



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
ROBBINS, Colleen	Spruce Woods	PC
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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 2, 2025

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 48—The Protective Detention and Care of Intoxicated Persons Act

The Speaker: The honourable minister of—I've been away for a while—the honourable Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness.

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), that Bill 48, the protection detention and care of intoxicated persons act, now be read a first time.

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that Bill 48, The Protective Detention and Care of Intoxicated Persons Act, be now read a first time.

Ms. Smith: I'm so honoured to rise today and introduce Bill 48, The Protective Detention and Care of Intoxicated Persons Act. Honourable Speaker, this bill will help keep our community safe while ensuring that Manitobans are protected and cared for and are provided with health care and access to addictions supports and services while they are recovering from intoxication by alcohol and/or other substances.

I look forward to quick passage of this bill and unanimous support from this House so that we can keep Manitobans safe and free up our police officers, take the pressure off our emergency rooms and connect people with the care that they so desperately need.

Miigwech.

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

No further introduction of bills?

Committee reports?

Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

National Day of Action for MMIWG2S+

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): This Saturday, October 4, is the national day of action for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse relatives. On this day, we honour those we have lost, stand with survivors and reaffirm our government's commitment to ending this crisis.

To understand why this work matters so deeply, we must remember the names and lives of those taken. In March 2003, 16-year-old Felicia Solomon Osborne, from Norway House Cree Nation and a student at R.B. Russell school, went missing. Three months later, body parts were found along the Red River. The next day, one of our local papers ran the headline, and I quote: Prostitute with gang ties found. End quote.

That headline was not only cruel, it dehumanized Felicia. It reflected a society that too often dismisses Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited, and revealed the systemic inequities and racisms we continue to confront.

On a cold November day that same year, many of us gathered at the Alexander Docks in memory of Felicia where her body parts had washed ashore. After the prayers and remarks, her grandmother, Darlene Osborne, came up to me and said, and I quote: We need a 24-7 drop-in centre for Indigenous women and girls. End quote.

Almost 22 years later, after years of persistent and advocacy, I am proud to say this vision is becoming a reality. This morning, we announced a \$3.5 million investment into the establishment of the Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag Lodge, a first-of-its-kind, 24-7 safe space for Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit.

In partnership with Ikwe Widdjiitiwin, this lodge will be a warm and welcoming place of safety where women are met with dignity, where they can connect with culture and where they can find the support they need. It will also serve as a bridge, a soft hand-off, connecting women to housing, health care, addictions treatment, cultural healing and community supports. It is about preventing the next missing or murdered Indigenous woman, girl or two-spirit, but also it's about helping our relatives heal, rebuild and thrive.

The Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag Lodge is the cornerstone of our Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag: All Women Doing Well strategy. It's our government's whole-of-government strategy to empower and protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse relatives.

Since its launch in November of 2024, this strategy has already directed more than \$20 million into community-led projects across Manitoba. These investments are advancing the ten pillars of the strategy and strengthening safety, healing and empowerment of Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse relatives. Looking ahead, Budget 2025 invests another \$20 million to continue advancing this strategy, including large-scale projects in economic security, housing and justice.

Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag is not just a policy or a strategy. It is our sacred promise. It's about honouring our obligations, dismantling barriers and centring the leadership of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse peoples in Manitoba, and it is about prioritizing the protections of Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse folks in our beautiful province.

Miigwech.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I rise this afternoon to talk about the national day of action for murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls and gender-diverse people.

I want to begin by saying thank you to all of those who have come to visit the Legislature, share their stories today and every day.

There are many events throughout Manitoba that have been created to raise awareness, further dialogue and create much-needed supports and shared understanding for the loss that so many have and continue to experience. On this day of action and awareness, we bring our attention to MMIWG and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

We need to continue to support our communities and marginalized people, people with—who have been hurt by unnecessary violence and hate. The pathway to healing must include making the voices of these communities heard.

Honourable Speaker, it is incredibly heartbreaking that, because of violence, many Indigenous women and girls go missing or are found murdered. We as legislatures—legislators still need to do more. It is exceptionally important to give that full and proper

recognition for every person who has gone missing. Every single person who goes missing has a family whose lives are forever impacted.

Our hearts go out to all of you: those who are missing, those who have loved or love someone who may be missing or have been murdered. And to everyone who still experiences oppression for their sexual orientation, we see you and we hear you.

The journey to equality and peace is not without challenges, but I am confident that we can collectively rise to that challenge, that we can ensure the violence that plagues communities, in whatever form, from emotional to physical to monetary, to overcome.

* (13:40)

We as legislators must support avenues of escape and assistance for victims. We must look past old stereotypes and see the person, not the statistic. We must all do better.

And I want to say thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you to the MLA for St. Johns for bringing this statement forward.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to member statements, we have some guests in the gallery I'd like to introduce, and they have to leave before we'd be finished. So, seated in the public gallery from the University of Winnipeg, 30 students under the direction of Peter Ives, and they are guests of the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

We welcome you here today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Hannah Yang

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): At just 20 years old, Hannah Yang, a young woman with cerebral palsy, is a powerful voice for equity in Manitoba. Hannah uses her platform to advocate for people with disabilities and spread awareness about mental health. This past February, Hannah was honoured with the Yes I Can Award.

Last year, Hannah released her first children's book, *The Magical Runner*. Originally written as a grade 11 school project, the Shine Foundation, a London, Ontario-based organization, helped turn Hannah's writing dreams into a reality. Drawing from her own childhood, Hannah has transformed her experiences into a narrative that inspires children to embrace who they are and to believe in their own possibilities.

Hannah visits schools to share her book and her story with students across Winnipeg. She is a mentor, a storyteller and a role model for young people across this province. Hannah affirms to all exceptional young people they deserve to see themselves reflected in stories, and teaches the power of visibility, representation and inclusion.

Hannah fosters authentic and meaningful conversations about representation, helping to create positive change across our beautiful province.

Hannah has a strong presence felt by all members of the community. In fact, Hannah's impact is so enormous both myself and the colleague—my colleague, the MLA for Kildonan-River East, had both planned to honour her in the Chamber this year. So on behalf of all of us, and on behalf of the MLA for Kildonan-River East and myself, Hannah, you are so appreciated in your home community and in our larger Manitoba community.

Hannah, we are so incredibly proud of you and love you—and I ask my colleagues to help me celebrate Hannah.

Preston Houle

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Good afternoon. Today, we gather to recognize a true act of courage, an act that reminds us of strength, compassion and quick thinking that define the very best in our community.

On July 18, at Delta Beach just north of Portage la Prairie, a young child's life hung in the balance. In those terrifying moments, while panic and fear set in, Preston Houle stepped forward. Without hesitation, he ran to help, relying on his training and his impact to—instinct to save a life.

The child was unconscious, pulseless and in grave danger, but Preston remained calm. He took the child in his arms, he began chest compressions and he did not stop until that little boy coughed, until water cleared from his lungs, until life returned.

Because of Preston's bravery and his refusal to give up, a child's parents still have their son, a family is whole, and our community has been given an example of what true heroism looks like.

Honourable Speaker, words can never fully measure the value of a life saved, but we can say this: without Preston's selfless action that day, the outcome would almost certainly have been very different.

Preston, on behalf of the community and behalf of all Manitobans, thank you. You are a hero. You remind us of the power of courage, of preparation and of human spirit. Your action will never be forgotten.

Also joining Preston today is his wife, April Paul, his brother-in-law Shane Paul, and his mom, Tracey Houle.

Please stand with me to congratulate this hero.

Sophie Lamoureux

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I rise today with immense pride to recognize an extraordinary young girl, the youngest constituent I've ever had the privilege of setting a meeting with. At a young age, Sophie Lamoureux has already made a profound impact on our community through her courage, her compassion and commitment to advocacy.

Sophie was born with a port wine stain, a vascular birthmark that she carries with pride every day. This type of birthmark affects approximately one in 3,000 children, and at yet such a young age Sophie is already leading the way in promoting understanding and acceptance.

At an age when most children are learning to read or ride a bike, Sophie is learning how to raise awareness and build community. When Sophie and her mother, Roxane, visited my office, I was immediately struck by their enthusiasm and determination.

Last May for VBARS awareness month—VBARS standing for vascular birthmarks, anomalies and related syndromes—Sophie took on the initiative to organize a community walk in the River Park South neighbourhood. She brought together neighbours, friends and families to share information, build understanding and celebrate uniqueness.

Her event was more than just a walk. It was a meaningful step towards greater visibility and acceptance for individuals living with vascular birthmarks. Sophie reminded us that inclusion begins with awareness, and that even the smallest voice can make a powerful impact.

To Sophie, her mother Roxane and her family who join us today in the gallery, I thank you. You are role models and changemakers. Your efforts have brought our community closer together, and I am honoured to represent such inspiring individuals in Seine River.

I ask that all of my colleagues rise, join me in celebrating Sophie's remarkable advocacy and wishing

her continued success, and I ask the names of all my guests be entered into Hansard.

Alexander Lamoureux, Kevin Lamoureux, Roxane Lamoureux, Sophie Lamoureux, Cammie Lui.

Acknowledging Responders to Neelin School Incident

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, as MLA for Brandon West and as someone who once wore the uniform and stood proudly shoulder to shoulder with the men and women of the Brandon Police Service, it is a privilege to stand here today with deep pride and gratitude.

The recent incident at Neelin school tested our community's resilience. It was frightening and uncertain and could have certainly ended up very differently. But thanks to the swift actions of our officers, it didn't.

I want to especially recognize school resource officer Constable Moshe Linov and Constable Abdi [phonetic] Patel, the first responders on scene. I am pleased to recognize that Constable Abhi Patel along with his colleagues is joining us in the gallery today.

Your courage and professionalism made all the difference. You didn't hesitate. You acted with clarity, compassion and a fierce commitment to protect our students and staff.

* (13:50)

But let me be clear, behind every front-line response is a team of professionals: dispatchers, supervisors, investigators and support staff. And to every member of the Brandon Police Service, many of whom join us in the gallery today, your dedication and quiet strength do not go unnoticed.

You confronted an armed aggressive attacker, showed supreme discipline, exercised expertise in your training and dedication to the protection of the citizens and the preservation of life. You—your collective actions saved many lives and we owe you all a debt of gratitude.

On behalf of myself and all of my colleagues, know that your commendable actions are truly appreciated. I know the toll this work can take: the long nights, the missed family moments and emotional weights of running towards danger. And I also know that you do not do it for recognition, but because you believe in protecting our community.

Today, we thank you. We stand with you, not just in moments of crisis, but every day. Brandon is safer because of you, and I am proud to call you colleagues, friends and heroes.

Thank you.

Officers: Constable Ryan Brossart, Constable Duncan, Constable Frame, Constable Friesen, Constable Goran, Constable Jordan, Constable Linov, Constable Lumgair, Constable Mahoney, Constable Menzies, Constable Montgomery, Constable Patel, Constable Plante, Constable Puteran, Constable Ruskin, Constable Samagalski, Constable Smith.

Sergeant Kulchyski, Sergeant McBeth.

Cadets: Cadet Caballeros, Cadet Flett, Cadet Gill, Cadet Rose, Cadet Sawchuk, Cadet Yeo.

Dispatchers: Christie Chabot, Kayla Drakeley, Taylor Ennis, Morgan Hanlon, Tia Patten, Jessica Sutton, Danna Twerdoski.

Clerical Front Desk Attendants: Camille Anderson, Jess Paterson, Terra Snow, Ashley Trokhym.

Chad Posthumus Memorial Court

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I rise today to honour the life and legacy of a great Manitoban, Chad—pardon me—Chad Posthumus, and to celebrate the opening of the Chad Posthumus Memorial Court at Gateway Recreation Centre in the constituency of Rossmere.

Chad's basketball career was nothing short of remarkable. He played professionally across Canada and around the world, including representing Canada on the men's national 3x3 team. Chad was the very first player signed to the Winnipeg Sea Bears and proudly took on the role of captain during the team's inaugural season in 2023. His sudden passing in November of 2024 was a profound loss for our community, felt deeply by his family, his teammates and the entire basketball community in Manitoba and across Canada.

But beyond his athletic success, what defined Chad's legacy was his kindness, his humility and his dedication to our community. Chad served as an ambassador for KidSport, he acted as a mentor for youth and he was a strong advocate for others who, like him, lived with type 1 diabetes.

That's why our community is so proud that this new basketball court in Rossmere will bear his name. Chad began his basketball journey at the Gateway Recreation Centre and was a graduate of River East Collegiate, where he earned the nickname the Beast from River East while playing for the River East Kodiaks.

Honourable Speaker, I'd like to thank the City of Winnipeg, the Gateway Recreation Centre and, most

importantly, the Posthumus family for the naming of the Chad Posthumus Memorial Court, which will ensure that Chad's story continues to inspire. It will be a place where young athletes will gather and play and learn to lead with heart and to give back to our community, just like Chad did.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to oral questions, there are guests in the public gallery that I'd like to introduce.

I'll draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, from the Brandon Police Service, Chief Tyler Bates, Deputy Chief Greg Hebert, Constable Darcy Ruskin, Constable Selena Samagalski, Constable Abhi Patel, who are the guests of the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen).

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

I would also like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today students from the River East Collegiate German exchange program: St. Konrad students Miriam Biehler, Aimilia Babenschneider, Frida Schneider, Greta Reich, Jonas Pfiffer [*phonetic*], Ben Stumpf, Julius Brugger, Fabian Bussman, Lars Hagenbruerher [*phonetic*], Isabella Bogadado [*phonetic*], Alisha Braun, Cienna Dyck, Samantha Schroeder, Joseph Mose, Henry Doltze, Lincoln Dyck, Jeremy Sawatzky, Martin Sokolies, who are guests of the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt).

And we welcome you here today.

* * *

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, I ask leave to enter the 37 names, following my members' statement, of the staff that attended to the Neelin incident.

The Speaker: Does the member have leave to add the names to Hansard? [*Agreed*]

And I just have one more comment before we move on to oral questions. I reminded everyone that they have two minutes to do members' statements; most of you exceeded that today. Tomorrow, you will not—because tomorrow we're not sitting; so Monday, you will not.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Freedom of Speech and Public Protests Request for Premier to Apologize for Comments

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, I want to start by quoting this Premier's absurd comments from yesterday. And I quote: you should not be protesting a minister of the Crown's right to serve the people of Manitoba. End quote.

I want to be very clear for the Premier, his ministers and everyone on that side of the House: None of us have the right to be in this Chamber. It is a privilege; it is an honour, and it is a responsibility that we must live up to and earn every single day.

And Manitobans do have every right to show up and express their opinion, their freedom of speech and protest if they so choose without the Premier aggressively challenging Manitobans, saying, and I quote: If they have a problem, come see me. As if he wants to fight them.

Will the Premier apologize and retract his comments from yesterday or, like his Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), does he think that those that disagree with him are not allowed to exercise their rights for freedom of 'speech' and protest?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Well, the PC Party of Manitoba should've recognized a red flag with this guy when he was always talking about himself around the Cabinet table. And now you see here in question period, it's all about him; it's all about him. Guess what? It's not about you; it's about you, the people of Manitoba.

Let's quit talking about politicians and let's talk about the issues. You know why they want to talk about politics instead of the issues? Because what we've done so far in government is hire 3,400 front-line health-care staff, 1,100 nurses, 285 doctors. We've reopened emergency rooms; we've hired 36 new police officers in the city of Winnipeg, 1,600 new educators. We cut the gas tax; we cut property tax; we cut income tax; we cut the payroll tax.

No wonder they want to talk about themselves, because if they ever talk about us, Manitobans will be nodding their head and say, yes, we're on board with the NDP plan.

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

Mr. Khan: Childish jokes, insults, by this Premier. Not once did he mention anything I asked him about: democracy, rights to protest, freedom of speech and his failed Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine).

I quote from Hansard: "It's important to uphold the constitutional right of all Manitobans to peacefully protest and ensure it does not improperly restrict anyone's freedom of speech . . . However, we must remain vigilant in balancing between protecting people on the Legislative grounds and allowing people's right to protest, even if this protest is something that we disagree with." End quote.

Who said that, Honourable Speaker? This failed Minister of Families, right here in this very Chamber.

Why does the Premier stand here with such arrogance and anger and belittle Manitobans by calling them goofballs and intimidating them?

Will he stand up today and apologize for calling Manitobans goofballs?

Mr. Kinew: No. The invitation is to him. If you have a criticism for the government, direct it towards me. Don't avert your eye contact from me and attack my Minister of Families. And don't say that she's failing when two minutes ago you were clapping for the announcement that she made on a 24-7 safe space.

Again, they want to talk about personal attacks; they want to talk about politicians themselves. Okay, the PCs can keep doing that.

* (14:00)

We want to talk about you. How are we making your life more affordable? Well, we brought in a permanent cut to the gas tax. We brought in relief on property taxes and, of course, we relieved you of the division of the terrible anti-trans, anti-LGBT, anti-MMIWG rhetoric from the other side.

But when it comes to the members opposite and us, the choice is clear: they want to divide, they want to incite. We want to unite.

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

Mr. Khan: As the Minister of Families loved to say, and I quote: When they show you who they are, believe them. End quote.

This Premier just showed his arrogance, just showed his bipartisan attacks, just showed how low he will go when he calls Manitobans goofballs, when he removes their democratic right to protest and freedom

of speech. That's your Premier. Not one single thing about the questions I'm asking him, but goes on on false statements about his failed NDP government.

It's ironic how the NDP are now so upset when Manitobans are writing in demanding action against their failed minister, when this same Minister of Families had no problem telling Manitobans to write in and call into my office when she disagreed with me.

The public debates, asking questions and peaceful protest is not violence. It's definitely not racism like this Premier likes to call it is.

Will the Premier apologize to Manitobans today that—and admit that he was wrong to equate public protest, asking tough questions to violence—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Kinew: Keeps talking about himself. I want to talk about you and how we're making your health care better, how we're making your jobs more secure.

So it is a little interesting to hear this newfound concern with democracy, because, well, earlier this year, when our democracy was under attack by Donald Trump, what did the people on this side of the House do? We literally draped the Canadian flag on the building.

What did they do? They thanked Donald Trump. And it wasn't an accident. It's not only their leader who said thank you, I would say thank you to Donald Trump; they went out and got a new candidate whose only platform commitment was also to thank Donald Trump.

Here's the other thing I want to put on the record today: they've asked for a meeting to discuss new office furniture in the opposition offices. We're going to grant it. They better get comfortable because their No. 1 priority isn't you; it's making sure that they're going to stay there for a long, long time.

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

Personal-Care Homes Funding Concerns

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, I've been very clear. It is our job on this side of the House to ask questions, to hold this failing NDP government to account. Not once in those last three questions did the Premier even come close to answering one single question. This is a failed Premier and a failed NDP government. The Premier would rather talk about identity politics, but I will call

it out each and every time for him and his failed ministers on that side of the House; I will call them out based on merit and performance.

Sadly, Manitobans are coming to realize this NDP government is very limited on merit and has zero for performance. This summer, multiple care homes have reported funding troubles specifically related to this government not flowing money and releasing funds.

Why is the Premier failing to fund services for seniors across Manitoba?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Okay, setting aside the terrible wandering preamble, there was actually an issue brought forward in this one.

But I'm really surprised that the PCs want to talk about personal-care homes, because you know how many personal-care-home beds they built while that member was sitting at the Cabinet table? Do you know how many beds they built through the entirety of two terms in office? Do you know how many beds they built in every single community across Manitoba?

Well, I'll tell you this, Honourable Speaker. It's right here in the palm of my hand. No, no, actually, it's right there on the end of my finger. No, actually, it's right here in all of our heads. It's completely imaginary. They never built a single personal-care home bed, ever.

We're building the personal-care home in Arborg. We're building the personal-care home in Transcona. And guess who's crossing the floor soon? Because we're building a personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet too.

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

Mr. Khan: I will gladly put our record up against this Premier's shaming past record. We employ thousands of personal-care homes—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —on this side of the House; all they've done is stole the hard work of the previous PC government and reannounced them like they did something.

I will table a letter today that shows systematic—and I quote: systematic failures and financial negligence; end quote—by this NDP government and failed Health Minister from a personal-care home right here in Manitoba, in the backyard of the Minister of Health's riding, Union Station.

So my question is simple for the Premier—maybe he can actually answer it. And I quote from the letter I just tabled: Are systemic failures and financial negligence really the best he can do? End quote.

Mr. Kinew: So again, Honourable Speaker, there are more beds in the lost city of Atlantis than they ever built during their time in office. All of our guests in the Chamber today, each have build more personal-care home beds than the members opposite did in their time in office. They didn't build—not only a single bed, we actually lost personal-care home beds during their time in office.

In fact, there was actually—and I don't want any laughs or heckling here—there was a humanitarian crisis. There was a humanitarian crisis at the Maples personal-care home while they were in charge of our health-care system. It was an abomination. We are fixing the damage; we are building beds, we are building personal-care homes, and we're making sure that seniors get what this issue's really about: care, dignity and compassion.

I got care, dignity and compassion for seniors every day and I'll never have any for those who seek to divide Manitoba.

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

Mr. Khan: I bring forward a serious issue of personal-care homes in this province and underfunding by this NDP government; what does the Premier do? He stands up and makes jokes. The lost city of Atlantis.

We have personal-care homes that are closing under this NDP government and he stands up and makes jokes. It's embarrassing; it's wrong; he has to stop.

The NDP vilified the Lions club when they sold senior housing to continue to operate the personal-care home, but now they are actively undermining that same care home and many others with delayed and insufficient funding. I table that letter for the Premier.

The Health Minister won't meet with them; the Premier calls Manitobans goofballs for protesting; the Premier calls members on this side of the House racist for asking tough questions. If you won't meet with them, you won't talk to them, you won't answer questions, you have no right to be here.

Will the Premier and Health Minister meet with Lions house today?

Mr. Kinew: All right, let's pull it back from the alt-right, or alternate reality on the other side there and

focus on some facts. Here's some reasonable things that you, the reasonable people of Manitoba, understand.

The second that something crosses from being a legitimate dispute over politics to lighting a match and threatening lives, yes: it deserves to be condemned. And I will always condemn acts of violence in our politics.

Also, the second that the PCs talk about personal-care homes, you know that they're on shaky, unsteady ground. They allowed Lions Place to close, threatening many, many seniors' housing situation. And now we see the personal-care-home impacts of their negligence on the job.

Again, the Maples personal-care home tragedy was an absolute abomination. The member knows it; that's why he can't look up from his phone.

We are repairing the damage caused by a systematic pattern of cuts and neglect under the PCs. At the same time, we're uniting Manitobans and saying: No; if you are engaged in violence in our politics, you are on the fringe, you are on the extreme. Doesn't matter if you're left or right; all the rest of us can play here and have a constructive debate about the future of Manitoba.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: If you could stop the clock for a moment, please. There's some guests in the gallery that are leaving right away, so I want to acknowledge them.

We have, seated in the public gallery, from the University of Winnipeg, 30 students under the direction of Peter Ives, and they're guests of the honourable member for Union Station.

* (14:10)

Brandon Regional Health Centre On-Call General Surgery Availability

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Another day, Honourable Speaker, another example of ways that health care is only getting worse under this failing NDP government.

Can the Minister of Health explain why there is currently no on-call general surgery available at Brandon Regional Health Centre?

The Speaker: The honourable member for—the honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): You know, it's interesting. First, the Leader of the Opposition gets up and reminds Manitobans about their failures in government and the harm that they did to personal-care homes, and now the member for Roblin stands up and reminds Manitobans about their failures on the surgery side. We're doing more surgeries now in Manitoba than we ever have before, and why is that? It's because we're investing right here in our own capacity, not sending it out to the United States like they did for years and years.

We're also working directly with our provincial clinical lead to make sure that we're continuing to build that capacity in rural sites across the province. And we're going to keep doing that work with our partners who didn't have that partnership under the failed former Health ministers and that member, while she was advising Heather Stefanson to cut health care.

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

Mrs. Cook: That absolute non-answer is cold comfort to the people of Westman who may present to their regional health centre today and be unable to access surgery. I'll table a memo from Prairie Mountain Health that was distributed confirming that there is no general on-call surgery available for a 24-hour period that began this morning. The contingency plan laid out in this memo says that patients who need surgery will either be forced to wait up to 24 hours, travel to Dauphin, if Dauphin has capacity, or travel to Winnipeg.

How could the minister have failed to see this coming and how could they have failed to take action to prevent it?

MLA Asagwara: I want to be really clear, Honourable Speaker, that under the previous PC administration, Manitobans were being sent to the United States. They were being sent out of the country for essential health care.

And while the Leader of the Opposition heckles me as I answer this question, I want to remind Manitobans that he was around that Cabinet table, sending millions of dollars to private US companies and sending Manitobans out of the country for essential care.

The PC record on health care is abysmal. And I also want to remind Manitobans that the member opposite who asked the question today is the same person who was advising Heather Stefanson for years to cut health care.

The Speaker: Honourable member's time has expired.

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

Mrs. Cook: Honourable Speaker, there are patients in Westman right now—right now—visiting Brandon Regional Health Centre. They may need emergency general surgery, and they cannot get it at the regional facility in Westman because this failing NDP Health Minister has failed to foresee an entirely preventable situation. Once again, Manitobans are learning that under this NDP government health care is not only not improving, it's actively getting worse.

Will the minister apologize today to the people of Westman for letting them down and apologize to the front-line health-care workers at Brandon Regional Health Centre that she—that they're once again requiring to clean up their mess?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I'll acknowledge that they're almost as good at co-ordinating answering a question with the member opposite as they were at co-ordinating cutting emergency rooms and cutting services and firing health-care workers for seven and a half years.

The member opposite was the person advising the former premier of this province—while she was the Health Minister—to cut the very services she claims to advocate for today. And she's never answered for that. The member opposite was advising Heather Stefanson to cut services across rural Manitoba and she has never answered for that. Why won't she?

Honourable Speaker, on this side we're investing in fixing the damage that she was a part of doing for seven and a half years. We're building more capacity. We're working with our partners including—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Brandon Regional Health Centre On-Call General Surgery Availability

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): To hear that Brandon Regional Health Centre has no general on-call surgery today terrifies me.

We've heard about how violent crime is through the roof under this failed Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), and we pray there are no emergency situations that arise today to make things worse because of this government inaction, no families battling life or death injuries, no officers wounded in the line of duty.

To my fellow MLA, the minister of municipal relations, how has this government allowed this to happen? When was he made aware of this unprecedented situation?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I want to remind the member for Brandon West that under the previous government they cut the very program that was in place to retain and recruit rural doctors, rural surgeons.

On that side of the House, there are members including the Leader of the Opposition and the Health critic who was advising Heather Stefanson to cut the very resources needed to retain and recruit doctors.

On this side of the House, we have worked together to do something that hasn't been done before, and that is to set up training seats for residents in Brandon. We announced that recently. We have training seats for doctors in Brandon right now, and we are training the next generation of surgeons and providers for rural Manitoba.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Balcaen: Brandon is the hub of Westman and the second largest city in our province. And today, citizens are on their own if things come to the dire situation.

This memo, sent out today, advises that if emergency room patients cannot travel to Dauphin; they wait 12 to 24 hours. That is totally unacceptable.

To the minister of municipal relations: We disagree about a lot but share a love for our very fine city.

How has this minister not spoken up about this egregious situation?

MLA Asagwara: The residents deserve care in their community when they need it. Our government takes that very, very seriously. We recognize that a lot of damage was done over seven and a half years, and we're working very hard to repair it.

Almost 60 doctors have been recruited to the Prairie Mountain Health region by our administration in the last year alone. And in the last year, we have also stood up additional training seats, actually the first training seats for medical residents at Brandon.

Work is happening right now to make sure we expand that capacity even further. So we've recruited almost 60 doctors; we're training about 20 new residents, and we're doing the work of making sure that we have hundreds of additional health-care workers on the front lines this year alone.

There's more work to do—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Balcaen: When we talk about wait times, we are talking about real people. Today, we're talking about people's deepest fears in our health-care system, that when they need help, when that time are the darkest and they're on their own, this government's solution to staffing crisis in Brandon is highway medicine.

The people of Brandon East need to hear it from their own MLA: Why has he left them high and dry? Why has he not spoken out about this unacceptable staffing position? Why has he not intervened, and why is this Premier (Mr. Kinew) muzzling him today?

MLA Asagwara: I wonder if the member for Brandon West has ever bothered to talk to the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), who is heckling him during his own question.

That's the same person who closed—who actually—who started the project of decimating health care in Manitoba. He was the former Health minister who said: You know what? You know what we don't need in this province? More health-care workers. You know what we don't need in Manitoba? More emergency rooms. You know what we don't need? The 90 paramedics that were lost across rural Manitoba under his watch.

The member for Brandon West sits on a side of the House full of the architects of the health-care decimation that happened for seven and a half years. It's disgusting that he doesn't bother to have a conversation with any of them.

Don't worry. On this side of the House, we're cleaning up that mess.

* (14:20)

Manitoba Building Trades Manitoba Jobs Agreement

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): This Premier has shown a clear pattern of disrespecting Manitobans with whom he disagrees. We saw that clearly yesterday when he referred to those calling on the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) to resign goofballs, which I think we all know is the more parliamentary term for what he actually wants to call them.

He doesn't respect the right of Manitobans to think for themselves or make their own decisions. He

made that clear this summer when he signed an agreement with union bosses, dictating he'd freeze out open-shop contractors.

Simple question: Does the Premier think that non-unionized workers and tradespeople are also goofballs?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I'd like to thank the opposite member for that very important question.

We are so proud on this side of the House for that Manitoba jobs agreement. And if you—and if members opposite cared about Manitobans and Manitoban jobs, they'd be up as well, you know. But, of course, they're not.

The member opposite has put some false information on the record about this Manitoba jobs agreement. Any qualified contractor can bid on these jobs, union or non-union, large or small. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

Let's all just have a little pause and calm down so that we can actually hear what's being said.

Mr. Guenter: Well, maybe the minister wants to check with the Premier because that's not what he told the folks gathered at the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association breakfast just days ago.

In fact, the Premier actually put Manitobans into groups, which, in his words, he said were unionized Manitobans, then Manitobans and then Canadians. And so that's the typical NDP approach: your rights depend on the group that you belong to.

Honourable Speaker, 80 per cent of Manitobans—of Manitoba's construction sector is non-unionized.

Why is the Premier preventing them—these Manitobans—from working?

MLA Marcelino: Let's try that again, this time a little slower.

Any qualified contractor can bid on these projects, union or non-union, large or small. The only difference is that once on site, everyone plays by the same rules: a single collective agreement that guarantees industry-standard wages, benefits and conditions for all workers.

And finally getting rid of this PC tradition of out-of-province licence plates on these very, very important infrastructure projects for our province, that all Manitoba workers should be doing instead of out-of-province workers.

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

Mr. Guenter: The minister will want to check her facts. I table this release from the Winnipeg Construction Association. Guess who this government failed to consult with and listen to before making this decision to ban non-unionized workers from government work sites? Those who would be most affected.

It isn't one Manitoba when the government is picking winners and losers.

Will the Premier (Mr. Kinew) admit that by dividing Manitobans into groups and then treating them differently, his talk of one Manitoba is a farce?

MLA Marcelino: You know, again, we just want to make it clear on this side of the House how proud we are of the Manitoba jobs agreement. This is so important. This is a game-changing agreement that's going to mean so much for Manitoba workers.

So I would suggest that members on the opposite side get their facts straight and get on team Manitoba.

Chinese Tariffs on Canadian Canola Request for New Markets for Manitoba Producers

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): It feels great to be back in this Chamber, to see all my colleagues, including the Minister of Agriculture, who I address my first question. It's going to be a simple one; I'm just looking for a number.

Since China, our biggest canola customer, has slapped a 75 per cent tariff on Canadian canola, how many new markets for that world-class Manitoba canola has this minister successfully opened up for Manitoba farmers?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): It's my pleasure to entertain the first agriculture question that I had to deal with, and it's my pleasure. Congratulations to the newly appointed critic of Agriculture.

Honourable Speaker, you know what? More importantly than what I've previously said is, let's show our appreciation to the agriculture producers in the province of Manitoba and what they've had to do for the last number of years—an opportunity. Now we're here—we're here as a government to listen to the producers, and we're going to work with the producers, not listen to what the previous government did when they were in power, almost to the point they shut them down, the offices. We opened offices up. And that would be the backdrop.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Narth: That's very concerning, very concerning for farmers in Manitoba. No new markets has been the answer. No new markets by this failed NDP government.

I find that very concerning and a little surprising. Considering that the US has been largely shut out of the Asian market, there's nothing but opportunity for Manitoba to sell our canola to the world.

Is there no one in the government benches that has any sales background? I know there's not a lot of business acumen there or real-world experience, but surely there's got to be somebody—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Narth: Well, how about this, Honourable Speaker—

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Narth: Can the minister at least tell the Chamber, and by extension Manitoba canola producers, in his effort to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me remind the members opposite, back in 2019, China disrupted canola market in Canada to the point of \$2 billion in losses for the agriculture producers in this province. Can you honestly tell me what did the PC party do at that time? They absolutely did nothing. They sat quiet and so—want to lead by example? I question members opposite, what the heck did they do when the canola situation come against them back in 2019?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Narth: Now, of course, Honourable Speaker, we all know neither the minister, nor his colleague, the minister responsible for trade, or even the Premier, none of them have been successful in opening up a single new market to Manitoba farmers.

They've just done what they always do: rather than look for real, sustainable solutions to grow our economy, they use Manitoba tax dollars and throw it at the problem and hope it goes away. They haven't been successful in opening any markets for Manitoba farmers.

So here's the question, Honourable Speaker: Have they even tried?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Our Premier (Mr. Kinew) wrote a letter and contacted the federal government as soon as the tariffs come into effect—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kostyshyn: That was the first request.

Now, let me educate members opposite: during the FPT that we hosted this year in Manitoba, we had numerous conversations with all agriculture ministers across Canada, including the federal agriculture minister.

* (14:30)

And obviously what's being said today in question by members opposite, we had the premier from Saskatchewan go to European countries, to China. Unfortunately—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Unfortunately, the results are nil as we stand here today, as we spoke with the federal agriculture minister, and we will continue to work with the agriculture—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The member's time has expired.

Order, please.

Seems a long time ago that I asked us all to stay a little calmer but, apparently, we've forgotten.

Wait Times for Child-Care Spaces Impact on Parents' Return to Workforce

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, a 2025 Probe Research survey commissioned by the Manitoba Child Care Association confirms that Manitoba families are now waiting 17 months on average for a child-care space. This wait time has increased by two to three months since the NDP has formed government.

People seeking child-care spaces are frustrated for a number of reasons, one reason being it prevents many parents from returning to the workforce. In fact, the same survey shows 52 per cent of respondents delayed going back to work due to child-care unavailability.

What protections is this government putting in place for parents who cannot find child care and therefore cannot return to work?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, and thank you to the member from Tyndall Park for an important question on child care here in Manitoba.

Our government knows that every family in Manitoba deserves access to affordable, high-quality, accessible child care, and that's why we've been making record investments.

It's a fact, Honourable Speaker, that in Manitoba here, we are more than halfway to the way of reaching our committed spaces on child care in partnership with the federal government. Our government has been very successful in negotiating a very lucrative agreement with the federal government to work on expanding capital spaces here in the province.

We know that there's more work to do; we are playing catch-up after years of a government who failed to make—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

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

New Child-Care Spaces Update Request for 2026 Targets

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, the minister's putting false information on the record. This government is not almost halfway there; they are 14 per cent there.

The Honourable Speaker, under the Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Childcare Agreement, in 2021 Manitoba committed to creating 23,000 new child-care spaces by 2025-2026. We are nearing the end of 2025 and this government has only fulfilled 14 per cent of this commitment, as I shared.

Does the government still plan to create 19,592 spots by the end of 2026?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Our government has been making incredible progress on child care. We absolutely admit that there is more work to do, that there are families here in Manitoba that are in-still in need after years of a failed PC government that failed to make any progress and any investments on child care, chose instead to give child-care contracts to their friends and their donors. On this side of the House, we are investing in communities, we're investing in schools, and we are investing in families and kids here in Manitoba.

The fact of the matter is, when it comes to the spaces we have open and the capital projects we have committed to, we are, in fact, halfway to reaching our goal in partnership with the federal government. We are going to keep delivering for Manitobans and we are going to keep delivering for every single child here in Manitoba so they have access again to the high-quality, affordable child care—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Search for Child-Care Spaces Request to Restore Online Registry

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Parents currently have to connect with multiple child-care centres, often all over the place, just to apply for child-care spaces that, sadly, they may never even hear back from. This takes up time, resources and can be incredibly frustrating and overwhelming for any parent.

Will this government help parents in Manitoba by bringing back the online registry that was retired, to better assist parents who are searching for child-care options?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Again, I thank the member opposite for this important opportunity and question as—that we have the chance to talk about child care in Manitoba. And we are making progress on our spaces, Honourable Speaker, but in order to be able to get children into those spaces what we have to do is make sure that we have the early childhood educators to work in those child-care centres and to work in those spaces that we are expanding.

So we have increased the wages of child-care workers here in Manitoba by up to \$5 an hour. These are workers who are largely women. These are workers who are newcomers. We are making a difference in the lives of Manitobans, not just the people that are looking for child care but the people that are working with our children in our early childhood education centres.

We are working on a tuition reimbursement program. We are working on a comprehensive recruitment and retention program so that we have the child care—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ethics Commissioner Report Findings Regarding PC Party Members

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans know that exactly two years ago the former PC government broke the law and violated our constitution.

The independent Ethics Commissioner was clear: Heather Stefanson, Cliff Cullen, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) and the PC House leader violated the will of Manitoban voters after the 2023 election, all while their current leader cheered them on from his Cabinet seat. From top to bottom, there's too much corruption in the PC Party of Manitoba.

Can the minister reveal more about this disturbing abuse of law by the PCs?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you to the member for Seine River for the question.

The ethics report has brought to light disturbing and consistent patterns of corruption within the PC Party. For the first time ever, charges have been laid. Heather Stefanson is charged \$18,000; Cliff Cullen is charged \$12,000; and the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) is charged \$10,000.

And, let's be clear, the pattern of corruption never left. Even when the PCs had a chance to come clean, during his investigation, the commissioner found Heather Stefanson's story wasn't lining up with the facts, the PC's House leader had no credibility and Cliff Cullen's testimony flew in the face of the evidence.

Two years later, they haven't changed. It's clear to all Manitobans there's too much corruption in the PC Party.

The Speaker: The time for question period has expired.

PETITIONS

Removal of Federal Carbon Tax

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The federal government has mandated a consumption-based carbon tax, with the stated goal of financially pressuring Canadians to make decisions to reduce their carbon emissions. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order.

When the Speaker is standing he's supposed to be heard in silence. People are supposed to sit down. I can't hear what the member is saying in his petition, so I would ask us all to either take our conversations to the loge or somewhere else other than the Chamber.

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

(3) Home heating in Manitoba is not a choice or a decision for Manitobans to make; it is a necessity of life, with an average of almost 200 days below 0°C annually; no. 3, home heating in Manitoba is not—sorry;

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

* (14:40)

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, Honourable Speaker, this petition was signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Elm Creek School Gymnasium

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) All Manitoba students deserve access to appropriate physical education facilities, not only as part of their education, but as part of living an active and healthy life.

(2) The current gymnasium at Elm Creek School is insufficient for the needs of the student population. Physical education classes are overcrowded and there is insufficient space for whole-school assemblies and events.

(3) The current gym structure is aging and showing the impact of years of usage. Parents have significant safety concerns of the physical space and the aging electrical systems.

(4) Uneven and heaving floors pose a safety risk for students participating in physical education classes or sports.

(5) The existing ventilation system was designed to meet old standards for a smaller student population and poses serious risks for students.

(6) The current facility is the only option available to students, and should it become inoperable, students at Elm Creek School would be deprived of physical education spaces.

(7) The government has a responsibility to make funds available to replace this aging infrastructure and provide appropriate activity and recreation activities to students in Elm Creek.

We urge the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the government of Manitoba to immediately work with the Prairie Rose School Division to begin the process of replacing the gymnasium facilities at the Elm Creek School in consultation with parents and the community.

This is signed by Colin Penner, Craig Frost, Scott Penner and many, many more Manitobans.

Rural Community Policing Services

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans: Gordon Coutts, Lorette Ferrier [*phonetic*], and Neil Porosky.

Thank you.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

House Business

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), on House Business.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Honourable Speaker, pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on next Thursday of private members' business will be one previously put forward by the honourable member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook). The title of the resolution is School Tax and Education Property Tax Increases.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been announced pursuant to rule 34(8)—I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be

one previously put forward by the honourable member for Roblin. The title of the resolution is School Tax and Education Property Tax Increases.

Back to petitions.

Location of Safe Injection Sites

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Province of Manitoba has filed paperwork with the federal government proposing the establishment of a drug injection site for illegal drugs at 200 Disraeli Fwy. without sufficient public consultation.

(2) The decision to locate the facility at 200 Disraeli was made despite that the site is located in the immediate vicinity of a daycare centre, a high school and multiple community gathering sites, including churches and cultural institutions.

(3) Residents, business owners and community organizations have raised concerns that the location is incompatible with nearby institutions serving thousands of youth and families, and believe it will erode public safety and confidence in the area.

(4) Existing community consultations specifically ignored concerns about public safety and were criticized by community members for being artificial and scripted.

(5) The provincial government has failed to introduce legislation and regulations to control where drug injection sites can be located.

(6) Other provinces are closing drug injection sites and adopting a recovery model, following the expertise of groups such as the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence.

(7) This decision to ignore the experts will leave people suspended in addiction and will not give Manitobans their lives or their loved ones back.

(8) The provincial government has failed to fund and operate any treatment or additional Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinics to break this cycle.

* (14:50)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to cancel drug injection sites in the Point Douglas community,

including the one—the proposed location at 200 Disraeli Fwy.

(2) To urge the provincial government to legislate that no further site will be proposed without community support.

This petition has been signed by many, many, many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Honourable Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Kellie Verwey—(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

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

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

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

(6) Action—immediate action—is required to close gaps in the justice system that allow dangerous criminals to remain free, which puts innocent Manitobans at risk.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to take immediate and decisive action on bail reform to address serious deficits in enforcement by utilizing all available provincial mechanisms to strengthen warrant enforcement, increasing bail supervision and opposing release of offenders, thus ensuring that

repeat violent offenders are held accountable and that public safety is prioritized over leniency; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this petition was signed by Stephen Sutileg [*phonetic*], Doug Williams and Alexandre Lamaux-Tremblay [*phonetic*] and many, many, many other Manitobans.

Location of Safe Injection Sites

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Province of Manitoba has filed paperwork with the federal government proposing the establish of a drug injection site for illegal drugs at 200 Disraeli Fwy. without sufficient public consultation.

(2) The decision to locate the facility at 200 Disraeli was made despite the site is located in the immediate vicinity of a daycare centre, a high school and multiple community gathering sites, including churches and cultural institutions.

(3) Residents, business owners and community organizations have raised concerns that the location is incompatible with nearby institutions serving thousands of youths and family, and believe it will erode public safety and confidence in the area.

(4) Existing community consultations specifically ignored concerns about public safety and were criticized by community members for being artificial and scripted.

(5) The provincial government has failed to introduce legislation and regulations to control where drug injection sites can be located.

(6) Other provinces are closing drug injection sites and adopting a recovery model, following the expertise of 'groots'—groups such as the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence.

(7) This decision to ignore the experts will leave the people—leave people suspended in addiction and will not give Manitobans their lives or their loved ones back.

(8) The provincial government has failed to fund and operate any treatment or additional Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinics to break this cycle.

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

(1) To urge the provincial government to cancel drug injection sites in the Point Douglas community, including the proposed location at 200 Disraeli Fwy.

(2) To urge the provincial government to legislate that no further site will be proposed without community support.

And this has been signed by many, many, many Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

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

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

(1) The Province of Manitoba has filed paperwork with the federal government proposing the establishment of a drug injection site for illegal drugs at 200 Disraeli Fwy. without sufficient public consultation.

(2) The decision to locate the facility at 200 Disraeli was made despite that the site is located in the immediate vicinity of a daycare centre, a high school and multiple community gathering sites, including churches and cultural institutions.

(3) Residents, business owners and community organizations have raised concerns that the location is incompatible with nearby institutions serving thousands of youths and families, and believe it will erode public safety and confidence in the area.

(4) Existing community consultations specifically ignored concerns about public safety and were criticized by community members for being artificial and scripted.

(5) The provincial government has failed to introduce legislation and regulations to control where jug-drug injection sites can be located.

* (15:00)

(6) Other provinces are closing drug injection sites and adopting a recovery model, following the expertise of groups such as the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence.

(7) This decision to ignore the experts will leave people suspended in addiction and will not give Manitobans their lives or their loved ones back.

(8) The provincial government has failed to fund and operate any treatment or additional Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinics to break this cycle.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to cancel drug injection sites in the Point Douglas community, including the proposed location at 200 Disraeli Fwy.

(2) To urge the provincial government to legislate that no future site will be proposed without community support.

And this petition is signed by Blanche Bouchard, Ralph Bruenger, Shaun Finnigan, and many, many other Manitobans.

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

I wish to present the following petition, and the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

This petition is signed by Tosha Hotel, Debbie Spratt, Lori Buhatu [*phonetic*], and many, many more fine Manitobans, honourable Deputy Speaker.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

And, honourable Deputy Speaker, this petition is signed by Rob Doama, Cameron Fingas, Randall Fraser and many other Manitobans.

Funding Crime Cost Mitigation for Small Business

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

* (15:10)

(5) Vandalism, break-ins and other senseless acts cannot be accepted as a cost of doing business for businesses throughout Manitoba, and the provincial government must do more to ease the burdens small

businesses are carrying with its catch-and-release justice system.

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

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

We urge the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many, many, many, many Manitobans.

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

This petition has been signed by Shelley Krause, Kim Ritz and Shelley Eros and many, many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I call on the next presenter, I'll—we're a little out of practice; second day of session.

We are allowed to name three names at the end of a petition, and we are allowed to use the word many twice at the end of our petition.

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Green Valley School Expansion

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

* (15:20)

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of La Vérendrye and other areas around Manitoba are extremely frustrated and concerned

by the provincial government's decision to cancel the school expansion project for Green Valley School in Grunthal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition has been signed by Kitana McDougal, Leona Friesen, Raymond Friesen and many, many other Manitobans.

Provincial Trunk Highway 45

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Upgrading Provincial Trunk Highway 45 will accelerate economic development as it will enhance connectivity, facilitate efficient transportation and promote economic growth in the region.

(2) Economic development will be further enhanced as improved road infrastructure attracts businesses, encourages investment and creates job opportunities.

(3) Roads meeting the Roads and Transportation Association of Canada, RTAC, standards improve both safety and efficiency, as they can handle heavier loads, reducing the number of trips required for goods transportation.

(4) Safer roads further benefit both commuters and commercial vehicles, minimizing accidents and damage.

(5) Upgrading to RTAC standards ensures resilience to challenges caused by climate change, such as thawing and flooding, which negatively impact road conditions.

(6) Efficient transportation networks contribute to Manitoba's economic competitiveness, as upgraded roads support interprovincial and international goods movement, benefiting both trade and commerce.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to take the necessary steps to upgrade Provincial Trunk Highway 45 from Russell to Provincial Trunk Highway 10 to meet RTAC standards.

This petition has been signed by Kim Flintoft, Nikki Bender, Lori Cook and many, many Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

* * *

* (15:30)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hour being 3:30 p.m., in accordance with rule 2(23b), I am interrupting petitions to terminate routine proceedings and immediately proceed to orders of the day, government business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):

On House business? Okay, on House business, honourable Deputy Speaker, can you please call second reading of Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act; followed by Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act—actually, honourable Speaker, I'm going to fix that for one minute. Let's start again.

Can you please call second reading of Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act; followed by Bill 23, The Public Interest Expression Defence Act; followed by Bill 30, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act; followed by Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act; followed by Bill 40, An Act respecting "O Canada" and Other Observances and Land and Treaty Acknowledgements in Schools (Education Administration Act and Public Schools Act Amended).

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, it has been announced that we will be doing second readings of Bill 8, Bill 23, Bill 30, Bill 12 and Bill 5. *[interjection]* Apologies, resuming debate on Bill 40.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 8—The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act

The Deputy Speaker: And so we will start with Bill 8. We will start with the honourable Minister of Justice.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister responsible for Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism (MLA Kennedy), that Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wiebe: Very pleased to rise in the House this afternoon to speak at second reading of Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act. Ultimately, honourable Speaker, safety for all Manitobans is a prime priority for this government. By addressing some of the root causes of crime and focusing on prevention, we have the potential to divert young people away from our criminal justice system.

One of the ways we know that we can do this is by strengthening the guardrails that help keep addictive substances like liquor out of the hands of young people in our province. This bill that's before the House will do just that. It will give the government broad powers to create regulations under The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act specifically designed to protect young people. Specifically, it will enable us to prohibit liquor service licences from being issued in the kinds of businesses that attract minors, such as convenience stores in urban areas.

Under the current regulatory framework, general liquor service licences are issued to businesses such as restaurants and bars, where liquor is consumed, of course, on site. Some convenience stores sell food for consumption in dining areas within their premises, allowing them to hold liquor service licences. However, minors are known to frequent these stores—these convenience stores—which allow them to see adult customers purchasing and consuming liquor.

Bill 8 will allow the government to restrict eligibility for liquor service licences, designating specific kinds of businesses in certain areas as being ineligible for this type of licence. We have all seen young people gathering with friends and teammates at convenience stores in the city, buying chips or candy or a Slurpee. In fact, many convenience stores rely on these kinds of purchases by young people to sustain their businesses.

Our government does not consider this type of business to be compatible with liquor service. By introducing legislation that provides a legal mechanism to restrict liquor service, we will be able to reinforce protections for minors, keeping liquor out of the corner stores in urban areas.

Our government understands that business opportunities can differ between urban and rural settings. For example, a licensed dining room in a rural convenience store may be one of the few establishments that provides liquor service in a community.

So, by creating this regulation-making power, it will allow us to limit liquor licences only in certain areas, and this bill balances the safety of minors with the flexibility that businesses ask for across our diverse province.

I hope that all members of this House will come together to support this bill and I thank you for the time, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

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

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to ask some questions here.

Why not just allow the municipalities to decide where and when alcohol can be served in their communities through zoning and bylaws?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): And thank you to the critic for the question.

It is important to note that we have a regulatory framework that exists through the LGCA here in the province of Manitoba and, of course, that helps us have some uniformity across the province.

However, I will note that this bill does give us the flexibility to work with municipalities, to understand their specific needs and to make sure that those businesses are protected as well.

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): Does this bill apply in rural areas? Can a small-town grocery store that has a Liquor Mart also have a dining room and service area?

Mr. Wiebe: And a big welcome to our newest member of the Legislature, the member for Spruce Woods, and I think she did a great job on her first question. Of course, her first time—opportunity to speak was yesterday. She did a great job, so welcome here and welcome to the team.

The Speaker in the Chair

With regards to her specific question, yes, there is flexibility built into this bill. Of course, that will be handled through the regulatory-making process. We're going to work closely with the LGTA to ensure that we respect and work with communities to make sure that those businesses are protected.

Mrs. Robbins: Why does the province need to restrict or stop licence for something that is fairly ordinary and done in Ontario and Alberta?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, of course, we're not in Alberta or Ontario. In fact, we're in Manitoba where we have a very strong and proud history of using our public regulatory body to ensure that these kinds of products aren't served around minors.

My kids go to the store to get a Slurpee every now and again, and I want to make sure that they're not also accessing—or that folks aren't accessing—liquor in that same establishment. Let's keep them separate. Let's focus on the convenience stores and give businesses the opportunity to grow.

Mrs. Robbins: Are you never going to issue any more licence for these kinds of establishments?

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would just remind the member. I recognize that she's relatively new but all questions and comments need to be addressed through the Chair. You can't specifically ask: are you doing something?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, for the record, Honourable Speaker, I think the member for Spruce Woods (Mrs. Robbins) is doing a great job, so thanks for the question.

Some Honourable Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Wiebe: I believe the question was specific to new licences, so again this doesn't impact any of the existing licences, and in terms of new liquor licence, of course they're being issued all the time in the province and we want to make sure we're working with business. Those businesses that want to serve alcohol in a responsible way, we want to enable them to do that.

* (15:40)

When it comes to convenience stores, we're going to be taking a look at this. We're going to be setting up a regulatory framework, and we know that businesses are eager to work with us to make that happen.

Mrs. Robbins: How is the minister differentiating between these businesses from other kinds of restaurants?

Mr. Wiebe: Again, I think a great question. First of all, the member opposite had asked specifically about urban versus rural Manitoba. There are some differentiation that we're going to be able to make there and make sure that we're bringing the appropriate regulations for rural establishments.

That being said, within the context of an urban setting, a convenience store, you know, something that needs to be defined specifically in the regulations,

we're going to be doing that work. But I think it's pretty clear. If they're selling, you know, penny candy and Slurpees to kids, I would suggest that's not a place we should be serving alcohol.

Mrs. Robbins: It is somewhat elitist that the minister allow a fine-dining restaurant to serve alcohol in a neighbourhood, but not a Chubby Chicken in a gas station that has dining area and a commercial kitchen and washrooms.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I'm not sure I heard a question there specifically, Honourable Speaker. If there was, I ask the member to clarify.

Again, what I'll say is, you know, gas stations should stick to selling gas, convenience stores should stick to selling Slurpees. And businesses that want to apply for a liquor licence, we want to work with them. We want to make sure that they're successful. Folks have heard many times the economic horse pulls the social cart; our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has said that many times. That's going to be our focus, and that's why we're working with business.

Mrs. Robbins: I'd like to know why the minister thinks that the urban children are at more risk than the rural children, as right now, rural children—if you've been outside of Winnipeg you will note that most alcohol facilities, Liquor Marts, are in our convenience stores, grocery stores and pharmacies where children are allowed.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I feel like maybe the member opposite has lost the plot a little bit, and I do appreciate her new-found concern about restricting alcohol sales in those places that minors have access to.

So when it does come to committee time—we're going to have an opportunity to have the public committee—I invite her to be there, make sure she puts on the record very clearly that she doesn't believe that alcohol sales should happen in rural settings where minors can access that.

We're trying to find that nuanced balance, but it sounds like maybe she's taking a hard line when it comes to alcohol sales in her community.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I'm sure the minister is well aware that the majority of liquor in Manitoba is sold through private licensees. Many of those in rural Manitoba are in independently owned stores that have access to everyone, and the convenience is given to where the convenience is needed.

So my question to the minister is: why will he not allow that where it's profitable for the government to run those stores and compete with private enterprise?

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, I think maybe the member opposite's a little confused about this particular piece of legislation because what we're talking about is alcohol sales on site, in a restaurant that is essentially a convenience store, and we're talking about urban areas.

So there is a lot of concern within community. We don't want to see alcohol being served or being promoted to kids; I think this is something we can all agree on. When it comes to working with specific businesses to ensure that they have the ability to, you know, to have a profitable business in—under the regulatory framework, we're happy to work with them and be happy to work with anyone that he would like to connect us with. We're happy to work with them as part of the regulatory process.

The Speaker: If there are no further questions—

Mr. Narth: Just a clarification for the minister since he seems to think I'm confused. I just want to clarify my question that currently, in rural settings where the Province of Manitoba, the government, doesn't deem it profitable to have a store opened and selling liquor, they're not in the business. But yet, in an urban setting, where the population is more dense and it is more profitable, they are interested in being in the business.

So is this a safety issue or a profitability issue for unionized workers in Manitoba?

Mr. Wiebe: To the—you know, I'll take the member opposite's point. I think maybe the question and how he asked it confused me, so I'll take that on myself. I was confused by the nature of the question.

We work with our partners in rural Manitoba. We want to make sure, again, that their businesses are profitable. That's a big part of the work that we do through our regulatory powers at the LGCA. And, of course, we're happy to continue to work with them. This is about protecting kids, so if he's asking whether this is about, you know, some kind of balance sheet or whether it's about protecting kids, it's about protecting kids.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Yes, so there's lots of municipalities that are very, very vast, and they are over the 5,000 threshold, yet any particular town within that municipality is way, way under that threshold. But all the towns added up.

How is it fair to force somebody to drive the 30 or 40 miles to the neighbouring liquor store rather than

allowing one to open in a small town by them if the municipality is over 5,000 people? That's not fair for rural Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I guess we're getting into the B-team and C-team over here because we're now getting questions that clearly, obviously, the member opposite hasn't had the bill briefing, hasn't actually looked at the bill.

First of all, we do not define what is an urban area; that's going to be done in regulation, so I welcome his input in that regard. But we're not talking about new liquor stores here; we're talking about licences for restaurants and service in a convenience store.

So I think he's a bit confused—he can check in with the critics that are assigned to this bill, or I'd be happy to maybe just pull him aside, we can have a chat about it.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, it says municipality for rural areas, it doesn't necessarily say town as a geographical area. So a municipality that is over 5,000 people, even though no single village or community in there is 5,000, they will not be allowed under this legislation to have a liquor store in a community.

Mr. Wiebe: This is not about liquor stores. The member opposite is confused. Proposed legislation will give the government broad powers to create regulations that prohibits specific business types from being licensed for liquor service in certain areas. Concepts like convenience store and urban area will be defined in the regulations. It's nothing to do with municipalities, has nothing to do with the definition of an urban area.

We're working with community and we're working with vendors. We're going to make sure that we work with businesses, as we always do, throughout the province to make sure that folks have access legally and safely to alcohol in our province.

The Speaker: If there are no further questions—the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth).

Mr. Narth: Thank you for the opportunity to ask the minister another question on this specific topic. And my question is, again, the viability and why it's limited to specific stores.

So he had answered that it's about safety, but—yet, it defines the population for discussion. So my question is: If it is about the safety, why has it not been reduced—or why has it been limited by the amount of population?

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, again, I think we're taking a new position once again. Members opposite delayed this bill for months and months and months. They could have taken some time to read it, maybe talk to people in rural Manitoba. I would guarantee that people in rural Manitoba want to protect kids in the same way that people in Winnipeg and Brandon and Thompson and Selkirk want to protect the kids in their communities too.

* (15:50)

Now, what the nuance is, is that within those communities sometimes there are specific situations where there's only one establishment that can provide multiple services. We're going to work with them to make sure that they can provide those multiple services while at the same time protecting the kids in those communities and making sure that those alcohol sales aren't done in a way that puts them at risk.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): So I'm mainly looking for a little bit of clarification because I know there's scenarios in rural Manitoba where a facility like a grocery store would be—or, a small convenience store—would be selling alcohol in their little Liquor Mart. Also, that same gas station and/or convenience store would also have a restaurant attached to it. Would that restaurant then be allowed to sell liquor as well or is there a limitation according to this legislation?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, you know, Honourable Speaker, if you've reached one Manitoban, you've—you know, you've had a successful day maybe, and I think I've finally reached the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth)—Dawson Trail—apologies.

I will say that the exact kind of nuance that he's talking about is what's captured in this legislation. We're going to make sure that we understand within a smaller urban setting or a smaller rural setting there is a chance there there's a business that does multiple functions.

We're going to protect kids—that is the No. 1 goal of this bill—but we're going to do it in a way that works with communities and make sure that we're also respecting the nuance that exists out in rural Manitoba.

We're happy to hear from him at the committee. I'm sure he'll be able to bring some good ideas to that process as well.

The Speaker: The time for questions has ended.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

No one—

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): I rise today to speak against bill—this Bill 8, which amends The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act. I cannot see any real reason for this bill other than to restrict consumer choice, limit free enterprise and undermine businesses in Manitoba at a time when they're already struggling.

Bill 8 reduces choice for Manitoba. It prohibits certain businesses, such as convenience stores, from ever being eligible for liquor-service licences. Consumers should decide where they want to spend their money, not the government.

This comes at the worst possible time. Inflation is high, 'floodflation' is squeezing families, US tariffs are hitting our businesses, and Canada is in a technical recession. Bill 8 makes things worse by limiting competition. Bill 8 tells a business they're not trusted. It creates uncertainty by allowing rules to be changed overnight at the whim of a Cabinet. Businesses cannot thrive when government picks winners and losers.

The NDP say they're worried about liquor sales near schools, but at the same time they just were planning not too long ago to have a government-sanctioned drug-injection site across the street from a high school. That is not consistent policy.

In cities, Liquor Marts are the main source of alcohol; in rural Manitoba, small, private stores and groceries have long sold alcohol responsibly. That system works. Yet the NDP now claim that a corner store in the urban area selling alcohol would somehow be the downfall of society.

This is not about public safety. The reality is the NDP do not want competition for Liquor Marts. Bill 8 shields a government monopoly while pretending to protect communities. Municipalities already have zoning tools to decide where businesses should operate. Bill 8 strips that authority away and hands it to the minister and LGCA. This is unnecessary centralization.

At a time when Manitoba needs more opportunities, more investment and more consumer choice, Bill 8 closes doors instead of opening them. It risks costing jobs, businesses and growth.

Honourable Speaker, Bill 8 does not solve a problem; it restricts choice, discourages businesses and divides Manitobans. It protects Liquor Marts from

competition instead of supporting entrepreneurs. And it treats rural and urban consumers differently without reason. This is a wrong approach at the wrong time.

Manitoba needs opportunity and fairness, not more restrictions. For those reasons, I cannot support Bill 8.

I grow up—I've grown up and I've been in rural Manitoba all my life, and all my life, there has been private liquor stores in my communities. I have never seen an issue that was caused that put children in danger, the same danger that would happen in Winnipeg. It makes no sense to me whatsoever.

I cannot support this bill for the reasonings of the misinformation that it drives to businesses, that the profits aren't there for them, but only for government.

Thank you, honour.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Thank you for the opportunity to rise here today and speak of Bill 8. I do want to congratulate my colleague from Spruce Woods for becoming—well, No. 1, the opportunity to stand today, for first opportunity to speak on a bill, and also to become the new critic for liquor and lotteries. But I appreciate the opportunity to stand here today, too, being the former critic.

Now, Bill 8 here, we're finding is limiting our opportunities in both rural and urban Manitoba for the reasons of new business owners look for different opportunities to capitalize on their businesses. We have many new Canadians that are buying convenience stores and whatnot, and selling liquor could be an option. And yet, the NDP continues to use the leverage of keeping it away from our kids.

As my colleague from Spruce Woods had mentioned, much the same in rural Manitoba for me where I come from, just about every small town has a liquor store in it, just down the street from the high school or the elementary school. So to me, it's a pretty lame reason for having to introduce this legislation when we believe that it'll give consumers more choice, no matter where they are in Manitoba, whether it be urban or rural.

In my little town there of Warren, where I live, we've—the liquor store has moved about three different times over the years, and it's always been—the kids all walk by it every day to get from the elementary school to the high school to jump on the bus. So it was certainly—didn't create any issues there that we're aware of. But that's just how it is in small-town Manitoba.

Now, another concern about this bill, and we're starting to see it now from the passing of Bill 9,

Honourable Speaker, back in the spring with the cannabis bill, is—and my colleague from Interlake-Gimli brought it up there earlier—was the population. Now, I have constituents and business people that want to set up cannabis stores in other areas of Manitoba, but they can't because of the population of the municipality being collectively too great for them to set up in the small, small town within that municipality. So it's concerning that—moving forward with this bill, that we could run into the same type of problems with business owners wanting to set up in small-town and urban places, in Winnipeg, Thompson, Brandon or where it might be.

So it is definitely a concern. That's why we oppose this bill, because those consumer choices—

* (16:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hour being 4 o'clock—4 p.m., I'm interrupting debate in accordance with subrule 2(23). Within two sitting days of the resumption of the fall sitting, the questions for second reading of designated bills must be put.

On this day, the minister moving the second reading motion can speak for a maximum of 10 minutes, followed by up to a 15-minute question period. Critics of recognized parties and independent members may then speak for a maximum of 10 minutes per bill. If such a bill had been previously called for debate, all remaining actions just identified will be dealt with before the questions will be put. The House will not adjourn until second readings are completed.

Accordingly, I will now call for resuming debate on Bill 8, the liquor and gaming and cannabis control amendment act.

Are there any independent members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 8, the liquor and gaming and cannabis control amendment act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Speaker: All those in the House in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Honourable Speaker, a recorded vote.

The Speaker: A recorded vote has been called for. Please call in the members.

* (17:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The one hour for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I am therefore directing the division bells be turned off and the House proceed to the vote.

All—so the question before the House is second reading of Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Ayes

Asagwara, Blashko, Brar, Bushie, Cable, Chen, Compton, Corbett, Cross, Dela Cruz, Devgan, Kennedy, Kinew, Kostyshyn, Lamoureux, Loiselle, Maloway, Marcelino, Moroz, Moses, Moyes, Naylor, Oxenham, Pankratz, Redhead, Sala, Sandhu, Schmidt, Schott, Simard, Smith, Wiebe.

Nays

Balcaen, Byram, Cook, Ewasko, Guenter, Johnson, Khan, King, Lagassé, Narth, Nesbitt, Perchotte, Piwniuk, Robbins, Schuler, Stone, Wharton, Wowchuk.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Ayes 32, Nays 18.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Bill 12—The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act

The Speaker: We will now proceed to second reading of Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act.

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara), that Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act, now be read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Smith: Our government has made housing affordability a top priority to ensure that all Manitobans have a place to call home. Affordable housing helps reduce poverty, build safer communities and support stable families.

The purpose of The Housing and Renewal Corporation Act includes ensuring that there is adequate supply of housing in Manitoba and improves the affordability of housing for tenants with low-to-moderate incomes or with special needs.

The current act does not have a check and balance over the sale or transfer of buildings that have received public funding. Without checks and balances, sales of affordable housing and unaffordable rent increases happened when the previous government sold off social housing. They sell; we build.

The proposed amendment will protect Manitobans and their public investments in affordable housing. It supports our government's priorities to ensure that there is adequate supply of affordable housing Manitoban—in Manitoba and that housing remains affordable.

The recent sale of Lions Place, a seniors non-profit housing complex in Winnipeg, to an Alberta-based for-profit real estate company, raised concerns that future sales or changes of ownership of housing that receive public funds may result in significant rent increases and a loss of social and affordable housing units. The Lions Place sale prompted Manitobans to advocate for the prevention of future sales of publicly funded housing.

So, Honourable Speaker, we listened to Manitobans, and Bill 12 will ensure that an owner of a funded building cannot sell or demolish and—or—a building or use the building for a purpose other than social and affordable housing without the prior written consent of the Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation.

This legislation would apply to all projects that receive at least 15 per cent provincial funding or federal funding under the Social Housing Agreement for the cost of acquisition, rehabilitation, conversion or construction in the form of grants, loans or mortgage

financing and funding agreements entered into for new agreements or expiring or existing agreements after the date law comes into effect, owners, subsequent owners or leases of 21 years or more.

* (17:10)

So this will affect over 150 existing projects with over 5,000 units—rental units. There's—they're expected to be covered by this legislation, so these are all new projects that receive at least 15 per cent of this funding from the Province that will be covered.

Quebec passed similar legislation in 2022 that required non-profit housing organizations to receive approval from the minister before the sale of any asset funded by the Province or federal funding for building acquisition, restoration or renovation.

So, Honourable Speaker, Bill 12 will protect Manitobans by providing a measure of control over the sale or transfer of buildings that have received public funding that will help preserve our social and affordable housing stock over the long term.

I invite all members of this House to support Bill 12, which will protect taxpayers' public investments in affordable housing.

Miigwech, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Each will follow a rotation for questions and the floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you to the minister.

I just want to start off by asking who was consulted when you were working on preparing this bill.

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): So thank you for that question.

So Manitobans were consulted. They were really concerned about the previous government, PC government, selling off Lions Manor. They approached us, asked us to protect taxpayers' money and ensure that any investment 15 per cent or more is protected so that affordable housing stays affordable.

Unlike the previous government who sold off, we will continue to build. We will continue to ensure that taxpayers' money is secured and that we are ensuring that affordable housing stays affordable, unlike the previous government.

Ms. Byram: The minister made reference to having checks and balances included in this bill, and I'm just wondering if she is able to share with us here in the House today—elaborate a little bit more on what those checks and balances might look like.

Ms. Smith: I thank the member for that question.

So if the member was listening to the preamble that I had shared, again, they would have anyone that is trying—that has 15 per cent or more from government funding—provincial funding or federal funding—would have to get permission from one of—Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation to either sell, demolish or, if they wanted to sell, they would have to keep it affordable.

So that's a check that we would ensure that if they sold that, the new owner would have to ensure that that housing stayed affordable. If they demolished and rebuilt, they would have to rebuild the same amount of affordable housing in those units that would be rebuilt.

Ms. Byram: Okay, so in response to that, does the minister really believe that adding red tape, which will also add uncertainty and control, how does this—how will this work and reduce—I guess it'll create a new single, new housing—I'm sorry, I'm not sure where I'm going with that.

Let's start this again: Why should Manitoba families have to pay the price for this government's interference and adding further red tape into this process?

Ms. Smith: Well, actually, Manitobans aren't paying any price. They're paying the price of the former government in what they did when selling off Lions Manor, not investing in affordable housing. We're taking the boards off of Manitoba Housing and investing in actually putting folks into those housing. Unlike previous government, we're listening to Manitobans who want to protect taxpayers' money, ensuring that affordable housing stays affordable.

End Homelessness Winnipeg is in support of this. Non-Profit Housing Association and other sector representatives are in full support of this. They're wondering why this previous failed government is holding up this bill, why they didn't pass it, why they are continuing to be against a bill that is protecting taxpayers' money and keeping affordable units affordable so that Manitobans can get into these homes instead—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): My question for the minister would be, if she and her department have done any analysis on how this would affect investment in the real estate market for affordable housing in our province?

Ms. Smith: So 15 per cent of taxpayers' money that is invested into non-profit social housing—the folks that are investing in non-profit social housing are folks that want to support folks in affordable housing. So I'd ask the members opposite why they are against helping folks get into affordable housing and why they are holding up this bill and why they—why they don't want to protect taxpayers' money.

No one's against this bill except members opposite. Non-profit housing associations and other sectors are in support of this. This is protecting taxpayers' money that's been invested into this sector. Nobody is stopping anyone from selling off, they're just—we're just simply making sure—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: This bill will discourage developers from investing here in Manitoba. They'll need the Province's permission to sell or divest their assets.

Why is this government wanting to meddle in the open real estate market?

Ms. Smith: We are ensuring that taxpayers' money stays with taxpayers. I'm not sure why the members opposite want to sell off affordable housing. I know, when they were in government, they were doing just that. We are taking an opposite approach. We see homelessness on the rise. We are responding to that by supporting and making sure the wrap-around supports are there and protecting non-profit housing, affordable housing.

Unlike members opposite, we are taking a different approach. We are listening to Manitobans, which Manitobans told us that Bill 48 is the way to go, protect taxpayers' money, ensure that non-profit housing stays in the non-profit sector. We are not prohibiting sale, we are saying that they need to come and get permission and—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Narth: On this side of the House we are hearing time and time again by real estate investors that they're reluctant when the government sticks their hands into

their opportunities and options on managing their portfolios.

So my question to the minister is, if we see a decline in private investment into affordable housing, does this Province, the Province of Manitoba under the NDP, plan on investing more of our tax dollars into affordable housing?

Ms. Smith: We actually see more folks coming forward to help support affordable housing. That's why we've increased our tax incentives. So \$8,500 for folks that are building not affordable, market rent, housing; \$13,500 for those that are supporting affordable.

We are investing, we are building, we are supporting. We are taking a different approach. That's why we are protecting affordable housing that is 15 per cent or more investment from the provincial government and from the federal side.

Unlike members opposite who sold off, we're going to continue to build, we're going to continue to support and ensure taxpayers' money that has been invested into housing for affordable units is protected—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: Will housing costs increase because of a lack of investment from developers who don't want to partner with this NDP government?

Ms. Smith: Well, right now we have approximately 152 existing projects, which is about 5,000 housing units that are expected to be covered by this legislation. So this previous failed government is holding up protecting these projects and these units. That's affordable units.

* (17:20)

Unlike the previous government who didn't want to protect affordable housing and wanted to sell it off and made homelessness worse in this province, we're not taking that approach. We're listening to Manitobans who—Manitobans sent us here and said we need to protect taxpayers' money. We need to ensure that there's affordable housing across the province, and we need to make sure that there's affordable rent, unlike members opposite, who we saw rents—

The Speaker: Time is expired.

Mr. Narth: My question for the minister is, if she's able to share with us here today: How much additional

investment is the Province of Manitoba going to make on affordable housing in our province?

The Speaker: The honourable minister of addictions, homeless—let's try that again.

The honourable minister of addictions—no. The honourable—I'm sorry—the honourable Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness.

Ms. Smith: Well, I can tell that member we're making record number of investments, way more than the previous failed government made. We are supporting Manitobans, but more importantly, we're ensuring that investments that Manitobans have made in affordable housing stay in Manitoba.

Lions Manor is a good example. They begged the former government to protect that jewel. They failed to protect that. Seniors saw their rents go up under that failed government. We're not taking that approach. We're going to ensure that affordable rents stay affordable, affordable units stay affordable that are invested by the provincial government, unlike members opposite who turned a blind eye.

The Speaker: If there are no further questions, the House ready for—

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I rise today to speak strongly against Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act. This legislation, introduced by the NDP government, may sound good on paper, but let's be clear. It will do the exact opposite of what Manitobans need here right now, at a time we see families across Manitoba that are struggling to buy groceries and also find affordable homes. When rents are rising and when the housing crisis is at its worst in decades, this bill will make matters worse.

Instead of encouraging investment in affordable housing, it will discourage developers from building. Instead of creating more options for families, it will scare away the very partners that we need. Instead of solutions, it delivers barriers. Bill 12 is bad for Manitoba families. It is bad for investment, and it is bad for the future of housing in our province.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans know the reality. Families in Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson, Portage, Steinbach and every community in between, we are all struggling to afford a home. Young couples are

trying to buy their first house, which are priced out of the market. Seniors on fixed incomes are worried about rising rents. Low-income Manitobans are waiting for social housing. The list gets longer and longer every year.

What Manitobans need right now is more investment, more building, more partnerships that deliver new units. We need developers who are willing to work with government, with non-profits, with communities to add to our housing supply.

But Bill 12 sends the opposite message. It says if you build in Manitoba, if you invest in Manitoba, if you create new housing units in Manitoba, you may not have to go to the—have the freedom to manage your own assets. You will have to go cap in hand to the government for permission to sell, to divest or to move your assets. That, Mr. Speaker—Honourable Speaker, is not a recipe for investment; that is a recipe for developers fleeing our province and discouraging investment.

Let's not pretend otherwise. Developers and investors have choices. They can build in Manitoba or they can take their capital to Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario or anywhere else in Canada. They can choose to invest here or they can choose to invest where governments welcome them, not where governments interfere in their decision making.

Bill 12 tells developers the NDP doesn't trust you. Bill 12 tells investors Manitoba is closed for business. And what happens when developers walk away? What happens when investors say no? The supply of housing shrinks; the cost of housing goes up; the waiting list for affordable housing gets even longer, Honourable Speaker.

This bill doesn't discourage—this bill doesn't just discourage development, it worsens the housing crisis here in our province; it punishes Manitobans looking for that affordable home. Government meddling in this market is not right.

Mr. Speaker, housing markets are complex. They work when government creates—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I just need to remind the member that the correct way to address the Speaker is Honourable Speaker, not Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Byram: I stand corrected, Honourable Speaker.

Housing markets work when government creates stability, predictability and fair rules. They fail when government meddles, when government second guesses, when government inserts itself into decisions best left to partners on the ground. Bill 12 is government meddling at its worst. It requires developers to seek provincial permission to sell their own assets. It creates, again, additional red tape, uncertainty and delay. And in real estate, uncertainty kills investment.

Why would any developer risk partnering with government if the government ultimately controls whether their assets can ever be sold? Why would any builder take on the risk when the government has the final say on what they can and cannot do with their property.

Honourable Speaker, I say this again: this is not a partnership; this is control, and it will backfire. It will impact on families. Let us not forget who pays the price: it's not the developers; it's not the investors; it is the families of Manitobans.

Families that are already facing record inflation, record food costs and record rent increases will see fewer housing units built because of this bill. Families waiting for social housing will wait longer. Families saving for their first-time home will be pushed even further away. Bill 12 takes hope off the table for Manitobans, and in the middle of a housing crisis, it's just unacceptable

The solution—instead of narrowly fixing problems, the NDP has swung a wrecking ball at the entire market, and in the process they will scare off future partners who might otherwise want to invest and bring millions of dollars and hundreds of new units into Manitoba. We cannot solve one mistake by making an even bigger one.

Honourable Speaker, Manitoba families deserve better. They deserve a government that makes it easier to build, not harder. They deserve a government that attracts investment, not one that drives it away. They deserve a government that puts people first, not one that uses legislation to score political points.

Honourable Speaker, Bill 12 is the wrong bill at the wrong time. Again, it discourages investment; it will scare developers away; it will worsen the affordable housing crisis. What Manitoba needs is more homes, more investment, more partnerships and more opportunities for families. What Bill 12 delivers is the opposite: fewer homes, less investment, fewer partnerships and fewer opportunities.

On behalf of the many, many families and on behalf of Manitobans looking for a fair chance at a home, I urge this House to reject Bill 12, because Manitobans deserve better than interference; they deserve better than red tape; they deserve better than higher housing costs. They deserve solutions, and Bill 12 is not the solution. Bill 12 creates bigger problems.

* (17:30)

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: So the question before the House, then, is second reading of Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Speaker: All those in the Chamber in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, can I ask for a recorded vote, please.

The Speaker: A recorded vote has been asked for, please call in the members.

* (18:30)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The one hour provided for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I am therefore directing that the bells be turned off and the House proceed to the vote.

The question before the House is second reading of Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Ayes

Asagwara, Blashko, Brar, Bushie, Cable, Chen, Compton, Corbett, Cross, Dela Cruz, Devgan, Kennedy, Kostyshyn, Lamoureux, Loiselle, Maloway, Marcelino, Moroz, Moses, Moyes, Naylor, Oxenham, Pankratz, Redhead, Sala, Sandhu, Schmidt, Schott, Smith, Wiebe.

Nays

Balcaen, Byram, Cook, Ewasko, Guenter, Johnson, Khan, King, Lagassé, Narth, Nesbitt, Perchotte, Piwniuk, Robbins, Schuler, Stone, Wharton, Wowchuk.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Ayes 30, Nays 18.

The Speaker: I declare the motion is accordingly passed.

Bill 23—The Public Interest Expression Defence Act

The Speaker: We will now call for second reading of Bill 23, The Public Interest Expression Defence Act.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, that Bill 23, The Public Interest Expression Defence Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm very pleased to rise in the House today for second reading on Bill 23, The Public Interest Expression Defence Act.

This bill will establish anti-SLAPP legislation in Manitoba. SLAPP is an acronym, and the acronym stands for strategic lawsuits against public participation. These lawsuits can be used as mechanisms to silence or deter participation in debates of issues of public interest.

A SLAPP lawsuit typically takes the form of a meritless lawsuit brought on by a 'vindividual' or a corporation against an opposing party or critic that is intended to silence or intimidate them, to deplete their resources or simply to stifle public debate.

In addition to news organizations, SLAPPs are commonly brought against citizens who publicly comment on health or environmental violations,

circulate petitions or otherwise engage in public information campaigns, and especially against those who make allegations of sexual misconduct.

Presently, there is no legislation in Manitoba that specifically deals with the treatment of SLAPPs. While the Court of King's Bench rules and provisions in The Court of King's Bench Act could be used to address SLAPPs, there are inherent challenges in relying on these remedies alone.

A Uniform Law Conference of Canada working group noted that the evidence suggests that common law and legal remedies that respond to these abusive lawsuits are not easily obtained or used in practice. The ULCC recommended that the enactment of an anti-SLAPP legislation to prevent improper use of the legal system and to promote the exercise of freedom of expression.

The bill provides that a defendant in a proceeding may bring a motion to dismiss that proceeding on the grounds that it arises from an expression made to the defendant on the matter—on a matter of public interest. If a judge is satisfied that the defendant has sufficiently proven this, the burden would then shift to the plaintiff to prove that the claim shouldn't be dismissed.

To do this, a plaintiff would have to prove that there are grounds to believe that the proceeding has substantial merit, that the moving party has no valid defence and that the harm caused by the expression outweighs the public interest.

Once the motion is brought, no further steps may be taken by any party in the proceeding or in a proceeding that is before an administrative tribunal that relates to the same matter of public interest until a decision on the dismissal motion has been made.

If a proceeding is dismissed under this legislation, a judge may also award the moving party damages to— if the proceeding was commenced in bad faith or if it was for an improper purpose.

* (18:40)

A motion to dismiss the SLAPP suit should be addressed in a timely fashion, and as such, the bill includes restrictions on the length of cross-examinations that may be conducted in these cases.

Ultimately, this bill strikes a balance between protecting legitimate expression and preventing harm, ensuring that legal actions, while with substantial merit, can proceed while discouraging lawsuits intended solely to suppress public discourse. The

proposed legislation is consistent with model legislation that was developed by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, and similar legislation has now been passed in Ontario back in 2015 and in British Columbia in 2019.

This bill will discourage the use of litigation as a means to thwart open discussion and debate on matters of public interest. It will reduce the risk of individuals being inhibited from speaking out on important matters without the looming threat of legal action.

It strengthens democratic discourse, and it protects those who engage in meaningful debate and to those who speak truth to power, acknowledging that public participation is the cornerstone of a healthy and informed society. Fear should never silence voices advocating for transparency, accountability and justice.

I look forward to the support of this House and having this bill passed.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): We know that this legislation will impact many Manitobans. So my question to the minister is, who did he consult with before introducing this legislation?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): It's important to note that this legislation is legislation that is modelled on model legislation that was brought forward by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. This is legislation that was proposed for all provinces to follow and, in fact, has been on the books for quite a while. And, unfortunately, under the previous government, there was no movement.

We're joining other provinces. It's important to get this right and to get this done quickly.

Mr. Balcaen: Can the minister provide some examples of matters of public interest that this bill is addressing

and would be grounds for dismissal of the complaint or the proceeding?

Mr. Wiebe: As I mentioned in my preamble, there's a number of cases where, you know, certain interests have spoken out about environmental or about other public interest issues and then have been hit with these sorts of SLAPP types of lawsuits. That's a big concern, but it's also a major concern for those who are dealing with sexual harassment and other serious allegations.

These are often used by the powerful to silence those critics, and we just think we want to give those folks assurance that their government is standing with them. We're going to make sure that their voices are protected.

Mr. Balcaen: Just wondering if the minister can explain a little bit further—we've heard about the SLAPP process—but whether this bill is relating to liable and slander laws as well.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, this is very specific legislation when we're talking about these types of lawsuits that are ultimately proven frivolous, and I would suggest that on their face they are seen as being frivolous. But right now the tools that we have within our current legal system do not address that sort of frivolous nature at the outset.

What this does is simply shift the burden of proof, or the burden of proving that this is an issue that needs to be dealt with, to the plaintiff and ultimately gives that opportunity for the powerless to, you know, to have their day in court but ultimately their free speech is protected first and foremost.

Mr. Balcaen: My two-part question for the minister on this one is: How does this proposed legislation compare with other Canadian jurisdictions? And what other Canadian jurisdictions presently have this legislation in place?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

There are currently two other provinces that have legislation that is very similar or identical to the legislation that we're bringing forward here. As I mentioned in my preamble, the government of Ontario has had this on the books for a number of years, and then, the province of BC also has this.

So this is something that was proposed by the uniform law commission and we're simply following suit.

Mr. Balcaen: Can the minister cite any situations in Manitoba where a SLAPP was utilized?

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, unfortunately, these types of lawsuits have certainly been a part of the public discourse in many parts of the province. As I said, I think some of the more high-profile ones have been maybe, you know, in the public, and folks understand those when we're talking about having that voice of the community that's being silenced.

It—the cases where I'm very concerned about are the ones of sexual harassment and misconduct. And, to be honest with you, I think we've heard some really difficult stories, over the years, come to this Legislature about how these types of SLAPP lawsuits have been used. And this will certainly give more tools to those voices who are standing up and speaking out.

Mr. Balcaen: Just wondering, again for the Minister of Justice: the minister is confident that this legislation will withstand any potential legal challenges as it's only been introduced in two other provinces. I just wanted to know his confidence level in this.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, we are confident in this legislation, that it will stand up. The Ontario Superior Court released 20 decisions of—on anti-SLAPP motions in 2023. The superior court of British Columbia released five, and the success rate in each province was similar.

Overall, about 56 per cent of anti-SLAPP motions decided in 2023 were successful, thus resulting in the dismissal of the underlying action. Again, these pieces of legislation are based on this Uniform Law Conference of Canada model legislation. We know that Quebec also has similar legislation, although slightly different.

But we know that we're confident in the legislation we're bringing forward here today.

Mr. Balcaen: Again, Minister of Justice: Are there any unintended consequences that could arise out of this legislation once it's implemented?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think it is important for us to get this legislation right. You know, part of this process here in Manitoba is that as we bring pieces of legislation forward—first reading and then, of course, at second reading—we do get the opportunity to listen to the public.

I look forward to the committee hearings that will take place after this stage in the bill process. I think it's important to listen to Manitobans, and that's

certainly what we intend to do to make sure that we do get this legislation right.

Mr. Balcaen: I agree; it's important to listen to Manitobans and listen to the people that are impacted by such legislation. A question to the minister is: Did any concerns get brought up by the individuals that he was consulting with regarding this legislation?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, as I said, Honourable Speaker, we know this is important legislation and it's legislation, quite frankly, that should have been enacted years and years ago. But, of course, under the previous government, there was no action in this regard.

We're playing catch-up here in Manitoba, but that does give us the perspective of what's been done in other provinces and how we can do things better. So it is important to listen.

And now that the opposition has stopped delaying this bill, that we'll actually see it go to committee, I look forward to hearing from Manitobans.

* (18:50)

Mr. Balcaen: I'd just like to ask that question again, because I really didn't get an answer. Talked about our party and what we did with this bill.

But the question was whether or not he had any information brought forward to the minister that would cause any concerns with this bill.

Mr. Wiebe: And, as I said, we're very happy to be bringing this legislation forward and, you know, quite frankly, it's still bewildering to me why exactly the opposition delayed this legislation to even getting to this point.

But I guess shouldn't be surprised because we know, under the previous government, they had an opportunity. This model legislation was presented to them and they had the opportunity to move forward on it and they didn't. And I think it speaks to their values. It speaks to their, you know, their dynamics that their party prioritizes. Maybe the powerful, rather than those who are being affected by the powerful.

We take a different approach, Honourable Speaker. I look forward to bringing this to committee and hearing from Manitobans about it.

Mr. Balcaen: Perhaps third time's a charm, because there's still no answer. Was there any concerns brought forward during the consultations?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the member opposite won't take no for an answer. But what I will say is that he is, again,

rather than seeing the merits of this bill, not giving Manitobans a clear idea of exactly why they oppose it other than this, I guess, ideological bent towards protecting the powerful rather than protecting those who speak to that power.

You know, again, Honourable Speaker, let's listen to Manitobans. We're happy to continue to work with them, but I do know that members opposite should move this bill along finally and get out of the way. Let's get this important piece of legislation passed.

Mr. Balcaen: And, again, that's the ideology coming from this minister and this government, is get out of the way and we'll just ram this through, and that's why we cautiously waited to look at this legislation so that we could review it.

So my question is: Will this legislation slow down proceedings and bog down our administrative tribunal system?

Mr. Wiebe: No, Honourable Speaker, it won't.

You know, this is an important piece of legislation that, in fact, helps to put the resources in the right place, if I can phrase it that way. That is to say that it gives the opportunity for courts to consider serious matters and non-frivolous matters, rather than dealing with these cases that are brought forward in a way that, again, every—you know, most common sense folks looking at this would understand the nature of these types of lawsuits. But right now the courts don't have the tools to dismiss them or to move on. This will give them those tools, and we'll actually end up saving resources.

Mr. Balcaen: And with the great resources available to the government benches, I'm just wondering if there's been any analysis made of how much court time this could potentially save and what that court time could be used for.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I'd be happy to take the conversation offline. If the member opposite wants a second bill briefing we'd be happy to provide that for him. Not a question that I heard the first time around in that bill briefing, but happy to dig into some of the details in terms of specifics.

Again, what we're talking about is making our core processes just more efficient and really reflecting the needs and the interests of communities. So that's what we want to put our resources towards. This legislation will help us get there.

Mr. Balcaen: I'll end with this question because I see that the minister is stumbling and having a very hard

time answering a lot of the questions on his own legislation. So—just wondered what part of this legislation or how we're going to ensure that people that make complaints that are of a serious nature aren't declared vexatious.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, so I heard that the member opposite is done with his questions. I do hope that in his speech he does take the opportunity to explain very clearly to Manitobans why—why anyone, why any party—would stand against this legislation; why, for seven and a half years, they did nothing; they didn't move on this legislation.

I mean, I think I know why. I think most Manitobans know why. But he should clearly articulate because we have seen this bill delayed now until the fall and it is important legislation. We've been asked by survivors, we've been asked by the powerless to stand up and have this kind of legislation.

We're moving forward as a government. We're going to protect those voices. Members opposite need to answer why they didn't protect them when they had the chance.

The Speaker: So the question before the House is second—oh. Okay, let's do that.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I think we should note that many times, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) stated that he wanted me to put on record why this bill was held back, and I'm happy to do that during some of my words today.

So, Honourable Speaker, on Bill 23, we didn't feel that it was right to rush. This NDP government has been continually rushing bills and rushing regulations, and that has only caused confusion and discontent among Manitobans. We've seen it as recently as two weeks ago with regulations regarding hunting, where it had to be revisited again to clarify the errors that were made in this rushed legislation. So we wanted to make sure that we took the time on our side to consult and to talk with the people that really are going to be impacted by this legislation.

When people's rights are involved, governments must take time to consult and review carefully. This is people's individual rights that we're talking about, and that's why we paused: so we could hear from Manitobans and assess how this legislation may work in principle and in practice.

There are also defamation lawsuits currently before the courts, and some of those cases, Honourable Speaker, could potentially fall within the scope of anti-SLAPP legislation. And it would have been reckless to charge ahead without understanding these implications.

We took the time to consult with legal experts on these matters and get their very valued feedback, feedback that oftentimes this Minister of Justice and this NDP government neglect. We took time to review the state of the law and to consult further with other territorial jurisdictions. And now, we're here with Bill 23.

But let me be clear: while this bill is a step forward, it does not fully address the issues it attempts to correct. It offers a starting position, but not a clear solution and certainly not a finish line.

Honourable Speaker, much of the concern around SLAPP suits comes from how organizations respond when problems are raised. And too often, when accountability and transparency are lacking, the public has no choice but to bring these issues forward. We wanted to ensure that we balanced this process with individuals that feel aggrieved and want to bring this forward.

When institutions are mismanaged, when oversight fails and when legitimate concerns are ignored, Manitobans are left with only one recourse, and that's to speak up publicly. And we've heard, over the last two days in session and before that, how much this government dislikes people exercising their freedom of speech.

But we appreciate when people do that. We appreciate when people take the time to talk to us, to consult and to bring their grievances forward. Manitobans lose a critical safeguard if this is not something that they can rely on. Communities lose their ability to shine a light on wrongdoing, on waste or on mismanagement, and the result is less accountability, not more.

* (19:00)

And, again, I know that's what this government is about, less accountability. We're advocates for accountability.

And that's why, Honourable Speaker, anti-SLAPP legislation truly matters. But this is also why Bill 23 feels incomplete. Yes, it acknowledges the problem. Yes, it sets out the framework for dealing with strategic lawsuits against public participation. But it

does not fully answer the question of how to protect Manitobans who are compelled to speak out.

Free expression must be balanced with legitimate rights of individuals to defend their reputations. And I don't think any individual in this Chamber would want their reputation challenged unlawfully. But the balance struck here is not clear enough. It leaves gaps and uncertainties that will inevitably be tested in our courts.

Bill 23 is a beginning, not an end, and certainly not a finish line. Gestures at the principle of protecting free debate, but it does not deliver the certainty that Manitobans deserve. Manitobans need assurances that their right to raise concerns publicly will be defended. They need to know that mismanagement and lack of accountability cannot and ought not be hidden behind expensive lawsuits designed to imitate and to silence.

This bill brings that—or begins this conversation, Honourable Speaker. But it does not end it. The work of protecting free expression, ensuring accountability and respecting legitimate legal rights remains unfinished. And for that reason, Bill 23 is a first step, but we will continue to press for stronger, clearer protections that Manitobans truly need.

So to answer the Minister of Justice's (Mr. Wiebe) question: Why was this bill paused? It was needed. It was important to pause and consult with stakeholders before moving forward to make sure the legislation would work properly for Manitobans. With defamation lawsuits currently before the courts, which may potentially fall within the purview of anti-SLAPP legislation, we believed it was prudent and necessary to carefully review the situation before taking a position on this legislation. We took the needed time that this government did not to assess the state of the law, consider how this type of legislation could impact Manitoba specifically rather than rushing in to act.

After completing that review, we determined that supporting the legislation is the right step forward. Protecting free expression while ensuring legitimate legal claims can be heard is a responsible way to move forward.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 23, The Public Interest Expression Defence Act.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: The motion is accordingly passed.

Bill 30—The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act

The Speaker: We will now move on to Bill 30, second reading, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), that Bill 30, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement des élections et la Loi électorale, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Education and Early-Childhood Learning, seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance, that Bill 30, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

MLA Schmidt: I am pleased to rise in the House today for the second reading of Bill 30, the elections financing amendment act and the elections amendment act. This bill will make amendments to both The Elections Financing Act and The Elections Act to address issues regarding contributions, advertising, voting at returning offices; and strengthening penalties for offences; and knowingly promoting or publishing false and damaging information.

Democracy is incredibly vital in Manitoba and across the country, and at a time when that democracy feels threatened, both from other nations and the growing threat of political violence and the scourge of cyber threats, we must stand firm and protect our elections.

Not only that, we must also hold our own political parties to a higher standard. Ethical campaigning is paramount in a free and fair democracy, and we must actively fight against disinformation and bad faith attacks on candidates and other groups. This will ensure our elections remain based in reality.

And, in fact, new offences are being created that punish impersonation and the publishing of false statements. This includes the banning of so-called deepfakes, which are videos in which the subject is digitally altered to appear as another person, often as

a malicious tool to spread false information. These deepfakes are capable of undermining our elections and public confidence in the democratic process and they have no political—I'm sorry—they have no place in our political campaigns.

This legislation will give voters and party members tools enabling them to hold politicians accountable by requiring parties to establish a code of conduct that includes a complaint procedure for advertising.

This legislation comes in the wake of the 2023 general election here in Manitoba when the opposition party took out ads that were deeply harmful to the families of murder victims, urging Manitobans to stand firm against a landfill search that later brought closure to those same families. When any party, no matter their political stripe, engages in such unethical advertising, there must be a mechanism for their members to hold them accountable. And that's what this code of conduct will do.

We are also making it easier and more accessible for Manitobans to vote by expanding advanced voting options to include returning offices on the Sunday and Monday before an election. We are giving voters the freedom to choose when and where they will vote and a guarantee that they will be able to vote.

This legislation lowers the personal contribution limit from its current value of \$6,000 to \$5,000 to ensure that all Manitobans can participate in the electoral process equally and fairly, and to bring us in line with most other jurisdictions. We are protecting the integrity of our elections, introducing new offence provisions around false statements and impersonations of election officials. These changes protect our election processes, our democracy and our province, which is critical in an age where democracy faces growing threats.

I urge all members to support these changes as it is crucially important at this time to be vigilant and to protect our democracy and our elections, as that will benefit all of us.

I am so pleased to introduce this bill and I'm so pleased to work beside the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe). This is just one of many bills and much work that he has done in this legislative session and over these first two years, and I am pleased to introduce this bill to the House for consideration.

Thank you.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed in the standard rotation. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Floor is now open for questions.

* (19:10)

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): This question is to the Minister of Justice or the minister of education and early childhood development, whoever decides to answer.

Is the \$2,500 maximum auditor fee high enough to cover the costs of an audit of election expenses for a campaign?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Indeed, I think anyone on this side of the House would be happy to stand up and answer questions with regards to this important legislation. Because what it does is it keeps big money out of our politics; it establishes a code of conduct that all parties will have to follow—including the members opposite who ran under one of the most deplorable campaigns in Manitoba history—and it will ultimately fight the disinformation we know is infesting our politics. Anyone on this side of the House is happy to answer these questions because it's time to hold parties to account for their actions.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Does this new administrative scheme for monitoring false statements not put the election commission in a difficult position that risks their neutrality? Would it not be better for other authorities to enforce these kinds of laws, such as the courts, through civil lawsuits?

Mr. Wiebe: You know, Honourable Speaker, it is rich that the party opposite would now all of a sudden talk about disinformation as if they had no part in some of the deplorable text messages and information that was spread in the last election campaign. We know that this is going to be more and more of an issue within our campaigns. We've listened to the elections commissioner, we've listened to Elections Manitoba. We are acting based on their recommendations, on—based on consultations with them.

We want to make sure our legislation in Manitoba is the strongest it can be. Members opposite: just, you know, say sorry and move on.

Mr. Balcaen: Just wondering if the minister is concerned that some of these provisions might put a chill

on freedom of speech and expression, particularly the way that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has been shutting down that freedom of expression.

Mr. Wiebe: Honourable Speaker, we're protecting free speech, and that's what this bill is all about. It's ensuring that political parties are going to be held to account. We know that, in the last campaign, members opposite ran some really disgusting ads and had some really disgusting positions.

Now, that maybe is exactly where every member on opposite stood in terms of their position on those issues. However, without the code of conduct that needs to be established under this legislation, we have no idea; we don't know. You know, members opposite say, it wasn't me, it wasn't me.

Well, members have to be held to account, and this is one of the most important tools to do that. We're going to have a code of conduct. Every member opposite needs to sign on to it and we're going to understand if they stand with those kind of deplorable acts.

Mr. Guenter: Well, this is very concerning, Honourable Speaker. These are serious questions, because the government, this NDP government, has supported—a—an NDP Premier supported the Minister of Families, the MLA for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine), who, just in recent days put out some very appalling and repugnant stuff and—in the light of an assassination of a public figure, and the Premier somehow thinks that that's okay, this caucus somehow thinks that that's okay.

I think that's hugely concerning when these people, this government, with that kind of moral standard, are setting the laws—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guenter: —and they're defining what's acceptable and what's not. So these are—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, fascinating, Honourable Speaker. We talk about rules and regulations oversight and accountability, and the member opposite goes completely off the deep end.

And he wants to attack various members in the government. And I'll echo the First Minister's comments: I'm right here, you know. Direct the questions at me. Let's keep it about this bill.

What this bill is just simply ask for that kind of accountability and, you know, enforces to that: all members opposite have to stand up and say that they stand with those ads that spoke against missing and murdered Indigenous women, that talked about standing firm, talked about not bringing a serial killer to justice. Well, Honourable Speaker, they need to be accountable for that; this legislation will help ensure that they are.

Mr. Balcaen: So my question is, does the elections commissioner have sufficient resources and staff to be able to enforce these new rules and new duties being created by this legislation? And will this government provide that proper funding?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, Honourable Speaker, the member opposite knows that Elections Manitoba is funded through a non-partisan committee of this House specifically designed to take politics out of these kinds of conversations. And this legislation is drafted based on the advice given to us by the Chief Electoral Officer. And so we are moving and we are taking action to make sure that that is what's happening here.

But again, it's curious that all of a sudden members opposite are all up in arms. In fact, they're willing to delay this bill rather than moving it forward. I would say most Manitobans understand the threat of disinformation in election campaigns—you know, why aren't members opposite willing to simply support this bill and act? Well, again, I think it's clear, based on their actions in the last election campaign.

Mr. Guenter: We're going to try to get some answers out of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe). These are serious questions.

How will the neutrality of the election commission be ensured when they are determining what statements are false or accurate?

Mr. Wiebe: Wow, I think that's a new low, honestly, Honourable Speaker, questioning Elections Manitoba and the non-partisan nature in which they operate in our province. We are not the United States of America. We do not have an electoral system that's in question or can be questioned because people know that our electoral officer is someone who does their job with the highest integrity and professionalism.

I'm dumbfounded, Honourable Speaker, why members opposite would question whether the Chief Electoral Officer and their focus on keeping our elections safe and secure, why they should be questioned.

Mr. Balcaen: Some of the information—this bill seems a little bit self-serving for this government, particularly when it comes to donations.

So does the federal government and other provinces allow testamentary instruments or documents from deceased states to allow donations to political parties?

Mr. Wiebe: Honourable Speaker, what this is—this is a bill that keeps big money out of politics. And of course, we know, under the previous government—Brian Pallister, Heather Stefanson—well, they had a lot of money and they knew a lot of people with a lot of money, and so they just went to their rich friends and said, we want, you know, we want you to bankroll our campaigns.

We do it a little differently. You know, I know members get small donations and—small donations from regular Manitobans. That's what this is about, is making sure that we keep those contribution limits in check and that we ensure that average Manitobans have as much of a voice as those wealthy donors that bankroll certain members opposite.

The Speaker: No further questions? Then the question before the House—

Debate

The Speaker: Floor's open for debate. I really am in a hurry.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I'm glad to have the opportunity to have some debate and some words put on the record here regarding Bill 30.

It's a pleasure to put a few words on the record regarding The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act.

We've had the opportunity to review this bill over the summer and identify where there are things that we would fully support and there are some clauses that could be strengthened and improved. Although we generally support most of the measures in the bill, there are a few that would question whether the government has gotten this right.

What we see in this bill and what we like and is based on recommendations made by the elections commission includes expanding opportunities and locations for voters to participate, and that's a welcome change and will help attract voters.

* (19:20)

Another good change recommended by the elections commissioner is the petition for registering a potential

party must be signed by people who appear on the register of voters instead of people who voted in the previous election.

We also support the increase to the auditor's fee—allowed to move to \$2,500—and for all of the auditor fees to now be indexed to inflation.

The limit on a loan made by a person or an organization other than a financial institution, registered party or constituency association is increased from \$3,000 to \$5,000. This seems like a reasonable change to accommodate rising costs and inflation.

The annual reporting deadline for constituency associations is extended from January 31 to March 31, and this appears to follow the correct practice—or, sorry, the current practice of elections commission and gives volunteers doing this work more time to file their paperwork. This just makes sense.

To update the register of voters, the CEO may enter into an agreement with any person or body the CEO considers to be a source of reasonable—or, reliable information. This also seems to make sense as a way for the elections commission to efficiently update the voters list with accurate information.

Advanced voting at returning offices is extended to include the Sunday and Monday before the election day. We fully support more opportunities for Manitobans to vote at their convenience, and hopefully, this will help improve voter turnout.

The government, however, will need to make sure that Elections Manitoba is able to hire enough staff and has the right equipment to keep all of the voting stations open and operating fully during the election period.

One measure that we do not support and one that is—of reasons we held this bill over is the change to allow a contribution by the way of a testamentary disposition to be made. It says this act will be allowed if the contribution meets the other requirements of this act. I would invite the minister to explain a bit about what those other requirements are and how that will work, and he can certainly do that when this bill comes to committee.

But why we see this as problematic is that people should not be able to support a political party after death. What this change means is that someone, through a testamentary contribution, could influence the results of an election occurring long after their death. This just seems fundamentally wrong; elections

and governance should be primarily concerned with voters and the living.

We are also concerned that this bill is ending the indexation to inflation of the contribution limits. The contribution limit is no longer indexed to inflation and is reset to \$5,000. We will want to amend that to ensure, similar to other areas, that we are indexing to inflation.

Other changes that we support include that, on election day, a voter may vote at any returning office in the province; a late filing fee must be paid within 30 days; the term of office for the next CEO is set at 10 years and may be renewed; a term may be extended for up to 12 months if necessary due to a general election.

However, we believe that sections of the code of conduct in the investigation body and mechanism need some improvements to strengthen it, and we hope to bring forward some friendly amendments at committee to strengthen that section.

Right now, it says a registered party is required to establish a code of conduct that includes a complaint procedure for advertising done by the party or by one of its constituency associations, candidates or leadership consultants.

We question whether the NDP or any political party should be investigating itself. We think it would be more appropriate for the elections commission to be the investigative body or another third party that is neutral and objective.

So we think we can bring forward some friendly amendments that will make this bill stronger, and we hope the minister will consider them seriously. We also support the new offence provisions relating to the publishing of false statements and impersonations are added, and that administrative penalty scheme is included to enforce compliance with the new provisions.

In this day of AI and deepfakes, I think it's important that we update our legislation to address concerns in this area and that an independent, objective third party be asked to monitor and enforce these laws. However, we need to make sure that this is done fairly and that it does not put a chill on freedom of speech and legitimate political speech and differences of opinion.

For other changes in the act—sorry—the other change in the act is increasing the maximum penalty for serious offences. We do not see any issue with this and take the elections commission recommendations that it is needed.

Further, I want to say that it is important that changes to The Elections Act and elections financing legislation be fully reviewed by the public and that there is some bipartisan agreement on any changes.

So I would encourage the minister to take that approach to his Elections Act changes and that he should be seeking all-party support, including the Liberal Party, represented by the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux), for those changes.

And that once the bill goes through committee and we have had the opportunity for the public to have their say, that the minister considers friendly amendments that will strengthen the bill and ensure that this act passes unanimously by this Assembly.

It's important, again, that we make sure that this bill is brought forward to committee and that Manitobans have their say on this. This is an important part of our legislative process, and it is too important to get it wrong. This is how we all get elected into this Chamber, and making changes to this act and to the contributions to each one of us is extremely important, and we want to make sure that we get it right.

Having that open consultation with the public and having our electorate—our voters come in and have their say on this will be incredibly important piece to make sure that we keep the trust of Manitobans, a trust that has slowly been slipping away under this NDP government. We want to make sure that individuals come forward, that they want to vote, that they do not ruin their vote or protest vote because of the lack of trust that they have in our system.

It's important to make sure that this is backed up by proper—sorry—proper legislation and strong and timely legislation. And, again, Honourable Speaker, that's why we took the time this summer to seriously look at this act, to take a look at it from start to finish and all of the vast changes that have been brought forward by this minister; some, of course, we absolutely agree with and some not so much. But we will work towards that, and I think working together is the only solution on this, including our independent member, including the NDP, the PC and our Liberal member from Tyndall Park.

When we all come together and have an agreement that we can all work towards, that we can all work together, it only benefits Manitobans and those people that put us here. It's their responsibility to put

us here, but it's ultimately our responsibility to form those laws and make sure that we continue to serve Manitobans with that respect.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: So the question before the House is bill—second reading of Bill 30, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: The motion is accordingly passed.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 40—An Act respecting "O Canada" and Other Observances and Land and Treaty Acknowledgements in Schools (Education Administration Act and Public Schools Act Amended)

The Speaker: Now we will resume debate on second reading of Bill 40, An Act respecting "O Canada" and Other Observances and Land and Treaty Acknowledgements in Schools (Education Administration Act and Public Schools Act Amended).

As there are no speakers on the bill, the question before the House is second reading of Bill 40.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

* (19:30)

The Speaker: Agreed and—

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: Oh, I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Speaker: All those in the House in favour of the bill, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Speaker: I do believe the Ayes have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Recorded vote, please.

The Speaker: A recorded vote has been called. Please call in the members.

* (20:10)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The question before the House is—where is the question before the House?

Question before the House is second reading of Bill 40, An Act respecting "O Canada" and Other Observances and Land and Treaty Acknowledgements in Schools (Education Administration Act and Public Schools Act Amended)

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Ayes

Asagwara, Balcaen, Blashko, Brar, Bushie, Byram, Cable, Chen, Compton, Cook, Corbett, Cross, Dela Cruz, Devgan, Ewasko, Guenter, Hiebert, Johnson, Kennedy, Khan, King, Kostyshyn, Lagassé, Loiselle, Maloway, Marcelino, Moroz, Moses, Moyes, Narth, Naylor, Nesbitt, Oxenham, Pankratz, Perchotte, Redhead, Robbins, Sala, Sandhu, Schmidt, Schott, Schuler, Smith, Stone, Wiebe.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Ayes 45, Nays 0.

The Speaker: I declare the vote—the motion accordingly passed.

The hour being past 5 o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 2, 2025

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