to see that \$4,000 rebate on new EVs.

And come to—I'm smiling because our budget was so good this year, and the Finance critic had no issues with our budget. She was so happy for that, and her only concern was why Tesla and Elon Musk is not getting money from the provincial government. And, again, I'm so proud of the Finance Minister that we have excluded the Tesla from the list of rebates. And there's a \$2,500 rebate on used EVs.

And this is—again, when we were in opposition working and listening to Manitobans, this was one of the ideas where I was part of this, you know, not decision desk—you can't call it—but this is where we were listening to Manitobans alongside the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) to see how can we bring more affordability and how can we have more—how can we protect our environment. This was one of the ways to do that, and I'm really, really proud that our Finance Minister delivered on this one.

And also increasing the young farmers rebate. We know farmers are hurting because of the tariffs from the States and also tariffs from China. That's why our

finance—our Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) is working really, really hard. And, you know, another that was a bad decision by the previous government was increasing the Crown land lease rent. Our incredible Minister of Agriculture froze those funds, second year in a row.

So yes, when it's come to affordability, we will listen to Manitobans and we will deliver on their priorities and we will also deliver on our election commitment that we had made during the election times. We have delivered of many, and we will continue to deliver on the remaining ones.

Thank you, honourable Speaker—Chair.

Mr. Guenter: So we've spent half an hour now, thanks to the minister stonewalling a very simple question, which is what percentage of above-guideline rent applications were approved for fiscal year 2024-2025. And I asked what impact has the NDP removal of the education property tax rebates on apartments and other multi-family units had on housing prices in Manitoba. We've spent half an hour—the minister spent 16 minutes consulting with his staff, 10 minutes talking—and still no answers for Manitobans.

But the minister loves to talk about Elon Musk and Donald Trump; and, well, he should, because he's been doing a lot of business in America. The Minister for Public Service Delivery, this NDP government, has been, as we've been learning in the House, as I have been standing up and our PC team and revealing and uncovering and discovering all the contracts—millions and millions of dollars worth of contracts that this NDP government has given to Donald Trump—even after the tariffs were applied in Canada—on Canada by Donald Trump.

And this NDP government has been quite brazen with signing multi-million-dollar contracts that benefit Trump's America and disadvantage Canadian firms. And so why is this minister spending our money to make a big impact in Trump's America?

* (16:40)

MLA Sandhu: Thank you to the member for that question—very important question.

And as I said many, many times during the question period and also even outside the Chamber, we are reviewing every contract to find opportunity to support Canadian and Manitoba companies. While the

Opposition House Leader thanks Trump, I want to thank Manitoba businesses. You know, they're doing incredible work under the threat of Donald Trump.

And this is where even the member from Borderland—not only he, as their leader said thanks for putting the tariff, and he himself said, you know, let's become 51st state. Manitobans will say, no, that will not going to happen.

But I will let the member know, sometimes there are situations where there's no alternatives. In that case, a US company might be the only option to deliver an essential service.

It is sad that the PCs didn't invest in our local tech capacity. They ignored the IT sector for seven years. How many ministers they had under them who were innovation and technologies? Seven and a half years; zero.

Our government is investing in the industry. We have a new Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz) who is bringing Manitoba into the future—again, bringing jobs to Manitoba, reviewing every single contract. It's very, very important.

Again, the PCs were okay with relying on US contracts. We are doing everything we can to give preference to Canadian businesses here in Manitoba and in Canada.

Manitobans are lucky that they wasn't—it wasn't a PC government during these tariff times because their leader thanked Donald Trump. The member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) would throw up his hands in the air and give up. We won't do that. We are listening to Manitobans. And, you know, the way the Opposition Leader thanked Donald Trump, I think that was wrong. We are standing up for Canada.

I do like to bring, you know—we all know the Fort Whyte—MLA for Fort Whyte thanked Donald Trump for the tariffs and still holding up legislation that will promote the singing of O Canada in the schools. I don't know why they won't let that legislation pass. The member for Fort Whyte said that Trump, I quote, wants a win. I think one of his clear wins and a lot of Canadians' wins was a change in the federal government. He want to—he wanted Justin Trudeau gone, and thank God he's gone. So how much of an influence did the 25 per cent tariff threat have on that? I would say

a lot, and I would say thank you. I would say thank you. He's gone.

Honourable Chair, not only he said those words on the podcast, he said those words six times here in the Legislature. A leader, Official Opposition Leader, thanking Donald Trump in this House six times. That's wrong. We will stand up for Manitoba jobs; we will stand up for the Manitoba economy and the Canadian economy.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Guenter: Well, the minister's comments simply don't pass the smell test. I think Manitobans can sort truth from fiction. There's no connection to reality in the minister's comments.

And, unfortunately, though, this minister, this NDP government, has been very busy doing business with Donald Trump in the middle of a trade war. In fact, the only members in this Manitoba Legislature—perhaps in Manitoba history; I'll go that far—to sign—to give untendered government contracts to US firms in the middle of a trade war with the United States is this NDP government. This minister, in fact, explicitly.

And so I would ask the minister, you know, about this sham review that he talks about; he talks about how he's reviewing all the government contracts, except that how is it that the—this government—this NDP government—has been reviewing contracts in order to increase the value of those contracts?

Yesterday I stood in this House and I tabled several of those contracts: one which, on April 1, was signed by the Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz). It was a contract with a Washington, DC firm. They increased that contract to \$2 million.

And so the minister talks about a review. The minister, you know, puts a bunch of political spin on the record, but I'd like to know: How is it that this government keeps on giving untendered contracts to American firms in the middle of a trade war?

And then, on the other hand, they're talking about a buy-Canada policy which, again, they've had months now to develop. And it's gone missing. It seems like there's been no movement on that front. The minister—I've asked repeatedly for something, some details on that, and the minister—the best he could say was, stay tuned.

* (16:50)

So I don't know why he's suppressing that policy, but I think perhaps it's become clear that this NDP government is very eager, very keen to continue doing business with US firms, with Donald Trump; and they want to do business with Donald Trump. And so they keep on giving untendered contracts.

And for members of the public who may be listening, untendered contracts means that those are direct awards. The government doesn't even open up the possibility for Canadian firms, Canadian businesses who may be able to provide a better service or at a cheaper cost, more affordable rate. The government—this NDP government—doesn't give them that opportunity.

So this NDP government chooses to, and has on multiple occasions now—and we've, again, tendered those—we've tabled those contracts, and this NDP government goes and grants direct-award contracts to US firms. They love—it's very clear—they love doing business with Donald Trump. And as I said, so the minister's remarks don't pass the smell test, and this review he talks about is clearly a sham.

And I wish he would defend it; I wish he'd be more specific; I wish he'd talk about his buy-Canada policy and be more specific. He hems and haws provides—fails to provide any answers; and in the meantime, he and his colleagues are busily signing contracts with Donald Trump, and who knows, lining themselves up for, you know, favours after they leave office here. Maybe they're looking forward to a future down there.

But I don't know what their reasons are, but clearly it's an affront and it's a disgrace. I've had Manitobans reach out to me, business owners who complain about the fact that they weren't even given the opportunity to bid on some of these contracts.

So this NDP government is absolutely excluding Manitoba businesses, not even giving them the opportunity to have their say and to demonstrate what they could do, what they could contribute to building a stronger, better Manitoba. This NDP government goes over their heads without asking any questions, without any consultation, without any opportunity for Manitoba and Canadian firms to participate or to bid on these contracts; this NDP government goes and grants US firms in Trump's America direct awards.

Is this the review that the minister is talking about?

MLA Sandhu: I think that was a disrespect to my credibility and also to my staff's credibility when it's come to this.

He really doesn't have to go far when he's talking about lining their pockets. Think of Heather Stefanson, Cliff Cullen, member from Red River North. And recently, not long ago, we had a contract with WestJet under Heather Stefanson. Now she sits on that board. That's the lining of pockets.

When he talks about credibility, he have to look left and right to himself. Talk to Heather Stefanson. Talk to Cliff Cullen. He doesn't have to go far to call those people. He can maybe just sit next to member from Red River North. Conflict of interest—this is to breach that one.

The Chairperson: I just have to remind the minister to keep the comments relevant to the department we're speaking to.

MLA Sandhu: Member brought up an issue that's near and dear to Manitobans. He is talking about conflict and he's talking about what Heather Stefanson, Cliff Cullen and member from Red River North did.

So this is, again, shameful for that member to even suggest—to put a finger on my credibility and my staff's credibility. And we're working every single day to look at the—all the contracts. You know, where member thanking Donald Trump—we will never say that. We will always thank businesses here.

The Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise and call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow—Monday—1:30 p.m. Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 22, 2025

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