



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**

**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report  
(Hansard)**

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



**Vol. LXXIX No. 69 - 1:30 p.m., Monday, October 6, 2025**

ISSN 0542-5492

**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Third Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
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

Monday, October 6, 2025

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

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

Please be seated.

**Speaker's Statement**

**The Speaker:** Prior to routine proceedings I have a couple of statements I want to make, a couple things that need to be addressed, the first of which is that while we're in this Chamber the use of cellphones for talking on the phone is prohibited, and that applies to each and every one of us in here. So I've noticed lately that several members have been using their phones. That is against the rules, so it needs to stop.

The other thing that is somewhat concerning is we noticed we had a lot of votes going on. Pages have to do their job during the votes. They have to be able to hear. We have to be able to hear, so I advise all members to please not be speaking while the pages are trying to conduct their votes.

Thank you.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS****INTRODUCTION OF BILLS****Bill 49—The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (2)**

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), that Bill 49, The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (2), be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Wiebe:** Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to present The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (2) to the House today.

This bill will preserve in legislation MPI's current registered owner insurance model, one that has delivered affordable rates to Manitobans for many years. It's based on the principles of public insurance, which include universally available insurance, a simple rating system that encourages road safety and affordability.

This act will help to ensure that MPI remains stable, affordable and focused on serving Manitobans, with a basic insurance model that the majority of Manitobans support. It's part of the work to put MPI back on track. By keeping MPI public and protecting the registered owner model, we are ensuring stable, affordable insurance for families now and for many years to come.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

### **Ethics Report—Caretaker Convention Breach Request for Former Premier's Testimony**

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** Two years ago, Manitobans voted for change. They voted for a government that has a plan to fix health care, to reopen emergency rooms and hire more staff. They voted for a government that is making their life more affordable by cutting the gas tax and freezing hydro rates. They voted for a government that is making our streets safer with more police and a real plan to end chronic homelessness.

Manitobans also voted to reject division. They voted against attacks on trans people and kids in our community, attacks the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) led. They voted against attacks on the families of murder victims. And they voted against a party that tried to pit Manitobans against each other.

What Manitobans did not know was how little the former PC government, led by Heather Stefanson, cared about what Manitobans voted for. When politicians lose an election, they lose the moral and legal authority to govern during that handover period.

But Stefanson and her colleagues—Cliff Cullen, the MLA for Red River North and others—didn't care that they lost the election. They didn't care about the morality of their actions or the law.

Two years ago today, Honourable Speaker, October 6 of 2023, Stefanson and her ministers tried to push through the approval of the Sio Silica mine. They didn't have the legal authority to do it but they tried anyway; they ignored those who told them it was wrong and attempted to force it through.

But our government said no. We knew that Stefanson and her PC Party had lost the election and did not have the right to make the decision for this mine for Manitobans. It was a shameful day for our province to see how a former premier can debase herself, her government and her party in seeking to push this through.

But the current leader of the PC Party is still trying to hide the shameful series of actions from Manitobans. They are using every procedural tool to block debate on how their colleagues, ones who sit in this Chamber right now, broke the law and broke the trust of Manitobans.

Every day since the return of the Legislature, they have put up procedural roadblocks to debating the

ethics report that details the wrongdoing of the PC Party, that shows that former premier Heather Stefanson blocked the Ethics Commissioner from finding out the truth, the report that shows that Cliff Cullen was breaking the law, the report that shows that the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) not only broke the law but covered up for his colleagues along the way. And that member still sits in this PC caucus, someone they are proud to sit next to.

We still have unanswered questions about the depth of the corruption that is within the PC Party, and the MLA for Fort Whyte wants to make sure that no Manitoban gets the answers that they are entitled to.

Manitobans deserve to know what benefit Heather Stefanson or any other friends or dependants stood to gain from illegally approving the Sio Silica mine. Manitobans deserve to know why she and all of her colleagues concealed the truth to cover up this wrongdoing. Manitobans deserve to know the answers to these questions because it is a sacred public trust to hold office in our province and it should never be abused for private gain.

The current leader of the PC Party is blocking this Legislature from asking those questions. We know he is not interested in hearing the answers; they might embarrass him or cause him discomfort. The answers might make him rethink why he accepted thousands of dollars in money from Heather Stefanson to fund his own leadership campaign.

\* (13:40)

But it's Manitobans that deserve these answers, Honourable Speaker. And that is why we today are asking for Heather Stefanson to actually speak on the record, to answer the questions Manitobans have about this illegal attempt to force an approval of a sand mine.

We know this Legislature has the authority to call witnesses before it. If the current Leader of the PC Party is really not trying to block answers from Manitobans, will he support our call?

Honourable Speaker, I am seeking leave to call Heather Stefanson to testify as a witness before this House on October 16 at 1:30 p.m. from the bar to give evidence regarding why her government tried to force through an illegal silica sand mine.

### **Speaker's Statement**

**The Speaker:** Before proceeding any further, I have a statement regarding the leave request from the

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

With the unanimous consent of all members of this House, does have the authority to modify or ignore rules and practices of the Assembly. However, this House does not have the authority to waive or set aside provisions contained in statutes of the Province of Manitoba.

Regarding investigations of ethics complaint made by one member about another member's alleged behaviour, section 44(5) of The Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) Act states, and I quote: "The Assembly and its committees must not inquire into a matter that has been referred to the commissioner."

Summoning this individual to appear before the House to discuss the matter referenced in the leave request would, in fact, constitute a further inquiry into a matter that was referred to the Ethics Commissioner and has been subject of a report currently awaiting consideration by this House.

Further, while section 34 of The Legislative Assembly Act does empower the Assembly to command and compel the attendance of persons to appear before the House or a committee, any such request to summon an individual should be made through the passage of a resolution of the Assembly.

Accordingly, I am ruling that the current leave request is out of order and may not proceed.

Thank you.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

*(Continued)*

### Ethics Report—Caretaker Convention Breach Request for Former Premier's Testimony

*(Continued)*

**The Speaker:** Okay. Back to—no response to—the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Happy Monday, and hopefully you and everyone else had a great weekend, Honourable Speaker.

And to those that have joined us here today in the gallery, it's sort of interesting that the Minister of Education takes her time in a ministerial statement to address something other than—you guessed it—education, Honourable Speaker. It is shameful.

This is exactly what has happened now with this NDP Kinew government. We are seeing ministers on a day-to-day basis get out of their own lanes, and

they're trying to reinvent some kind of wheel, Honourable Speaker.

I mean, the Minister of Education, Honourable Speaker, in her ministerial statement could've stood up today and actually talked about world teachers day, which was yesterday, October 5.

So to those teachers, educators out there, happy world teachers day, yet again belated, on behalf of the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt). She could've used that time.

You know, Honourable Speaker, as an—as a teacher myself, it was time to make sure that we put that stamp out there and thank the teachers and the staff and everybody involved in the education world, you know, a happy 2025-2026. And as we said that, the minister is so embarrassed, followed by her Premier (Mr. Kinew), that they wouldn't even clap when our side of the Chamber clapped for world teachers day, which was yesterday, October 5—one more poor example of how divisive and toxic the NDP side of the House absolutely are.

It's disgusting. You'd think that the Minister of Education, in a ministerial statement, would've possibly stood up and talked about some of her announcements that she's done recently from the Department of Education.

Well, it is a teachable moment, Honourable Speaker. You know, the nice thing is that of those 22-ish projects that the minister stood up, patted herself on the back, two thirds of them were promised and funded by the former PC government.

So whether that's putting some, you know, tar—much needed—*[interjection]*

Oh, and so the Justice Minister, I guess he's going to get up soon, Honourable Speaker, because he wants to say a few words—but some infrastructure improvements that need to be done to our educational facilities, which this Education Minister, along with her team and the Premier, won't bother doing because they only like cutting ribbons and something relatively shiny.

Well, over the last couple years, we've seen no announcements in regards to those types of things, Honourable Speaker. Matter of fact, the minister for environment stood there—and he's busily heckling me. I guess he's going to get up and talk right away considering the now—the most recent Education Minister was a former environment and parks minister, so I'm not sure who's failing where—whether it's the new

environment, parks minister or now the new Education Minister.

Well, we know, Honourable Speaker, that this is the NDP in action. When faced with the crumbling polling data, they want to try to rewind time. They want to try to reflect, deflect and make some kind of arguments and reasoning to distract from the truth: how much they're failing in education, crime, affordability and health care. It's shameful.

Well, obviously, so much for their tag line, one Manitoba, Honourable Speaker. The NDP's plan, obviously, from today and the next few ministerial statements, are divide, divide, divide.

Thank you for your time, the ability to respond to the ministerial statement.

**The Speaker:** Further ministerial statements?

**Ethics Report—Caretaker Convention Breach  
Member for Interlake-Gimli Statement**

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families):** Today, the PC House leader is playing political games at the direction of his boss, the Opposition Leader for the PCs. He is hiding himself and his friends from accountability by refusing to allow the ethics report to be debated on the Chamber floor.

Earlier this year, the ethics report revealed how the PC House leader helped former PC premier Heather Stefanson, former deputy premier Cliff Cullen and the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) in their plan to ram through the Sio Silica project after Manitobans had already voted them out of office.

He did this—they did this—knowing full well the PCs no longer had the consent of the good people of Manitoba. The PCs and the House leader did this knowing they were breaking both the spirit and the letter of our laws and violating the fundamental principles of our Constitution.

And the PC House leader was there every step of the way. He was there through it all: backroom meetings, secret phone calls and instructions given to civil servants to search for options to get around Manitoba laws.

\* (13:50)

Manitobans put their trust in the PC House leader when he was named Minister of Agriculture by the Stefanson government. He swore an oath to uphold the responsibilities and privileges of his office. He promised to work for the public good and not the private interests of his friends.

The PC House leader knows he failed to uphold his oath of office and his duties to Manitobans. He helped his PC friends look for loopholes. He looked for ways that his friends could corrupt our system. He advised them on how to avoid accountability, not uphold integrity. He chose loyalty to his friends over public duty.

And today, by blocking debate on the ethics report, he's making the exact same choice again.

Instead of coming clean, the PC House leader refuses to allow this House to examine the report. He tries to cover up the unethical and corrupt conduct of his friends and colleagues in the PC Party of Manitoba.

Two years later, he still isn't working on behalf of Manitobans. Instead he is working on behalf of Heather Stefanson, Cliff Cullen, the member for Red River North, the current PC Leader and himself. He's working to protect all of their interests, not the interests of Manitobans.

We know the PC House leader has the power to support debate on the ethics report today. He could finally come clean and give Manitobans the answers they've been asking for.

This is not about one project or one decision: it is a pattern of corruption that runs through the PC Party of Manitoba, from top to bottom, from Cabinet ministers to caucus members, from the premier's office to the House leader's chair. It is about a government that thought the rules didn't apply to them, that treated public office as a tool for private gain.

Every day the PC House leader refuses to debate, the betrayal deepens. Every day that he silences discussion, he confirms what Manitobans already know: this was not an isolated lapse in judgment, but a system failure of ethics and accountability.

The PC leader has the power today to have this report be brought before the Legislature. He can debate, open the record and finally give Manitobans the answers they deserve.

So the question is simple: I—will the PC House leader permit debate on the Ethics Commissioner's report into the conduct of the PC government and his friends? Will he finally come clean and tell Manitobans the truth about what happened and his role specifically? Or will he continue to choose to protect his friends, conceal the facts and cover up the corruption in the PC Party of Manitoba?

Because this is more than one MLA's reputation; it's about the integrity of our democracy. It's about

whether or not our laws and Constitution mean anything to the PC Party.

And Manitobans are watching.

Miigwech.

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** We want—what hypocrisy we can hear from the NDP on that side of the bench today. It's unbelievable, but it is very typical of this NDP government when faced with crumbling polling numbers, Honourable Speaker. We can talk about corrupt, disrespectful NDP government—and I'm going to talk about that. When faced with the consequences for many, many failures, this government should not stand in glass houses and throw stones.

So much for one Manitoba. The NDP plan is to divide, divide, divide. They divide Manitobans on geography, by culture, by identity. They pick winners and losers with every decision, Honourable Speaker. They pit every Manitoban against their friends, family, when they put a thumb on the scale for the awarding different projects and tendering. It should surprise no one that such a divisive leader can only lead by division.

And it is very unbecoming that Manitobans see through this. It's why they are failing. This NDP government is failing, Honourable Speaker, and let's shed a little bit of light on some of these failures.

The failing Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), who stood at an event and kicked an interpreter off the stage because the spotlight was not on her, Honourable Speaker. It's no wonder she wants to try to distract and deflect.

The failed Minister of Families, responsible for accessibility, ejected an interpreter, the very people that she is supposed to stand and represent, Honourable Speaker. It's no wonder she wants to try to deflect and distract.

The minister had no problem with her staff referring to sign language as, quote, frantic hand movements. I have a FIPPA that shows there was no correspondence, there was no discipline, no consequence for such action that this Minister of Families had. Of course there wasn't—it's no wonder, again, based on that, that she wants to try to deflect and distract, Honourable Speaker.

The minister, when confronted with her hot mic moment, the minister blocked an entire Indigenous news agency. And again, it's no wonder she wants to try to distract and deflect.

The Minister of Families, again when she finally apologized to the Deaf community, does this via over the radio. It's no wonder she wants to try to deflect and distract, Honourable Speaker.

It's the same minister who has had multiple groups from opposite ends of the political spectrum call for her removal from the Cabinet, calling for her resignation. And, again, it's no wonder this minister stands here today wanting to try to deflect and distract.

This is the same Minister of Families who allowed Myah-Lee Gratton's call to go to her CFS caseworker begging to be removed, or moved, from a dangerous situation, to have that call only go to voicemail, and that call—there was tragic consequences to that. It's no wonder that this minister stands wanting to try to deflect and distract again.

Honourable Speaker, we have an opportunity to talk about the NDP and how it's dividing Manitobans. We're calling for unity, to allow all Manitoba businesses here to prosper. Don't let the failed Minister of Families distract.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order.

#### **Ethics Report—Caretaker Convention Breach Request for Former Deputy Premier's Testimony**

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** This spring, the Ethics Commissioner found that former deputy premier Cliff Cullen broke the law and violated our constitution by trying to force through the Sio Silica project along with former premier Heather Stefanson, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) and the PC House leader.

This violation of our constitution goes against the very fabric of our democracy, which is built on the premise that when you vote, your vote means something. On this side of the House, Honourable Speaker, we believe that premise is worth speaking on and protecting. Manitobans believe the same.

When Manitobans went to the voting booths in October 2023, they voted for a compassionate and inclusive government. They voted for a government that had a plan to improve health care, a plan to keep people safe, a plan to make grocery prices and gas prices cheaper.

When the people of Manitoba vote, their voice should be heard and the actions of the losing party

must reflect this. During the handover period, the losing party must honour the people's vote.

But that vote was not honoured by Cliff Cullen. That vote was not honoured by Heather Stefanson. That vote was not honoured by the MLA for Red River North, who remains in that PC caucus.

\* (14:00)

Instead of listening to Manitobans, Cliff Cullen tried to approve a project that Manitobans did not vote for. Instead of listening to Manitobans, he thought he should just do what he thinks is best, ignoring the law, ignoring the constitution and ignoring Manitobans.

But we wouldn't let them do that, Honourable Speaker. We wouldn't let them get away with it. We knew that this corrupt act couldn't go ahead because that failed government had lost the election. Manitobans had spoken against them and spoken against their corrupt plans.

It was, and still is, shocking to hear about how Cliff Cullen and the PC Party tried to bully Manitobans by pushing this project through illegally. And who knows? Who knows, Honourable Speaker, on that side of the House, who is advising Heather Stefanson to break the law. And it is equally shocking to see the Leader of the PC Party now trying to block debate on this issue.

Honourable Speaker, what are they so afraid of? What are they trying to protect Cliff Cullen from? The ethics report names him 276 times and recommends a fine of \$12,000. It says that he broke the law and he violated our constitution. And yet, this PC Party will not let us hold him to account.

When Manitoba's politicians violate the law, Honourable Speaker, Manitobans need answers. They need to know exactly what happened and why it happened, and most importantly, they need to know that it will never happen again.

The actions of Cliff Cullen and his accomplices, some of which still sit in that corrupt PC caucus, violated the trust of Manitobans, and Manitobans are justified to question whether or not they can trust those politicians. To restore that trust, we need to continue to ask questions.

Today, Manitobans are seeking answers. Cliff Cullen needs to answer the questions the people of Manitoba have about why he didn't care about their vote and why he tried to shamefully force a project through.

The Leader of the PC Party has tried to distance himself from this corruption before, Honourable Speaker, but right now he's showing that he is one of them by blocking this very important debate. Will the Leader of the PC Party prove that he in fact does represent a new age of the PC Party by supporting our call to bring Cliff Cullen to answer questions before this very House?

Honourable Speaker, Cliff Cullen needs to answer why he went against Manitobans and tried to force through a Sio Silica mine. And the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the PC Party, needs to explain why he is choosing to block debate and why he doesn't want the corruption of his party and his colleagues to come to light.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Where to begin? I'm not surprised that the members opposite want to stand up and talk about what happened two years ago. It's all because they don't want to talk about what's happened over the last two years. They're avoiding accountability for their own dismal record.

So I think it's only fair to put some words on the record about the Minister of Health, since they stood up and delivered this statement. And I would like to humbly suggest that they might be more concerned with rising ER wait times, rising surgical and diagnostic wait times, a chaos in home care, that perhaps that's where they should turn their focus.

Earlier this year, this minister decided to centralize home-care scheduling services in the WRHA in downtown Winnipeg, resulting in widespread chaos. One of the reasons they want to avoid getting to question period today is because of things like happened last April, when I raised this issue in question period, and that minister stood in their place and told me I was wrong. They told me I was fear mongering.

They were wrong. I was relaying concerns from front-line home-care workers, concerns that this minister ignored all summer long. Home-care clients, their families, front-line home-care workers, calling my office in tears because nobody at the WRHA, nobody in the minister's office, nobody in the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) office would listen to their concerns. This all culminated in situations like July, where over 20,000 home-care visits were cancelled by the WRHA. Maybe if the minister spent more time worrying about that, we wouldn't be in these types of situations.

And that's not all, Honourable Speaker. I want to read into the record a couple of quotes from front-line



health-care workers about this minister's record. Earlier this year, Darlene Jackson, the president of MNU, told the Winnipeg Free Press: Our nurses tell us continuously that things are not getting better in health care, that, in fact, there are areas where things are deteriorating. Nurses are frustrated. We were promised a change. Things are not rosy in health care, despite what's been said. We are in a terrible crisis. That was February 12, 2025.

On February 13, Darlene Jackson also said: What we're finding is there is very little transparency from this government. There is almost no collaborative effort with this government.

And in May, Darlene Jackson said, quote: If the government had truly been listening during their listening tour, would we be here again, over a year later, with no measurable progress?

Nurses are beyond tired of the spin of being used for announcements, campaigns and photo ops, only to be ignored when the decisions are being made.

That's the reality of health care in Manitoba under the NDP, Honourable Speaker. Not only is it not improving, it's actively getting worse by almost every metric.

Manitobans deserve better.

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ethics Report—Caretaker Convention Breach  
Member for Red River North—Request for  
Removal from Caucus**

**Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change):** The recent findings of the Ethics Commissioner that the PCs broke the law has shaken the very foundations of our democratic institutions.

The report is clear: Four members of the former Progressive Conservative government breached The Conflict of Interest Act and violated the long-standing caretaker convention, a principle that ensures outgoing governments respect election results after losing the confidence of Manitobans.

Among those named is the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton). That member, while serving as the outgoing minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade, actively pushed for the approval of a controversial silica sand mining project in the days following the PC government's defeat in the 2023 election.

He did so, not in service of Manitobans, but in defiance of the democratic will expressed at the ballot

box. For this, he was fined \$10,000 by the Ethics Commissioner. And yet, Honourable Speaker, the PC opposition has not only failed to hold the member of Red River North accountable, they have actively delayed debate on the Ethics Commissioner's report. They have obstructed the very process that would allow this Assembly to formally respond to the violations committed by their members.

Of course, leading up to this, the member for Red River North actively denied involvement despite a timeline that he was very clearly implicated in.

On October 12, 2023, nine days after losing government, the member called his colleagues Rochelle Squires and Kevin Klein to encourage them to approve the Sio Silica project despite the fact that both Mr. Klein and Ms. Squires had lost their seats on election day.

When Mr. Klein came forward on December 27, 2023, the member from Red River North said Mr. Klein was lying. This claim is false, he said, truly false; I ensure due process is followed.

The next day, Ms. Squires came forward. And a week later, the member for Red River North's story changed. He says he called the two departing MLAs simply to gather information about the planned Sio Silica mine and to share it with the incoming NDP government.

He claims he did call them, but it was just information gathering.

The member's various narratives have the public scratching their heads. The member's behaviour is, in Paul Thomas's words, confusing and inconsistent. He goes on to say: He has come forward with different descriptions and explanations about what happened and why.

Even his former colleague Kevin Klein has demanded his resignation, saying this kind of conduct is exactly why people lose faith in their elected officials, and, in speaking about the member for Red River North, says: He should take responsibility and resign.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are asking: Why is the member for Red River North still sitting in the PC caucus? Why is the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) allowing him to remain in caucus as if this breach of ethics were a minor misstep? Why has the PC caucus not taken decisive action to restore public trust?

This is a matter of integrity. The caretaker convention exists to protect our democracy from precisely

this kind of abuse. When elected officials use their final days in office to push through decisions that benefit private interests—decisions that were opposed by their own bureaucrats and colleagues—it is not just unethical. It's a betrayal of the people they were elected to serve.

\* (14:10)

And yet, Honourable Speaker, the PC opposition has not only failed to hold the member for Red River North accountable, they've actively delayed debate on the Ethics Commissioner's report. They have obstructed the very process that would allow the Assembly to formally respond to the violations committed by their members. What message does this send to Manitobans? That ethics violations are tolerable? That accountability is optional?

On this side of the House, we hold ourselves accountable by meeting with and showing up for Manitobans every single day. I stand today with a government committed to transparency, accountability and public trust.

Honourable Speaker, the people of Red River North deserve answers. They deserve to know why the MLA pressured colleagues to approve a project that was ultimately rejected by our government due to the serious environmental and public health concerns. They deserve to know why their representative acted so egregiously. And all Manitobans deserve to know why the PC caucus continues to protect those who violated the public trust.

The Leader of the Opposition must take action. He's refusing to debate the issue, and the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) continues to occupy a seat in the PC caucus. When will the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) do the right thing and stop delaying debate on the PC ethics crisis, and fire the guilty parties: the member for Red River North?

They're not allowing the report to come forward. They're not addressing it at all. And all of their responses, including the heckling that is happening from the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), has not even acknowledged the ethics report in their response. And so Manitobans are left to ask when will they face the facts?

Thank you.

**Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain):** Honourable Speaker, I am disappointed but not surprised that this Environment Minister has taken the low road in his ministerial statement today.

This minister has overseen the dumping of massive amounts of untreated waste into waterways. It's no surprise he would do the same into the airwaves. It's also no surprise he's trying to distract.

This minister has overseen the slashing of parks budgets. He has cut everything but the grass. It's no surprise he's trying to distract.

This minister has refused to work with stakeholders to protect the transmission of invasive species. This minister has allowed everyone but himself to be responsible for stopping zebra mussels. It's no surprise he's trying to distract.

Honourable Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to talk about how the NDP government is dividing Manitobans. On this side of the House, we know Manitobans will see through this NDP division.

Thank you.

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

So I would like to comment on what's just taken place. There's a rule that we have that talks about providing 90 minutes' notice of a ministerial statement and what the topic of the ministerial statement is going to be so that members opposite can respond accordingly.

Now, I will say that the first three government members did make passing reference to the election. The final speaker really did not mention the election at all. While we have a rule that talks about it, there's a reason that the rule was put in place so that the point of the 90-minute notice was to allow opposition to prepare to speak on the topic.

Now, I will also comment that not one speaker on the opposition side actually talked about the topic. So we have rules, we have practices, and while sometimes those practices become somewhat looser, we need to make sure that we're following the spirit as well as the intent, I guess, of the rules.

So I didn't stop people from speaking this time, but perhaps in the future I will if the statements aren't specifically addressing the issue that was in the notice and perhaps even if the responses aren't addressing anything in the statement.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** So at this point in time, prior to members' statements, I want to acknowledge that we had some students in the gallery; unfortunately, they've left already. So we had 50 students from Shamrock School under the direction of Paul Figsby, and they were in—located—they are located in the constituency of the

honourable member for Southdale (MLA Cable). So hopefully, they listen and know that they did get recognized.

So members' statements—prior to members' statements. Clerk just reminded me that I had planned to make a short statement prior to members' statements about ensuring that you stick to two minutes. I talked about this on opening day that members' statements had to be two minutes or I would be cutting you off.

Now, on day one, every member statement, save one, was over two minutes. So keep that in mind today, that I will be stopping you at two minutes.

### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

#### Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities

**Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East):** Honourable Speaker, today I rise to recognize the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities, better known as MLPD. I'd like to request leave to have my guests' names entered into Hansard.

A group of my constituents in Kildonan-River East approached our local team when they were struggling with their Transit Plus service.

Together with MLPD, our local city councillor and residents in several of our apartment buildings, we facilitated dialogue based on the residents' lived experiences. That community collaboration opened my eyes to the barriers that too many people with disabilities still face every single day in our province.

MLPD has a long and proud history of fighting for accessibility and inclusion. Since 1975, they have been at the forefront of the disability rights movement here in Manitoba.

One of their earliest victories was helping create Winnipeg's first paratransit system, which we now know as Transit Plus. They also play a key role in making sure Manitobans with disabilities were protected under our Human Rights Code.

Today, MLPD continues that important work, ensuring public services meet the needs of the disability community, making public spaces more accessible and helping organizations understand their responsibilities under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. They also work one-on-one with people, helping them navigate supports for housing, income, transportation, health care and workplace accessibility.

Honourable Speaker, 2025 marks MLPD's 50th anniversary. That is half a century of advocacy, education and progress for Manitobans with disabilities. They

continue the legacy of so many leaders who came before them, and they do so by relying on grants and generosity of donors. I encourage anyone who is able to support their work to do so by donating through their website.

I want to thank MLPD for their dedication to building a more accessible Manitoba for us all.

*Allen Mankewich, Sheryl Peters.*

#### Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** One in eight women are diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, and every day, 15 Canadian women die from it. When it comes to cancer, early detection is key.

That's why I've now twice introduced The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, which would lower the age for routine screening for mammograms to age 40 by the end of next year. This would allow Manitoba women to access the same standard of care that is already available in nearly every other province and territory.

A year ago this week, with a gallery full of breast cancer survivors and advocates, the NDP passed the bill at second reading. But then, despite multiple requests, they refused to send it to committee and effectively killed the bill. Since then, there's been no word from government on when Manitoba women under 50 can self-refer for a mammogram, despite promises from this government.

Time is running out. There are so many reasons that the government must act now.

Breast cancer in younger women now accounts for nearly 20 per cent of all diagnoses. Younger women tend to be diagnosed with more aggressive forms of cancer or cancer that hasn't been caught until it's in its later stages and is harder to treat.

The peak incidence of breast cancer for Black, Asian, Hispanic and Indigenous women are all in their 40s.

\* (14:20)

Earlier screening actually saves money as well. Stage 1 cancer costs about \$39,000 to treat, but stage 4 breast cancer can cost up to \$500,000.

Every other province in Canada, except Quebec, has already taken action to make routine screening available to women under age 50. Where you live should not determine whether breast cancer is found

early, and Manitoba women deserve the same chance of early detection and treatment as other Canadians.

Wait times in Manitoba for both screening and diagnostic mammograms are far too long. The government has had a year since they made their promise to take action on this issue, hire more technologists and improve access for Manitoba women.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and we urge the NDP government to keep their promises and make this issue a priority. Women's lives depend on it.

### **Hood & Dagger Productions**

**MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo):** Today I'm proud to recognize an emerging Tuxedo constituency treasure, Hood & Dagger Productions, a shining example of what community theatre can achieve.

Founded in 2024, Hood & Dagger's main mission is to build community through community theatre. They put everyday Winnipeggers on a stage and partner with local businesses and charities. They are building community through art.

Hood & Dagger provides a safe, inclusive and accessible space where people of all backgrounds, abilities and identities are welcome to audition and participate, and they also offer complimentary tickets to those who face barriers to attend, including new Canadians and Ukrainian refugees.

Earlier this year, Hood & Dagger was honoured with the 2025 not-for-profit of the year award by the Assiniboine chamber of commerce, and their executive director, Crystal Hood, who's with us today, also received the 2025 Cherry Karpyschin Arts Management Prize for her leadership in strengthening the arts in our province.

Their upcoming production is *The Haunting of Hill House*, running October 23 to 26, and it's almost sold out. If you want to experience a night out of mystery and explore great local wares, I encourage you to get your ticket today. Each show features local businesses such as Killer Noob Escapes, Pure Anada, High Tea Bakery, Whodunit?, and more, with D'Arcy's Animal Rescue Centre as their partner charity.

Honourable Speaker, Hood & Dagger Productions is more than a theatre company. They are community builders, cultural connectors and champions of the arts. Please join me, a lifelong drama kid, in celebrating their great work.

Thank you.

### **Menno Home's 65th Anniversary**

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** I'm pleased to rise today to recognize a remarkable milestone in my constituency. Menno Home in Grunthal is celebrating 65 years of serving seniors in our community.

Menno Home stands as a powerful example of what can be achieved when community comes together to care for its own. Rather than waiting on government, Grunthal's churches rolled up their sleeves and made something happen.

In 1960, five local churches joined forces to create Menno Home, a place where seniors could age with dignity, safety and a sense of belonging.

Over the past 65 years, both the community and the organization have grown. The addition of Greendale Estate, assisted living and supportive housing, means even more seniors can continue to age with dignity close to home.

Grunthal's churches still play an active role in guiding Menno Home, alongside family representatives and a caring leadership team.

I'd like to acknowledge CEO Dave Claringbould and board members Leonard Klassen, Agatha Reimer and Anne Funk, who join us in the gallery today. Thank you for your service to our seniors and your commitment to our community.

Honourable Speaker, 65 years is a tremendous achievement, a legacy of compassion and care that have blessed our southeast region.

I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Mr. Claringbould, the board and the dedicated staff of the Menno Home for this outstanding milestone.

### **Philippine Basketball Association Winnipeg**

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** Mabuhay [*Long live*], Honourable Speaker.

Today I would like to recognize the outstanding contributions of the Philippine Basketball Association Winnipeg, which is proudly celebrating 25 years of dedicated service to our community.

What began as a small league with just seven teams has grown into Manitoba's premier Filipino basketball organization, run entirely by volunteers who are deeply committed to youth development and community engagement.

For a quarter of a century, PBA Winnipeg has provided a platform for young athletes to showcase

their skills, build confidence and pursue their passion for basketball. Through their efforts, countless youth have had the opportunity to participate in local, national and even international competitions, representing not only their teams but also the vibrant Filipino community in Manitoba.

This league is about more than just basketball. It is about instilling values of teamwork, discipline and inclusivity—values that strengthen our neighbourhoods and create lifelong connections. Every season, PBA Winnipeg brings families together, fosters pride and empowers the next generation to dream big and work hard.

None of this would be possible without the tireless dedication of the league's volunteer leadership and coaching teams. Their passion and commitment have made PBA Winnipeg a cornerstone of community life and a source of inspiration for so many.

I invite my colleagues to join me in welcoming PBA founder and commissioner, Manny Aranez, and his team in the gallery today. I request the names of my guests be entered in Hansard.

Salamat po [*Thank you*], Honourable Speaker.

*Manny Aranez, Abad Dela Cruz, Mercedita Dela Cruz, Rommel Dimaunahan, Randy Viray.*

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, from the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities, Allen Mankewich, interim executive director; Sheryl Peters, projects manager, who are guests of the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott).

And 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 Crystal Hood and Brian Hood, who are the guests of the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton).

And we welcome you here today.

### Speaker's Statement

**The Speaker:** Now members may have noticed a new face at the table today, and I would like to take a moment to introduce to the House Manitoba's first-ever clerk assistant-procedural clerk, Ms. Tiara Anderson.

Tiara is a member of the Little Saskatchewan First Nation in Treaty 2 territory, with family ties to the Métis community of Duck Bay, Manitoba. She is the first First Nations person to serve at the table of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

She holds a bachelor of arts degree in Indigenous studies from the University of Winnipeg, and prior to joining the Legislative Assembly, had worked for two years at the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba as a research assistant and ambassador for the Agowiidiwinan Centre in The Forks.

There, she was responsible for conducting historical and policy research and assisting public inquiries. As an ambassador, she welcomed the public into the exhibit at The Forks and provided tours and information about treaties and history of First Nations people.

Since joining the Assembly on July 9, 2025, Tiara has already made herself an indispensable part of the procedural team, graduating from the clerks' training program with distinction.

\* (14:30)

The clerks are delighted to have Tiara on their team and I'm sure members will make her feel at home in this Chamber.

On behalf of all honourable members, Tiara, we welcome you to the Clerk's table and to the Legislative Assembly as a table officer.

Also joining us in the Speaker's Gallery today is Madeline Anderson, Tiara's mom.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you to the Assembly.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Provincial Finances and the Economy Government Management Record

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Honourable Speaker, no one believes the NDP will balance the books by 2027 like this Premier falsely promised: not The Canadian Press, not the Free Press, not Moody's credit rating agency.

Further, they're predicting another billion dollars of deficit under this NDP. That would make \$4 billion in total of deficits under this NDP.

The Premier seems to be having a hard time asking complex questions, so I'll make it very simple for him. It's a simple yes or no. Spoiler alert: he's not going to answer the question anyways.

So the question to the Premier: Will the Premier balance the budget before the next election, yes or no?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** I want to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Anderson to this amazing Chamber and to say on behalf of all of the members of the Legislative Assembly: We hope that you keep us in line and good luck with that on some days here.

I also want to welcome her mother. I'm sure you're very proud of your girl and I've got a lot of good friends in your community so, obviously, we'll get to know each other over the coming years.

When it comes to the members opposite, it's their deficit. For years and years and years they cut everything in sight, and then when it was time to get re-elected they went on the spending spree to end all spending sprees.

Spoiler alert: it didn't work, and now they're on the opposition benches.

The member should read the Moody's report rather than just hearing about it second-hand from his colleagues. They affirmed our credit rating. They said this government is doing a good job. It was a welcome change, they said, from the previous government's financial shenanigans.

There's one question everybody in the House wants to know: why you're blocking the ethics report.

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

**Mr. Khan:** There you have it, Manitoba, no answer from this Premier. The Auditor General said that \$373 million were left by the previous PC government. That has turned into \$4 billion of deficit by this NDP.

No one believes this Premier—not news reporters, not one credit rating agency and not one Manitoban. Another broken promise by this Premier and his failed NDP government.

Health care is failing, crime is at all-time high, and the fiscal controls are out of control—actually, don't have any in this province under this government.

Will the Premier stand up today and apologize to Manitobans for all of his broken promises and failures by this NDP government?

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, the member opposite is trying to give lessons on money when he couldn't even run a lemonade stand. And I mean literally. All his lemonade stands are closed: the one in Osborne Village is

closed; the one at the airport is closed; the other one, they actually put a sign up in the window and said evicted for non-payment of rent.

When it comes to this side of the House, we've got the best Finance Minister in the country, right. I mean, what is going on here? Moody's affirmed the job we're doing. S&P affirmed the job we're doing. DBRS Morningstar approved the job that we're doing.

The only thing that Manitobans ought to know about what's going on in the House here today is why are they blocking the ethics report. First time ever a premier, Heather Stefanson—the one that they were all acolytes of—was fined; fined 18 grand for breaking the law, violating the Constitution.

Why don't they want to have debate? Why don't they want to talk about that? Why don't they own up to the fact that they blocked the machete bill for an entire month in the spring? Tons of stuff—

**The Speaker:** Honourable member's time has expired.

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

**Mr. Khan:** Manitobans saw it right there. I'm asking questions about the economy and this \$4-billion deficit, and what does this Premier do? Personal attacks. That's all he has: calling Manitobans goofballs and launching personal attacks.

We called, in this very House, to bring that report forward in the spring so we could debate it in the spring and pass it in the spring. This NDP government and this Premier are playing games and launching personal attacks.

Manitoba saw a loss of 4,300 jobs in August under this NDP government. That's 22 per cent of all manufacturing jobs lost in Canada; happened here, under this NDP government.

Now the Premier goes and will not answer a question on—about economy and he'll launch personal attacks.

So I'll simply ask him: Why is the Premier doing nothing to combat the job losses happening here in Manitoba?

**Mr. Kinew:** We're up 17,000 jobs in Manitoba since we took office. Member opposite is throwing a temper tantrum on the floor here because he lost his job at the lemonade stand. But guess what? It's not about him; it's about you.

Their former leader, Heather Stefanson, was fined \$18,000 for breaking the law and violating the Constitution. Why? Because after they lost the election, she still tried to push through a controversial mining project.

First, they couldn't wait to debate it in the spring; now they're blocking it. Why are they blocking it? Everybody knows, from urban to rural Manitoba, there's too much corruption in the PC Party. They choose a leader who got less votes than the other person. They don't let candidates seek local nominations. They ram through projects after they lost the confidence of the people. Too much corruption in the PC Party.

Start making amends by letting the vote happen on the ethics report today.

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

#### **Interprovincial Agreement on Economic Development Request for Manitoba Participation**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** No surprise by this Premier: more personal attacks. Let's go over some real facts here. Unemployment is over 6 per cent under this NDP government, the highest it's been in decades. Youth unemployment is over 12.5 per cent, the highest it's ever been in this province, under this NDP government.

Manitoba's GDP is the worst GDP in all of Canada at 1.1 per cent, under this failed NDP. An economic boost is urgently needed, not personal attacks and terrible jokes by this Premier.

Why did the Premier and every other member of that side of the House vote against signing on to a nation-building project that would bring in billions of dollars into this economy, thousands of jobs into this economy, that Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario have already signed on to?

Why did the Premier not sign on to economic growth in this province?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** You know, the real way to get big things built in this country is to work with Indigenous nations. And we're doing that first, before we do the press releases.

When it comes to building the economy, the economy's great because it's powered by you. And you, the people of Manitoba, are the best. That's why we've helped to employ 17,000 more people. That's

why we ended runaway inflation by cutting the gas tax.

The members opposite, though, did they bring any energy at all to the provincial economy? They didn't build a single thing. Two terms: all the same characters were there in government. They didn't do anything with two terms.

The only thing they had energy for was corruption. They went running around and broke the law after they lost the election. They ran up the deficit trying to win your favour; you saw through that. They went to desperation town and tried to campaign on the landfill search; you saw through that. And after they were debased and humiliated, what did they do? They ignored your will.

Manitobans, let's keep working on building up the economy together, and let's keep them in the penalty box.

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

**Mr. Khan:** An absolute joke by this Premier. He just said, and I quote: The economy is great. End quote.

But Manitoba is ranked dead last. It is the last province in all of Canada, with the worst GDP, under this NDP. And he says that's great. It is shocking to hear the Premier say this when we are rated dead last under him.

\* (14:40)

If he would have read the memorandum of understanding, it clearly says, and I quote: This agreement creates an overarching framework that aims to facilitate, leverage and build on party's existing work and engagement with industry, Indigenous communities and the federal government, end quote. I'll table that for the Premier to see it clearly says it's going to take consultation with Indigenous communities.

So why is the Premier stopping and not joining onto a project that will bring billions of dollars and thousands of jobs into this economy?

**Mr. Kinew:** Why did the member opposite take half a million dollars of your money during the worst of the COVID crisis, when small businesses were struggling? It's undeniable. That's a fact.

Why did the members opposite allow Heather Stefanson to break the law? Why do they sit in a caucus with that member in the back row, who's also been fined in this report? Why do they waste your

time, each of them collecting \$100,000 salary a year, and block this report from being debated?

There's too much corruption in the PC Party of Manitoba. The worst thing about it is they don't even know what they're doing. They fall backwards, in a complete show of incompetence, into breaking the law and violating the Constitution. The member himself, if you want to see incompetence, shows up at CBC, where he's asked about taking umbrage with my colleague from St. Johns, and he admits on the radio, to all Manitobans, talking about his questions, his performance in question period. Yes, the timing is unfortunate.

Newsflash, opposition: it's not just your timing. It's all the corruption.

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

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

**Mr. Khan:** Honourable Speaker, I can't control the terrible timing by this failed Health Minister. I can't control that she kicks an ASL interpreter off the stage. I can't control—

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I would just remind the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition that proper pronouns are important. So if you could apologize.

**Mr. Khan:** Apologize, Honourable Speaker. I meant to say failed Families Minister.

I can't control when the failed Families Minister kicks an ASL interpreter off the stage or when they block families from communicating with their foster families or when she shows no empathy for someone who's been murdered.

The Premier needs to look himself in the mirror and across the board there with his Cabinet minister and remove that Cabinet minister. That's accountability if this Premier wants to do something.

But we have been calling on that ethics report to come forward from the spring. And what does he do? He's playing games. They could have called it any time. Another failure by their Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine), their Families Minister.

It's simple: Why is the Premier standing in the way of billions of dollars and thousands of jobs coming to this province? Why will he not sign an agreement with Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario to bring prosperity to Manitoba today, not 2040?

**Mr. Kinew:** You are the centre of the economy, and each and every day we come working hard for you, here at the Legislature and across the province.

We stopped runaway inflation that was at 8 per cent under the PCs. The economy is bigger than ever today. We've added 17,000 jobs since we took office.

The members opposite, however, violated the Constitution, the supreme law of the land, the first time that's ever happened in Manitoba history. The law and order party, so called, broke the law, the leader that they all defended in those uncomfortable conversations after the election, when people were asking them, why did you run ads attacking the victims of serial killers? Remember when they defended her? Well, turns out, behind their back, she was breaking the law, breaking the Constitution. It's an absolute shame and abomination.

There's no clapback, there's no joke, there's no riddle that I'm going to lay out here. I'm just going to say this: you thought you saw the worst thing that had ever been done—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

### **Provincial Deficit Balanced Budget Timeline**

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** Honourable Speaker, this NDP minister is failing to keep taxes low and failing to balance the books. A \$2-billion deficit his first year, followed by \$1.1-billion deficit last year, and now he's projecting close to another billion-dollar deficit this fiscal year. That is almost \$4 billion in cumulative deficit since this NDP minister came into power.

No one credible thinks that this NDP can actually balance the books by 2027 or even beyond.

So will this Finance Minister finally admit that he has failed and he will never actually balance the books by 2027?

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** You know, it's an interesting strategy that the PCs have, which is quit before you even get started on the job at hand. Obviously, you can see that's a reflection of the content of their character.

We've got a great Finance Minister who's well on the way to cleaning up the mess that they caused. But



one thing that is not being cleaned up is the complete and utter disregard for ethics, complete and utter disregard for the law. The members all sat at the Cabinet table alongside a series of individuals, one of them who's still in their caucus in the back row there, as they tried to ram through a mine after you voted them out of office. That is corruption. That is illegal. There are fines being brought forward here on the floor, and they're trying to block it.

Question for the member who still has a few years in her political career ahead of her: What have they got to hide?

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

### Tax Increase Inquiry

**Mrs. Stone:** Honourable Speaker, this Premier just stood up and questioned my character when I asked the Finance Minister a very simple question as to whether he was going to balance the books by 2027. That is shameful for this Premier; it is 2025. The Brandon Sun, the Free Press, credit rating agencies and political scientists are all saying that red ink will continue in 2027 and likely beyond.

Manitoba's economy is lagging behind the national average; GDP growth is stagnant; unemployment is on the rise, and Manitoba families are struggling to pay off their bills because of these NDP higher taxes.

Honourable Speaker, the minister has refused to say whether he will raise taxes again this year to pay off his debt—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

**Mr. Kinew:** There's too much corruption in the PC Party of Manitoba. While the Leader of the Opposition heckles during his own member's time, on this side we're asking her a straight-up question: Why are you blocking the report? Why do you allow the previous generation of the PC Party of Manitoba's ethical failings to tarnish the current generation? Oh, that's right; there is no current generation; it's still all the same cast of characters.

Everyone on the opposite side was a political staffer, a Cabinet minister or an MLA when these infractions took place. And now they come here to block the important work of the Legislature. They come here to block the work of the Ethics Commissioner. Come on.

When will this parade of corruption of the PC Party of Manitoba end? It could end today if they allowed this debate to take place.

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

**Mrs. Stone:** Honourable Speaker, I know the Premier loves to ask questions, and in two years, we'll be happy to send him back again.

This NDP has a history of high deficits and high taxes. They previously raised the PST to 8 per cent. They're now raising school taxes, education property taxes, hydro rates and income taxes.

So, if the Premier is going to stand up today and answer my questions, then perhaps he can answer this one: Will he raise the PST to pay off his NDP Finance Minister's deficit and debt?

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

Just point out to the opposition bench that you're actually wasting your own time, but that's your business, I guess.

**Mr. Kinew:** Honourable Speaker, but that's exactly the point. They're trying to waste everyone's time because they don't want to talk about their own ethical failings.

The member there asked a question; I will respond directly: Never, okay?

Here's the thing, a little history lesson for everybody in the opposite side. Heather Stefanson tried to do the same thing in the last campaign, pushed that same question. Let's remind everybody, though, that was the second question after the landfill search.

\* (14:50)

You are part-speaking in the royal you sense of the word, of course—you are part of the biggest travesty when it comes to morality in this province. Heather Stefanson disgraced herself; she's been fined. Your colleague in the back row disgraced himself; he's been fined. Your former deputy premier has disgraced himself and has been fined. Let these facts see the light of day.

And then, yes, sure, we'll contest the next election. But first, how about this? Put one in the side of the good—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

### **Timely Access to Life-Saving Health Care Request for Support for Debbie's Law**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** It's been nearly a year since Debbie Fewster died waiting for life-saving cardiac surgery that she didn't get in time. Debbie's family is calling on this government to make some simple changes, to make sure what happened to her doesn't happen to anyone else.

The minister put on a good show; they met with the family and said all the right things. But since then, nothing.

Why is the minister refusing to be accountable for what happened to Debbie Fewster and refusing to take action to prevent this from happening to anyone else?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** I want to thank Debbie Fewster's family for their ongoing relationship with our government. I had the opportunity to talk with her son this summer. I had two separate conversations with him, the last one just a few weeks ago to discuss the work that we are doing to move this area of health care forward.

It's unfortunate that the member opposite, while she was advising Heather Stefanson, made decisions to cut the cardiac program of excellence here in Manitoba. And when she stands up and asks about accountability, one has to wonder why it is that she is blocking the opportunity to hold Heather Stefanson accountable in this House. She violated the Constitution, she broke the law and she should answer to that.

**Mrs. Cook:** Honourable Speaker, a woman died. I know they've all got their talking points and their message track for today, but that is a really bad look coming from the Minister of Health.

Six months ago, the government passed Debbie's law at second reading. With Debbie Fewster's children in the gallery, this government didn't have a negative thing to say about the bill. Not one member of the NDP spoke against it or voted against it. But in the six months that have passed since, the NDP House leader has done nothing to move this bill forward so that we can get it passed.

Will the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) call Debbie's law to committee today so that her children and other Manitobans can have their say about this important legislation?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, I can certainly, on this side of the House, do two things at once. I can acknowledge the loss of Debbie's life as a tragedy. I

can acknowledge that we're going to continue to work with her family to move this area of health care in the right direction.

And I can also say that the member opposite, who was advising Heather Stefanson to make cuts to health care—including cardiac care in this province—should be accountable to not only that, but she should stand up and be accountable to what was going on that Heather Stefanson broke the law, violated our Constitution—to the tune of an \$18,000 fine.

I don't understand why the member for Roblin has so much difficulty standing up in this House and being accountable for her decisions before, during the election and now in this House today.

**Mrs. Cook:** Manitobans have trouble understanding why this minister has so much trouble getting up in the House and actually answering a question.

Debbie's law would give Manitobans the information they need to take control of their own health care. It would require the government to tell people if the life-saving care they need is not going to be available within the medically recommended time frame and inform them about other options available to them. It is ludicrous that the NDP Minister of Health thinks that Manitobans aren't entitled to this information.

I ask again: Will the Government House Leader call Debbie's law to committee, or did they just pass it at second reading to save face in front of Debbie's family?

**MLA Asagwara:** We're going to continue to meet and work with Debbie's family directly to advance policy changes—of which we're already doing—to strengthen cardiac care in this province, and prevent tragedies like what happened to Debbie from happening to any other Manitoban.

Honourable Speaker, I would ask the member opposite to really reflect on her role in the previous government of cutting the Cardiac Centre of Excellence. She had a hand in that. She should be accountable to that.

And I would ask her to reflect on her role today in blocking the accountability of her colleagues in that caucus and the former premier, former minister of health she advised—the same former premier who broke the law and violated the Constitution and broke the trust of Manitobans.

Is that the record she wants now, to continue to break the trust of Manitobans across this province?

### **Moose Population Numbers Request for Conservation Closure**

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** The data is clear: moose populations in the Duck Mountain and the porcupine forest are at their lowest levels in over 20 years, and I table those results on a survey that has taken place.

We know that conservation closures work. We know that it is our only hope in restoring a healthy moose population.

In the interest of future generations of Manitobans, will the minister call for an immediate conservation closure in the Duck Mountain park and also in the Porcupine Provincial Forest?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** You know, I got a lot of time for moose hunters. Moose meat is delicious, probably the best tasting wild meat that there is. And the folks who want to be able to harvest moose, whether you come from the city, a small town, a reserve, are people who learned how to hunt from their parents and grandparents, and we're going to work with you towards that.

I'll note that the member opposite was part of a government that opened up a cultural hunt in the Ducks. He's also part of a government that engaged in an unprecedented act of corruption. He's sitting about three feet away from one of the first people ever to be fined in Manitoba for violating the conflict of interest law. He ran under office with Heather Stefanson, who committed the ultimate bellyflop in terms of PR, but a serious transgression when it came to morals, when it came to trying to violate the caretaker convention.

Will the member opposite look to his right and ask his colleague whether any of the PC caucus money in their collective budget will be used to pay the Red River North fine?

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Swan River, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Wowchuk:** Honourable Speaker, in 2010, when moose populations hit a historic low, the NDP government enacted a conservation closure. At that time, there was 1,349 moose in the Duck Mountains and 1,122 in the porcupine forest. Today, those numbers have dropped to 1,169 and 409, respectively.

Given the current populations are even lower than when previous closure was imposed, what's preventing this minister from implementing a conservation closure?

**Mr. Kinew:** We're going to work with moose hunters of all backgrounds to ensure that we have access to a hunt to put food in the freezer, but also to ensure that that way of life that you learned from your parents and grandparents, you'll be able to show to your kids.

Notice in the question there, the member opposite glosses over the fact that his government opened up the hunt in these parts of the province. He was also part of a government that couldn't count moose. How long were they in there? They never got a single count.

He was also, finally, part of a government that made history in breaking your will, moose hunter and animal lover alike. You went to vote, and they broke the law by ignoring the results of that election.

His seatmate has now been fined, and what does he do with his \$100,000-a-year salary? Does he come in here to take the blame? No, he comes in here to block the exercise of your democratic franchise.

It's not just a debasement of our democracy; it's a debasement of our veterans and what they sacrificed for in this country.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Swan River, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Wowchuk:** Honourable Speaker. The Premier is now oh for two in conserving moose populations for future generations.

Dr. Crichton, Manitoba's long-time moose expert, warned: and once populations fall below 13 to 14 hundred animals, recovery becomes nearly impossible. We're at the point now—every week without a closure brings us closer to losing these herds for good. Three in four Manitobans, including 77 per cent of Winnipeggers, support a conservation closure.

And I table the Vijay report here that was just taken, and both science and public opinion support it; why doesn't this Premier or the minister?

**Mr. Kinew:** We're going to work with moose hunters from all communities to make sure that there's a hunt for generations to come. The PCs didn't do anything to support that during their time in office.

What did they do? Well, I think everyone in rural Manitoba knows that there's too much corruption in the PC Party of Manitoba. They don't let local people run for candidate. They don't let rural Manitoba—the person who had the most votes become the next leader. They never let rural choose.

\* (15:00)

And now here, again, day after day, they block the accountability for Heather Stefanson; they block the accountability for their former deputy premier, for their current MLA. They've all been fined for breaking the law.

Each one of them is collecting a six-figure salary right now, to do what? To debate that? To engage with the issue substantively? No. They come here day after day to block the progress of our democracy.

Here's a question for the members opposite: It's clear that you'll block democracy when it happens here in the Chamber; but next time, after the next election, are you going to respect the will of the people, or—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

### **Intersection of Highways 5 and 23 Timeline for Safety Upgrades**

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain):** Honourable Speaker, early this summer, a 77-year-old man died in the—at the intersection of Highway 5 and 23 in a preventable crash. Local media had reported after the—some work had been done in the area earlier. Rubble strips were not replaced on the stretch of road that was under construction.

Why is this minister allowing safety downgrades to Manitoba highways?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** You know, when it comes to road safety, our government is really serious. And I'm very, very sorry to people who've lost family members to unsafe driving conditions.

Now when it comes to the specifics of what the member opposite is asking about, we'll certainly be happy to share information about improvements that we make on 5 and 2 and 3. And I think they object to the fact of—actually, when we update people on that.

But this member, actually, is part of this corruption that we've been talking about in the PC Party of Manitoba. He's implicated right there alongside the leader and the rest of the Cabinet. What's more, there is a report about Sio Silica that names a government relations person from Sio; this member, during this Legislature, goes and starts a business with that person.

It's all there on the public record. This is all factual. Perhaps the member would like to explain why he has started a business with somebody implicated in the Sio report at the same time that he comes to the Leg. to block debate about the Sio report.

**The Speaker:** The—[interjection] Order.

The honourable member for Turtle Mountain, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Honourable Speaker, it's kind of sad. When we were actually asking the minister, when it came to the highway conditions, when it came to actually a death of a 77-year-old: it's pretty bad when you actually have a death of a individual being 'politicalized' by this Premier. It's very shameful.

And at the same time, this minister also, this summer, she has taken down the project map offline. Manitobans can't get ahead on what is actually at work when it comes to the highways, especially when it comes to Highway 5 that should have been completed by now.

The site has been down most of the summer, saying that it was available September 30. Well, September has come and gone and the site is still not up.

What is this minister hiding from Manitobans?

**Mr. Kinew:** When it comes to road safety, we know that this is a serious issue. That's why I answered the substance of the question.

However, this member, not only is he a former minister of infrastructure who, if roads in his part of the province are in a state of disrepair, he owns some of that accountability, he also, as part of the PC Party, owns some of that accountability.

But I invite people out there to go and read the report that they are blocking debate on. I invite the members of the PC Caucus to go and read the report that debate is being blocked on. There is a GR person in that report who is very, very pushy. That same person went into business with that member—not before the election, not immediately after the election, during this current session.

So what are they up to? What's the nature of the business relationship? What activities will his business partner be engaged in? These are all important questions that the public has a right to know. No wonder they're blocking debate on this.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Turtle Mountain, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** You know, this is a—it's actually—there's definitely an I in that team, is how that team is spelled. The Premier is all one-man show. [interjection]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** The minister and the Premier finally left the Perimeter Highway this past summer for the—

to pay for the by-election in Spruce Woods. Of the announcements that the minister made, the vast majority of those projects were on our PC five-year plan, Honourable Speaker.

And the—what has been—actually been either scheduled or completed, much like Highway 5 that should have been completed by now, and then actually Oak Lake Dam that should have been started by now, Honourable Speaker. But now—they get—they actually promised it in—two years from now.

Why is this minister delaying these important projects for the Westman? *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** Hey, listen, I take no pleasure in it. I'm just laying out the facts. If the member is not comfortable with the facts being on the record, then maybe that's something that he should reflect on.

When it comes to the roads across Manitoba, hey, listen. We know. We got to drive on these things, just like you. We're fixing it; we're building, building, building Manitoba, and we're pushing back against Donald Trump.

When it comes to the members opposite, though, you've seen it right here on display, just a complete lack of cognition, a complete lack of awareness, over their ethical failings.

They sit there and blah-blah-blah-blah, standing ovation, when they evade questions. They stand up here and they block debate when it comes to an ethics report. They sit in a caucus with somebody who broke the law during this term in government and was found to have engaged in unconstitutional actions.

They turn to their colleague, who's heckling me right now, and they say oh, buck up, buddy. I'm sure there's nothing untoward with you and the lobbyist from the Sio report.

Why didn't they put out a press release about that? You go and—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

Order.

#### **End of Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit Funding for Social Housing Organizations**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** With rising prices for homes and rent, builders alongside prospective homeowners and renters cannot keep up. Unfortunately, there are social housing organizations, such as New Journey Housing, receiving fewer funds

because of the Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit that ended a few months ago.

Honourable Speaker, if this government wants to prioritize fixing homelessness, why are Manitobans who didn't make the deadline now having to wait in emergency shelters longer or having to pay higher than affordable rents?

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** I want to thank that member for that question. It gives me an opportunity to outline.

We've housed over 2,700 people this year. So this includes 1,400 people into our Manitoba Housing. We're going to continue to do that work. Eighty-one people out of encampments, something that the previous government were a part of. They were a part of dismantling social housing.

We're not taking that approach. We're investing; we're ensuring that people are staying successfully housed with the supports that they need.

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

#### **Low-Income Manitobans Request for Affordable Housing Options**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Home building is a key area in our housing crisis, with labourers, developers and regulators all working together for the benefit of people who desperately need housing.

We have seen countries such as Norway or Scotland opt to use modular homes as a response to the housing demands. The federal government has stepped up with a plan, but seeing how housing is a provincial responsibility, what is this provincial government doing to create more affordable housing for people living on low income?

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

This government is building, building, building; supporting, supporting, supporting, and we're going to continue that work, and we've got more work to do.

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

#### **Manitoba Housing Units Funding Target for Repairs**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Honourable Speaker, there are currently over 2,000 Manitoba

Housing products—or properties still sitting vacant. Some only need minor repairs, little renovations to be made. This would allow them to be habitable.

According to the current Estimates of Expenditures, this government strategy has resulted in only 94 social units, when funding was available for 350, Honourable Speaker.

What is this government's target for 2025-26, and how will the Minister guarantee that it's met and provide Manitobans with the confidence they deserve that the funds being allocated into housing here in Manitoba are actually being put where they said they are?

\* (15:10)

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** Again, we are investing \$78 million to support folks that are—that need affordable housing. We are building, we are investing and we're going to continue to do that, unlike members opposite who allowed people to be homeless without the supports.

We're not taking that approach. We got sent here by Manitobans with a mandate to end chronic homelessness, and we're doing that work.

#### **Former PC Cabinet Minister Ethics Report—Caretaker Convention Breach**

**MLA David Pankratz (Waverley):** Honourable Speaker, Manitobans know that exactly two years ago, the former PC government broke the law and violated our constitution. Heather Stefanson, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) and the PC House leader worked alongside deputy premier Cliff Cullen to break the law, violate that constitution, all while the current PC leader was cheering for them, from his Cabinet seat.

You know, to this day, with the fundamentals of our democracy on the line, the PC Party has continued to deflect and refuse to come clean.

Can the Minister of Education please tell us what we know so far about Cliff Cullen and the current PC leader's interest in breaking the law?

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** That's right, Honourable Speaker. The former PC deputy premier Cliff Cullen was one of the PCs at the centre of the push to break the law and violate our constitution.

We know that Cliff Cullen was in regular contact with David Filmon, a Sio Silica board member. When

David Filmon asked if they, quote, got it done today, Cullen told him was working on, quote, some options to push through the licence even though it was illegal.

Now we've learned that David Filmon recently donated \$3,000 to the current PC leader's leadership campaign. I table those records for the House.

The PC Party hasn't changed, Honourable Speaker. It's the same old story of corruption.

Will the new PC leader return that money today and acknowledge the corruption, and will the member for Red River North save us all some time, stand in his place and resign today?

**The Speaker:** The time for oral questions has expired.

#### **Introduction of Guests**

**The Speaker:** Before we move on, there's some guests in the gallery I'd like to introduce. And just as a reminder, when the Speaker is standing and talking, everybody else should quit talking.

We have with us in the public gallery Manny Aranez, Randy Viray, Abad Dela Cruz, who are guests of the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar).

We welcome you here today.

I'd just point out that the Speaker is still standing.

Petitions? No petitions. Grievances? No grievances.

House business.

#### **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**The Speaker:** House business—government House business.

#### **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

##### **House Business**

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** I would like to announce the Standing Committee on Justice will meet Wednesday, October 8, 2025 at 6 p.m. to consider—

**An Honourable Member:** Point of order.

**MLA Fontaine:** —the following: Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis—

**An Honourable Member:** Point of order.

**MLA Fontaine:** —Control Amendment Act; Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act.

### Point of Order

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, on a point of order.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** It pains me to get up on a point of order, especially when we're going to get to some very important topics this afternoon in regards to opposition day motion and that.

But the point of order today, Honourable Speaker, is basically talking about, since some of the topics today is about rules, I believe that you'll have to take this one under probably advisement and check the tapes. But the Premier (Mr. Kinew) actually crossed the artificial line.

So we welcome the Premier for—temporarily over to the PC side before we kick him to the backbench, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

The Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Once again, the MLA for Lac du Bonnet is just not serious. He's not serious about his job; he's not serious about the incredible honour that we have to sit in this Chamber, and gets up to continue to waste time, to continue to deflect from getting to the work of debating the ethics report. It's really quite shameful. And certainly, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) will never be on that side of the Chamber any time soon, and that would be the worst thing in history for Manitoba.

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

While I would acknowledge both parties that have spoken on this point of order, it's not a rule. It is, however, a practice that people don't cross between the Speaker and the mace.

Having said that, I believe the member does have a point of order, but I don't believe that the First Minister intended to cross the floor.

### House Business

**The Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader, on government—House business.

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Okay, let's try this again.

I would like to announce the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act;

Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act; Bill 23, The Public Interest Expression Defence Act; Bill 30, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act; 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).

And I would also like to announce the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet Wednesday, October 8, 2025, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: bill 8, the small—The Manitoba Small Business Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended); Bill 225, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Universal Screening for Learning Disabilities); and Bill 234, The Pride Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

**The Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 8, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act—*[interjection]*

Order, please.

That's about the third time today I've warned members about continuing to have conversations while the Speaker is standing.

Bill 12, The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act; Bill 23, The Public Interest Expression Defence Act; Bill 30, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act; Bill 40, an act respecting "O Canada" and other observances and land treaty acknowledgements in schools, Education Administration Act and Public Schools Act Amended.

Further, it's been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended); Bill 225, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Universal Screening for Learning Disabilities); and Bill 234, The Pride Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader):** On House business.

**The Speaker:** The honourable Opposition House Leader, on House business.

**Mr. Johnson:** Honourable Speaker, could you please canvass the House to see if there is leave to refer Bill 226, The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Reporting When Timely Care Not Available), to the previously announced Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, meeting on Wednesday, October 8, 2025.

**The Speaker:** Is there leave to refer Bill 226, The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Reporting When Timely Care Not Available), to the previously announced Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development meeting on October 8, 2025? Is there leave?

\* (15:20)

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**The Speaker:** I hear a no. Leave has been denied.

#### OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

**The Speaker:** We will now proceed to the opposition day motion brought forward by the honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter).

And for the information of all members, according to rule 31(15), the House shall not adjourn until all members have had an opportunity to speak to the motion. Were—when there are no further speakers in the debate, the Speaker shall put the question.

The floor is now open for debate.

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** Today, I rise on behalf of thousands—[*interjection*]

Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth), that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba call on the provincial government to immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs agreement, replacing it with a strategy to ensure all Manitoba tradespeople can benefit from government contracts regardless of union status.

**The Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member for Borderland, seconded by the honourable member for La Vérendrye, that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba call on the provincial government to immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs—[*interjection*]

Once again, the Speaker is meant to be heard in silence.

—immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs agreement, replacing it with a strategy to ensure all

Manitoba tradespeople can benefit from government contracts regardless of union status.

The motion is in order.

**Mr. Guenter:** Today I rise on behalf of thousands of hard-working Manitobans, electricians, welders, framers, plumbers, contractors and subcontractors, those who get up at four or five o'clock in the morning. They'll travel long distances to get to the job site. Those who leave their families behind and work long days, long hours, hard hours, all to try to pay their bills, pay down their mortgages, put their children through school. Those who build this province, those who are at the very centre of this economy.

I rise to speak on their behalf because that's what we were sent here to do. And I rise to raise their concerns and our concerns with the government's anti-competitive Manitoba jobs agreement.

The government calls it a jobs plan, but what it truly represents is a closed-door deal that hands complete control of major construction projects to a small group of politically connected building trades unions while shutting out more than 80 per cent of Manitoba's construction workforce.

Let's be clear. This is not about building better schools or creating more opportunities. This is clearly about political favouritism, plain and simple. It is pure political opportunism by the NDP to pay back those that run their political party and have bailed them out in the past when their party was weakened and in the wilderness.

And I remember, and some of us remember in 2019 after the NDP leader and the NDP suffered a defeat in that election. And the NDP leader was vulnerable, was facing a leadership review. And who bailed him out? Who saved him from having to face New Democrat grassroots party members? It was the union bosses—was the union bosses in 2019 that saved his job. And so this is about political favouritism; it's about paying back those that bailed out the NDP leader, and he's doing it with this Manitoba jobs agreement that is really a gigantic middle finger to about 80 per cent of Manitoba's construction workforce by preventing them from being able to compete, being able to work on government projects.

This is particularly distressing and disturbing given this is a time—we're going through a time when Manitoba families are struggling with higher costs. This NDP government has chosen to spend their hard-earned tax dollars on a sweetheart arrangement that limits competition, raises costs and reduces op-



portunity for thousands of skilled tradespeople across this province. And, Honourable Speaker, in question period last week when I raised this matter with—in question period, the Minister for Labour stood up and condescendingly tried to educate me on the Manitoba jobs agreement. The minister tried to tell me and tried to deflect and deny, tried to suggest that the Manitoba jobs agreement does not disadvantage non-unionized Manitobans.

Well, I looked at the Manitoba jobs agreement. I read through it. I read through the Manitoba jobs agreement, and there are—there it is in black and white. And I want to go through the Manitoba jobs agreement, and I want to share just a few—just highlight just a few items, and, Honourable Speaker, I see that I have hardly more than five minutes left, and I have barely begun, so I will—I do anticipate having to ask for leave. This is a very serious matter. I will be asking for leave near the end of remarks—my time here.

So there's a couple of details in the Manitoba jobs agreement. The minister suggested that non-unionized employees—Manitobans would not be disenfranchised. Well, absolutely, they are, because in section 20.2.5, where multiple—and this is what the Manitoba jobs agreement says in black and white, and this is for the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine)—Minister of Labour—where multiple—and for the Minister of Families, who should've resigned already but hasn't; I don't know why she's still there. But in black and white, the Manitoba jobs agreement says: where multiple candidates are deemed job qualified for a vacancy, Manitoba residents that are members of a union will be given preference over Manitoba residents that are not members of a union. There it is, black and white, for the Minister of Labour.

Now, I suggested in question period last week that she check with her boss, the Premier (Mr. Kinew), because the Premier backed up what the Manitoba jobs agreement said just two weeks ago when he told a crowd of business leaders, a group of business leaders, that he saw—his vision of Manitoba, one Manitoba, was divided into four separate groups. And at the very top of his list were unionized Manitobans. Then, secondly, non-unionized Manitobans. The third group, ranked in that order of importance, by the way, was unionized Canadians, and the fourth group, again ranked in that order of importance in the eyes of the Premier, was non-unionized Canadians. *[interjection]* Absolutely. This makes an absolute farce out of his talk of one Manitoba.

And so, clearly, the Minister of Labour and the Premier don't communicate, don't work together a whole lot, but there it is in the Manitoba jobs agreement. I laid it out for all Manitobans. We see it right there.

\* (15:30)

There's more, by the way; there's some more stuff in here that I think would—

**An Honourable Member:** What? It gets worse?

**Mr. Guenter:** Really. It gets worse.

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**Mr. Guenter:** It does get worse.

**An Honourable Member:** Come on.

**Mr. Guenter:** It gets worse. And I'll just flip through here real quick.

So by the way, if you are—so now, if they're not able, like the Premier said, if they're not able to find—they'll do everything possible to find unionized Manitobans. But, again, they only make up about 20 per cent of Manitoba's construction workforce; 80 per cent are not unionized.

So where he can't pay back his union leaders by hiring only union bosses, by hiring only unionized workers, then he says: Okay, we'll go to group two—we'll go to group two. They're not as preferred as group No. 1, which is the unionized workers; we'll go to group two, the non-unionized Manitobans. Maybe he sees them as goofballs.

**An Honourable Member:** Probably.

**Mr. Guenter:** Yes. He was out there and all Manitoba saw it—and Canadians actually were quite appalled to see the minister—or, the Premier refer to other Manitobans as goofballs: something you should never do, by the way. There's a power differential between premier and voter; you never do that. But the Premier called them goofballs.

But let's say now the Premier says: Okay, we'll go to this second group; we'll pull labour from this second group, the non-unionized, the less preferred, non-unionized Manitobans, the second-class—the second-class Manitobans.

*Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

**Mr. Guenter:** Then what does he say they do? He says: Okay, I—you know what? Union bosses, I got to do this, we have to pull from this pool of non-unionized Manitobans—

**An Honourable Member:** The unclean.

**Mr. Guenter:** —the second class; yes, the great unwashed, the goofballs—the goofballs.

So then what he says is: But here, union bosses, we'll make those non-unionized Manitobans pay union dues.

And so the Manitoba jobs agreement, in black and white, says under dues, assessments and initiation fees: The contractor shall make deductions from wages of all employees in respect of union dues or service fees equating to union dues and remittances; and which dues, assessment and initiation fees shall be remitted directly to the unions.

Honourable Speaker, this Manitoba jobs grant is an absolute farce. It is an affront to the electricians, the plumbers and the welders who build this province. For crying out loud, keep your hands out of our wallets and your hands off of our economy.

**Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery):** I'm so proud to rise today and put some words on the record about Manitoba jobs agreement. Our government is committed to creating good Manitoba jobs for Manitoba workers.

When workers do well, Manitoba does well. That's why we signed our first Manitoba jobs agreement with Manitoba Building Trades to create good jobs for building four new schools. This is the first step in a new policy to support local labour on major public infrastructure projects.

This agreement ensure contractors prioritize Manitoba workers and set standards for wages, benefits and working conditions. When Manitoba–Manitobans elected us, they gave us a clear mandate: Manitobans want a government that listens, work for them and put their needs first.

Manitobans have told us about challenges they face every day: rising costs, housing shortages and struggle to find good, stable jobs. We have been listening, which is why we have signed this agreement to create good and stable jobs for Manitobans.

We want to see more friendly Manitoba licence plates on the job sites. We are creating Manitoba jobs for Manitobans by making sure that our province is built with good, family-supporting jobs with the tradespeople. Supporting local labour, Manitoba jobs agreement will put Manitobans by—first by making sure our workers are first in line for major public projects over \$50 million.

When Manitobans work on Manitoba projects, the paycheque stays in our local economy instead of leaving the province. This means that Manitobans don't want to leave the province to have a good job, which keeps families together and create stable, long-term employment.

As part of our agreement we are also setting fair standards for wages, benefits and working conditions because Manitobans deserve safe, high-quality jobs, and we are thinking about our future as a province.

This agreement sets clear targets: 10 per cent of all projects are apprentice and 20 per cent—deserving groups. That means public dollars doesn't just build school and hospitals. They build careers for Manitoba—for young Manitobans and business Manitobans, women and newcomers. This is how we tackle and skills up—skills gap and make sure everyone has a fair shot at success.

Whether you are unionized or non-unionized, contract or full time, our government is committed to supporting Manitoba trades workers and their families through fair wages, safe working conditions and ensure your voice is heard through effective labour laws.

The Manitoba jobs agreement act does not restrict non-unionized workers from applying for the contracts. 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 background is fair wages, benefits and safe working conditions for all.

That's not exclusion; that's the fairness. Every worker on publicly funded sites earns a fair wage. Pension and health benefits are guaranteed. Proven safety standards are in place for everyone. It is—also ensures opportunity for all Manitobans within our province; 10 per cent of all projects hours go to apprentice; 20 per cent of hours go to quality, deserving groups. That means public dollars build not just to school and hospitals but career for Indigenous Manitobans, women and newcomers.

Critic with imaginary price tags, but a search from across North America shows otherwise. PLA—project labour agreements—deliver projects on time and was on time and budget for the new laws of competition.

With the quality—global uncertainty, great challenges, tariff and inflations, Manitobans need stability. They need a government that stands up for them. That's what we are doing, creating the stability and

growth right here at home by investing in our local jobs and training.

This starts with putting Manitobans to work to build for new schools to the highest standard for our kids. Devonshire Park, Brady Point in Winnipeg, Meadowlands in West St. Paul and one more in south-west Brandon. These projects means better learning environment for our kids, hundreds of good jobs for Manitobans and stronger communities built by local hands, not out-of-province contractors.

And this is just the beginning. Manitoba jobs agreement will soon guide future projects like new hospitals, transportation, infrastructures.

Honourable deputy Speaker, our government is keeping our promise to Manitobans.

\* (15:40)

When we were elected two years ago, we started working together, working right away to keep our election commitments. We have hired 3,400 new health-care workers. We froze hydro rates. We made a permanent cut to the gas tax, and we are keeping our promise to power economy with good Manitoba jobs for Manitobans.

We are focused on what matters to Manitobans. Right now it is more important than ever to support our local economy. When the PC—while the PC leader thanked Donald Trump for the tariffs, we are standing up for Manitobans and Canadians. That's why we introduced buy Canada act, legislation that allows government to prioritize Canadian vendors.

We are putting Canadians first by encouraging Manitobans to buy local, working with the federal government and other provinces to reduce trade barriers, ensuring our procurement policies give preference to Canadian business whenever possible.

We are a listening government, but it is clear the PCs are not listening to the Manitobans. They only care about themselves. When I got an email from the PC leader, I thought it might be about our many capital projects or our great impact to Manitoba jobs, but instead it was about furniture for his office. For seven and a half years, PCs showed Manitobans exactly who they are: a government that does not care about workers. The PCs ignored the struggles of working families, attacking their rights and pushed workers out of province. Every Manitoban deserves support and respect in their workplace, but under PCs, workers in Manitoba were left behind.

While the PCs are trying to divide people here today, we are building one Manitoba for both union and non-union workers. They don't care about the workers then; they don't care workers now. Everyone in Manitoba deserves to be supported while at work. That's why we have a signed Manitoba jobs agreement to help all Manitoban workers get good family-supporting jobs and to build workforce for our next generation.

Honourable Speaker—deputy Speaker, as I was saying earlier, I got the email from the Opposition Leader.

As the Premier (Mr. Kinew) said a few days ago, we are more than happy to renovate his office the way he wanted so he can stay there a long, long, long time.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of the opposition day motion moved by my colleague, the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter), calling on this government to immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs agreement and replace it with a strategy that ensures all Manitoba tradespeople, union and non-union alike, can benefit from government contracts.

Honourable Speaker, this motion is about one simple but powerful principle: fairness. Fairness for every tradesperson who works hard, pays their taxes and wants a fair shot at a public project built by their own tax dollars.

The Manitoba jobs agreement announced with much fanfare last month has been presented by the Premier and the Minister of Labour as a framework for fairness and opportunity, but when you strip away the talking points, the truth is much different. This agreement does not level the playing field; it tilts it. It reserves government construction projects worth over \$50 million for a small fraction of Manitoba's construction workforce—roughly 8,000 workers affiliated with traditional building trades unions—while effectively excluding more than 80 per cent of the province's tradespeople who work for open-shop companies or belong to progressive, independent unions.

That is not fairness, honourable Speaker; that is government-sanctioned discrimination, picking winners and losers based on union affiliation, not on merit, quality or value for taxpayers.

Our province's construction industry has long been one of Manitoba's great success stories. It includes family-owned companies, Indigenous contractors,

new Canadians building businesses from the ground up and progressive union locals that embrace open competition. These are the people who have built our roads, our schools and our hospitals, often with little fanfare and without asking government for special treatment.

And yet today, under this NDP government's new policy, most of them will be locked out of publicly funded projects simply because of how they choose to organize their workforce. The government likes to say any qualified contractor can bid, but what they don't say is that once a contractor wins a bid, every worker on that site is forced to work under a single union-negotiated collective agreement, even if those workers never voted for that union, and even if their company already has a fair and functional agreement in place. That's not choice; that's 'cohercion'.

We have seen this movie before, honourable Speaker, and it did not end well. Two decades ago, the previous NDP government imposed a master labour agreement on the Red River Floodway expansion. At the time, the heavy construction industry warned that forcing non-union workers to pay union dues and follow union hiring rules would drive up the costs. And they were right. The floodway project went over budget by roughly \$140 million 20 years ago.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association and many others all pointed to the mandatory labour agreement as a major cause for those overruns. Even the government's own documents showed non-union workers had to pay service fees to the Building Trades Council, a policy many Manitobans saw as unfair and unnecessary.

Honourable Speaker, history is repeating itself. The same model that inflated costs and reduced competition 20 years ago is being repackaged today under a new name: the Manitoba jobs agreement.

We have only to look west to see what happens when governments limit competition. In British Columbia, the NDP government introduced so-called community benefits agreement in 2018. The exact same approach is being copied here today. The result? Projects delayed, red tape increased, the costs skyrocketed by as much as 30 per cent. On one BC bridge replacement, the government's own estimate included a premium for the CBA, a \$6.6 million—the one-third largest cost item—in that project.

Another Indigenous-owned company was denied work on its own traditional territory because it wasn't certified by a building trades union.

Honourable Speaker, that's not reconciliation; that's exclusion. Here in Manitoba, the same outcome is likely. When governments restrict who can compete, taxpayers always pay more and we get less.

\* (15:50)

We believe there's a better way. We believe in open and competitive tendering where every qualified company, whether unionized or open shop, has a fair and equal chance to bid and win based on merit, not political favour.

Open tendering means lower costs, more innovation and faster delivery. It respects workers' freedom of choice and ensures taxpayers get the best value for every dollar that's spent.

Honourable Speaker, no one is arguing against fair wages or safe working conditions. Those standards already exist. We already have The Construction Industry Wages Act that sets minimum rates. We already have strict workplace safety laws that apply to every employer. We already have apprenticeship and training programs that bring young Manitobans into the trades. We don't need a politically driven labour monopoly to achieve those goals.

Let's be clear about who this policy hurts. It hurts Indigenous-owned businesses, most of which are open shop. It hurts women-owned and family-run companies that have built reputations for quality and fairness. It hurts young apprentices who may find fewer opportunities because their employers are barred from bidding. It hurts taxpayers who will pay more for fewer schools, fewer hospitals and fewer roads. In other words, it hurts exactly the Manitobans the Premier (Mr. Knew) claims to be helping.

Honourable Speaker, the Premier talks about unity, yet this policy divides. It divides workers from workers, communities from community and Manitoban from Manitoban. It says to all four out of five tradespeople, you need not apply. That's not a Manitoba value. Our province was built on co-operation, not exclusion; on hard work, not handouts; on fairness, not favouritism.

Our motion does not say that we should scrap support for apprentices on equity-seeking groups—far from it. We want those goals pursued through open competition and clear incentives, not through closed-door deals.

Honourable Speaker, this motion is not an anti-union. It is a pro-worker, pro-choice and pro-fairness. It's about ensuring every Manitoban who builds our province, whether they're unionized or not, has a fair chance to share in the work that their own tax dollars have funded.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

**Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation):** I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak on this opposition day motion.

And listening to the commentary from members opposite on why they brought forward this motion, it's very curious. Members opposite, member from La Vérendrye, made commentary they want fairness and they want, you know, want—don't want any political interference in these sorts of things. And this comes from a member who's blocking debate on conflict of interest allegations against current and former members. This is pretty rich, coming from those members, to bring forward an opposition day motion that is—the sole purpose is to delay us from talking about issues around their ministers, former ministers, former failed premiers who broke conflict of interest rules and got fined \$18,000. Now, what's the fairness about that?

He brought up fairness in his debate, and I think it's fair for me to respond about what fairness is he referring to. Fairness for workers who work at the job site, who are trying to make a good living for their families, make sure that they can provide stability in our economy and for their own people in their lives? Or is he talking about fairness for politicians who make hundred-thousand-dollar salaries, break the 'contic' interest rules, break the law, get fined \$18,000 and don't want to even bring that forward for debate? Where's the transparency there? I feel like this is a very important part of this discussion today, that they can do that. And yet it seems like they don't want to even be accountable for their own actions.

You know, I tell my kids, honourable deputy Speaker, that when they make a mistake, it's on them to figure out how to make amends for that mistake and learn from their errors.

But, obviously, that doesn't apply for the failed former PC government who made so many mistakes in office, including the fact that they did not take this approach—the Manitoba jobs agreement—but they continued it up with mistakes of running up that deficit to a \$2-billion deficit; made mistakes during that transition period where they broke the law; and

continue to make mistakes in office in opposition today, where they don't even bring forward opportunity to debate the conflict of interest ruling and don't hold accountable the actors—the bad actors—in their former government and, actually, in their current opposition team.

Now, that shows no ability to learn from mistakes, no ability to take constructive action to make themselves better in the future, and that's why Manitobans clearly sent them to the penalty box, to the opposition benches.

And so when it comes to this opposition day motion, honourable deputy Speaker, it's important for Manitobans to know that some of the commentary put on the record by members opposite were flat out not accurate.

And he says things, that member from La Vérendrye, he makes comments like people will be barred from applying. That is not the case. People can apply for those contracts and try to get those workers, and we want to make sure that any worker has an opportunity to work here.

But what we're trying to fight against is what we saw under the failed Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson governments where, on the job site, you go by and you look and you can count the numerous out-of-province licence plates on our job sites. That's a problem that was caused by Heather Stefanson and Brian Pallister.

And what are we trying to do? We try to make sure that we employ Manitobans, that when we make an investment as a province we put Manitobans to work with good jobs. And as a part of that process for Manitobans to get good jobs, along the way we want them to have good benefits and we want them to have safe workplaces. We want to make sure that the economic reality is benefiting our economy. That's stuff that Brian Pallister never knew and Heather Stefanson never acted on.

And now we see that lesson hasn't been learned by the current opposition members of the failed PC former government and now failing PC opposition team. They haven't learned that lesson. They haven't learned that when a government makes economic decisions in spending their dollars, it should benefit our economy as much as possible. That means those dollars, we want to get them into the hands of Manitobans, Manitobans who can have and afford a good wage, a good job and a good career, a family-

supporting job, which is going to set them up for a better and brighter future in our economy.

And, honourable deputy Speaker, I want to point out one more thing when it comes to this specific opposition day motion. You'd think that after some time—you know, after their failed government got booted out of office, that they'd have some time to reflect on their bad policies that they had over that seven and a half years. You'd think that they'd come forward over the last couple of years and rework some of their failed plans and see if they can make them better.

But I don't think they've been able to do that. Certainly, they haven't when I look at this opposition day motion. When I see that they're trying to call for a new strategy that's something that is perhaps better, they—as they claim—they say something new—do they actually say what that is?

Now, it's very telling I bring up that point: that they want something different than what we put forward, but yet they acknowledge they don't want to go back to the way it was because they know that they failed with what was before. They know they can't go back to the way things were because that was terrible.

But somehow they want something different, but they can't even articulate what that is. Why is that, honourable deputy Speaker? Because they have no plan. They have zero plan for growing our economy in a good way. And how do I know that? Not only because I see—can read this very failed opposition day motion, but it's because I can look at the data, look at the numbers, look at the GDP numbers over the last 10 years—from 2015 to 2025—and see how they lagged behind the rest of the country because of failed economic policy by Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson.

And what do we want to do? We want to chart a better course. We want to put ourselves on a brighter path for a stronger economy. And part of that is this Manitoba jobs agreement, to put more Manitobans to work with how we spend our provincial dollars, to make sure that people on the workplace, when they're there, they're playing by the same rules, that they have good jobs—good, family-supporting jobs. We want to make sure that the folks on the job site, not only are we looking after Manitobans first, we also want to make sure they have safe work environments.

\* (16:00)

So when someone goes out in a high-vis gear, steel-toed boots, that they can go on the job site, work hard all day and come back safely to their family.

But we can improve those high-quality jobs and safe jobs for Manitobans of all walks of life. And that's something I think members opposite fail to understand as well, when they bring this opposition day motion forward. They have no sense of what it's like in many of these cases, and I'm glad to stand up for Manitobans who work in these sort of situations and make sure that they know that you've got a government that actually is working for you, that is supporting the work that you do every single day.

Now, honourable deputy Speaker, when we think about the way that they ran their economy in the past, it's very clear—I can understand the thought process of what they did in the past and why they bring forward this opposition day motion.

In the past, the former, failed PC government said that they didn't care about wages. And how do I know that? Because they froze their wages. They brought forward legislation to freeze wages for workers. Can you believe that? Froze their wages.

What did they do? When they said, how do we build an economy, let's put the provincial dollars in place to build projects; let's freeze the wages of the workers so all the profits go to the wealthiest Manitobans.

Let's not take that approach, is what we said. We say, let's not take that approach; let's not take that failed approach where we freeze wages for workers, and instead let's invest in workers.

Members opposite, I don't think they've heard that word. Invest in workers: have you heard that phrase before? I challenge the next speaker up to tell me how the failed PC government of the past has invested in workers. Or maybe they have a new idea of how they can invest in workers. I'm not sure if they can—I'd love it to hear it if they could.

But I know that on this side of the House, we invest in workers. We make sure workers have good, family-supporting jobs, jobs that they'll make sure that they will have success, and economic success, in the future.

At the same time, we'll make sure we support businesses through this as well, to make sure businesses have the resources and the tools to succeed, to hire more apprentices, to make sure we get more journey people in our system. We train more people;

more people with barriers to employment. We're going to get them system—into the system—and lift them up throughout their job and throughout their career.

And that's how, honourable deputy Speaker, we not only have this Manitoba jobs agreement that supports workers, supports employers, supports apprentices and journey people throughout our system, but is a strategy and a tool of what we do as a Manitoba government that builds one Manitoba; one that ensures people from all walks of life have opportunity, an opportunity to grow here in Manitoba, have a good job here in Manitoba, a career in Manitoba and a rewarding life here in Manitoba.

It's all part of our NDP government's plan to build one stronger Manitoba.

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** I'm very proud today to stand up and speak on our opposite-opposition day motion.

I want to thank the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenther) for bringing this forward, and I want to thank my colleague from La Vérendrye for speaking ahead of me.

This is something that I know. I'm a tradesperson, have been my entire life from the time I was 16 years old, working in a shop, until today, a proud owner of a shop. I know labour agreements, I know employees, and I know what makes this province move forward is the people that we have employed in our businesses.

If anybody thinks that the difference between a union shop and a non-union shop is a happy worker, they're mistaken. The amount of people that are available to work in an industry is at a premium nowadays, so if you're not treating your employees right, you won't have them, plain and simple. They will leave somewhere else. And the cost of training new people is tremendous on a company.

So if you're a company that want to succeed, you have to invest in your employees. You have to treat your employees with dignity, respect, understanding. You need to encourage them to move forward, create advancement opportunities for them, to listen to them and allow them to be the stewards of their future. And that happens every day in the shops that I have worked at, whether they were unionized or non-unionized, throughout my entire career.

I was very determined at a young age and I started my first business when I was 16 years old, but at the same time, I was working for other companies. And

as I moved along and the companies got larger, and some may say more successful, but we took on more inherent risk. And as you have more inherent risk, you need to have more qualified people to run the operations for you.

At one point in time, we had 70 people working for us in the aerospace industry in machining, manufacturing, welding, tool and die making, all areas that I was trained in. We dealt all across North America in our products and services that we offered, and it was always available for open opportunity, not based on whether we were unionized or non-unionized.

And to say as a company anybody can apply, whether you're an open shop or unionized shop, may be skirting the line of the truth. But the reality is there's a huge payback going off to the union bosses for no work that they have done.

When we have an opportunity to bring people into our province and have them stand up and give them the dignity and the right to expand their futures and do the jobs that they want to do, we can't make it prohibitive for the employer by saying, only if you pay a union due or follow the union contracts, you can bid on this work.

And I heard a couple of times today, they said that they did this for safety. In the close to 25 years my construction company has operated, we have had one, one singular lost-time incident. And unfortunately, that was to my son, the supervisor of the company at the time. One in 24-plus years, and that still is one too many.

We follow the letter of the law, and we go above and beyond every single time to make sure our employees are safe, and to say that happens only because a union shop, that is totally false. There is programs out there. SAFE Work Manitoba made safe core certification and several other programs right here in the province assist companies in getting certification and the safety requirements that they need. But safety is legislated in everything we do. There is manual after manual after manual telling you what we can and we should do to protect our employees.

There is job analysis that is done prior to the start, toolbox talks that are done, and we heard the minister across the way talk about putting on a high-vis jacket and safety boots. PPE is much more than that; it is hearing protection, eyeglass protection, welding protection, auto-darkening glasses, hard hats. It is so much more than just throwing on a high-vis jacket.

To understand what happens in business and happens with the worker, you have to be there. You have to go and talk to them on their level. And I—trust me, that level is above many people in this room. When you go and you talk to the workers who are the experts in what they do, the experts on how to do the job, how to do it safely, how to do it effectively, and they're there because they believe in the companies that they work for, and they accept the wages that they have. And to say that we want to take away their right to decide by forcing them into labour agreements that they do not agree with or they would ever be a part of that is totally wrong.

Of the employees that we have and had over the years, we have extremely low turnover. Turnover costs money. We want people that we hire to retire with us, and we have demonstrated that over the years. The amount of employees that I've gone to at their weddings, been there for their children's births, been there for, unfortunately, some of their own funerals.

\* (16:10)

People in our workforce become more than employees. They become an extension of our family. We get together, we share stories, we back up each other. We are compassionate to each other, and it has zero to do with being a part of a union, or having the ability to enrich the union bosses with money paid to them as an extortion to the companies, to be a part of a bid.

Every single day that I have an opportunity to bid on a job I have to take into so many factors on what that entails. We have transportation, and for me I've been very fortunate that we're able to do work all over North America, including at one time on the Hickam air force base in Hawaii. We have to take travelling into consideration. We have to take in lost time for training on site, due to specific reasons. We have to make sure that we have the proper materials, the proper equipment, the proper tools. We have to make sure weather is a factor. Is it a safe work condition that we're going to be working in today? We're working at heights. Do we have the proper PPE there? Do we have the right equipment to get us up 30, 40, 50, 60, 70 feet in the air? We have to make sure we take into consideration every aspect.

We have employees who decide that they wish to help the company, and we have many employees working 50, 60 hours a week when we're in crunch time and enjoy paid time off when we run into slower opportunities. These employees have the decision whether to stay at our company or to leave at any single time. But to say that they should be subject to

collective agreements that they've never signed on for is absolutely ridiculous for this government to think, hey, in order to make the union bosses who support us happier, we're going to extort money from companies that employees don't even want to pay that.

We have opportunities for employees to go across this great province of ours and open the doors for the next economic future that we have. But driving up costs for unwanted or unsolicited costs associated with union dues is ridiculous. If you want to be a part of a union, join a union; I don't have a problem with that. But if you don't want to be a part of a union, you shouldn't be forced to be paying union dues. It's a matter of choice for Manitobans, and it's a matter of making this province the economic future that it has coming.

Thank you, honourable deputy Speaker.

**Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** Today's opposition motion is wrong on multiple accounts. First of all, the opposition is only bringing up this opposition day motion in the first place so that they can waste time and avoid debate on the damning ethics report on Sio Silica regarding a sitting PC MLA and former Cabinet minister and a former PC deputy premier and a former PC premier, Heather Stefanson. So instead of taking care of that business, we're working on this.

But the opposition is also wrong on this motion because once again they are trying to pit Manitobans against one another. In this case, today they're trying to pit unionized workers against non-unionized workers. Again, the PCs are falsely claiming that only unionized workers will be able to benefit from the Manitoba jobs agreement. This is not true. Again, any qualified contractor can bid on these public projects that the Manitoba jobs agreement will represent.

And there will be proof of this. The first set of public projects that the Manitoba jobs agreement outlines includes the building of four schools. The first set of schools are kindergarten-to-grade-8 schools. These schools will be built in Devonshire Park in Winnipeg; Prairie Point in Winnipeg; Meadowlands in West St. Paul; and a school in southwest Brandon.

Any qualified contractor can bid on these public projects, whether they are unionized, non-unionized, large or small. The only difference is that once on site, all workers involved in the building of these schools will be under a single collective agreement that will guarantee these workers industry-standard wages, benefits and good working conditions.



These conditions will be set out in the collective agreement prior to the work. This Manitoba jobs agreement is our government's way of prioritizing Manitoban workers and their families to be front and centre on the building of big Manitoba public projects.

Our Manitoba jobs agreement is our government's way of ensuring that apprentices can get trained on big public projects, like the building of these four schools, as well as equity-seeking groups like women in construction and Indigenous youth in construction. These folks can also be trained up and build skills and work experience on public projects.

Having a set number of apprentices and having a set number of construction workers as part of equity-seeking groups are going to be requirements that are going to be built into the contract of these big projects. The Manitoba jobs agreement targets 10 per cent of all project hours to apprentices and 20 per cent to equity-seeking groups, so that public dollars will be building these four schools. But our public dollars will also be building careers for Indigenous Manitobans, young people and Manitoba women.

That's what the Manitoba jobs agreement is going to be doing.

Now, under the Pallister and Stefanson governments, the PCs vastly unspent infrastructure budgets to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars every single year. But when the Pallister PCs and Stefanson PCs did decide to build something, their model of business favoured out-of-province firms to build public projects.

Now, our government was proud to pass the bill last year that repealed the ban on project labour agreements. Now, we had to repeal the ban because it was an ideological ban and Manitoba was an outlier as a North American jurisdiction due to this ideological ban on PLAs.

Pallister and Stefanson PCs: their ideology blinded them from research on project labour agreements that proved that PLAs, like the Manitoba jobs agreement, delivers projects on time and on budget with no loss of competition.

The Manitoba jobs agreement will do so by reducing risks on major public projects, risks like strikes and lockouts and jurisdictional disputes. A Manitoba jobs agreement prior to building the public project ensures the prevention of strikes and lockouts, ensuring labour peace, certainty and stability during the duration of the project.

\* (16:20)

The Manitoba Building Trades unions gave up their right to organize while building these public projects.

Deputy honourable Speaker, I'm proud to say that Manitobans will be able to see the results of the Manitoba jobs agreement. There will be public reporting of apprenticeship hours, equity participation, as well as final project costs. In this way, the Manitoba jobs agreement is a transparent and measurable framework.

The people of Manitoba are investing our shared public dollars and deserve the best outcomes and deserve transparency. The Manitoba jobs agreement will provide training opportunities for apprentices and will provide equitable hiring 'practices' and safe work sites. Good jobs for Manitoban workers.

So again, let me repeat again and again and again for the opposition: any qualified contractor can bid on these projects, be they union, non-union, large or small, as long as they are qualified. The only difference is that once on the site of a publicly funded construction project under a Manitoba jobs agreement—once on site, there will be a single collective agreement that will guarantee industry-standard wages, benefits and conditions for all workers.

This is our contract for Manitobans. Your NDP government wants Manitoba workers building Manitoba projects.

But, honourable Speaker—deputy honourable Speaker, you know, I was just listening intently as best as I could to members opposite about their opposition to—the—about their opposition to this PLA.

You know, the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth) was talking about CIWA, The Construction Industry Wages Act. He was talking about the Workplace Safety and Health standards that we have here in Manitoba and what we do here for apprenticeships. He was talking about how they're not really against unions at all, and I was just thinking: Was he listening to the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) who just preceded him talking about union bosses going into people's pockets and all this kinds of stuff?

You know, let me remind members opposite that leaders of unions are actually democratically elected by their members. How does that make somebody a boss when they are elected by their membership? And if they fail to provide the results that their membership

would like them to do—similar to our situation—we get booted out too.

So people like Kyle Ross of MGEU: he represents 33,000 members. That's not a union boss; that's a MGEU democratically elected leader. Gina McKay she represents CUPE Manitoba; that's 38,000 members that she represents, that she helps lead. And if their members—

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

The member's time is expired.

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** It gives me pleasure to put a few words on the record here. And I want to thank our—my colleague from Borderland for bringing forth this opposition day motion. And I especially want to thank my colleague from Selkirk on the words of wisdom. He's run a business and he knows how this bill is going to impact small business. And I thank him for those words.

I rise today in behalf of the people of my constituency, the many thousands of Manitobans who believe that fairness, transparency and opportunity should guide every decision an elected official makes in representing their constituents and this province.

Yet, time and again, this NDP government has failed—like, so many times—to uphold those principles. Instead of governing for all Manitobans, they've chosen to govern for a select few, rewarding political allies while leaving most of our tradespeople and taxpayers on the outside looking in.

Today's motion is straightforward: that is, government immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs agreement and replace it with a strategy ensuring all Manitoban tradespeople can benefit from government contracts regardless of union status.

The Manitoba jobs agreement was signed quietly last month between the provincial government and the Manitoba building trades. It applies to the construction of four new schools and according to the Premier (Mr. Kinew) will become the model for every major provincial project valued at \$50 million or more. In practice, every contractor must sign on to a single collective agreement controlled by the building trades. Non-union employees can only participate if their companies cede control of their own workplace relations to a third-party bargaining agent they never chose.

This is not open tendering. It is restricted access. Roughly 8,000 unionized tradespeople receive guaranteed work while more than 80 per cent of Manitoba con-

structive workforce—open shop, independent of members of progressive unions—they're left on the sidelines.

When the government restricts competition, costs rise. When it picks winners and losers, public trust fails. And when it dictates who can work and who cannot, the result is division in an industry that thrives on co-operation.

We've seen this movie before. In 2018, British Columbia's NDP introduced almost the same framework under the name community benefits agreement. It came with the same promises we hear today from the members across: more apprenticeships, local hiring and supposed value for taxpayers. But the result told a different story. Provincial audits revealed cost overruns as—of up to 30 per cent on major projects. But then, we know the members across got their nickname *spenDP*, and we know they like spending money. Bridge and highway work was delayed months, not because of weather or design but because qualified contractors were barred from bidding unless they joined specific unions.

In one case, the government's own records listed a premium for CBA of \$6.6 million on a \$106-million bridge replacement, money that built nothing new. Smaller contracts left the province. Indigenous-owned and family-run firms had built schools and hospitals for generations, were told they could no longer participate. Even labour allies in British Columbia have since conceded the system created unnecessary red tape.

Mr.—honourable acting deputy Speaker, British Columbia tried it, and, of course, it failed. Costs went up, competition went down, and families paid more in taxes while getting fewer projects completed. That is not a path Manitoba should repeat, especially during affordability crisis when every dollar matters.

Independent analysis from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Merit Contractors Association, showed that limiting competition on public projects inflate costs by 10 to 25 per cent. Apply that to the billions this government plans to spend on capital projects, and we're taking hundreds of millions of dollars, tax dollars, lost to inefficiency. Every extra dollar spent on red tape is a dollar not spent building classrooms, paving roads or upgrading hospitals. Manitobans already face rising fuel costs, grocery and housing costs. They should not also pay more for government projects because of political arrangements that exclude most of the workforce.

Fairness is not partisan. It is good governance. Open tendering gives every qualified contractor an equal chance to compete, and it rewards innovation, safety and skill, not political connection, and it protects taxpayers by ensuring the best price for the best quality.

Supporters of job agreements claim it guarantees higher wages and safer conditions, but Manitoba already has The Construction Industry Wages Act setting fair pay across the sector and strongly—or—and strong safety laws enforced by Workplace Safety and Health. Most open-shop contractors already exceed those standards because their reputation depends on it.

\* (16:30)

By excluding most Manitoba tradespeople from public contracts, this government is not raising standards; it's denying opportunity.

Indigenous-owned companies may not—not affiliated with the building trades lose access to work in their own communities.

At a time when Manitobans struggle to keep food on the table and pay their mortgages, a policy that deliberately reduces opportunity is not only misguided, it's deeply unfair. Manitoba is part of the New West Partnership Trade Agreement with Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. That accord commits each province to remove barriers to the free movement of goods, services, investment and labour.

By adopting a procurement model that the Minister of Labour herself described as designed to keep out-of-province workers, this government risks violating both the letter and the spirit of the agreement.

We need only look to our past. During the Red River Floodway expansion under a previous NDP government, a master labour agreement forced all workers, union or not, to pay fees to the Building Trades Council. Many companies refused to bid. Costs ballooned from \$660 million to nearly \$800 million: 22 per cent increase. Even supporters of the project later admitted that completely—that complexity of the labour arrangement contributed to those overruns.

The lesson is clear: whenever government inserts political preference it's contracting, taxpayers lose. Manitobans are living through one of the toughest affordability crisis: food prices rising, housing costs continue to climb and families balancing rising utility bills against back-to-back school expenses.

Yet, this government's decision to restrict competition will do the opposite. It'll drive up costs and, inevitably, taxes. It'll slow down infrastructure delivery when we can least afford it. Then it'll signal to investors Manitoba's closing the doors to open enterprise. And we're seeing that on a daily basis with this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, the Progressive Conservative caucus believes in smart procurement, shopping that is open, transparent and competitive. Every company, union or non-union should compete on a level playing field.

We also believe in partnerships that include Indigenous northern communities, women, newcomers and youth. But inclusion must come through opportunity, not exclusion, apprenticeship targets and community hiring programs. We can promote equity without closing the doors.

During question period, this government often speaks of fairness, reconciliation and affordability, yet this policy contradicts all three. Honourable acting deputy Speaker, reversing the Manitoba Jobs agreement is not about opposing workers; it's about defending every worker's rights; it's about restoring fairness.

British Columbia learned that that lesson—or, that lesson the hard way. Manitoba learned it during the floodway expansion. We should not have to learn it again.

This House has an opportunity to correct course, honourable acting deputy Speaker. If we do that, we'll be building more than schools and hospitals. We will be rebuilding public confidence that is being lost every day this NDP government is in power and how this government spends Manitobans' money.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar):** Just a gentle reminder for all members that honourable deputy Speaker is appropriate way of addressing the Chair, so please keep that in mind.

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** I am pleased to stand today and speak to this very important motion that my colleague, the MLA for Borderland, has brought forward today. And I want to be very clear, after hearing members opposite, that this isn't about union or non-union. That's actually what they're doing.

What this motion is about is about workers and opportunity for all Manitobans, regardless of whether that worker is unionized or not unionized.

Rather than embracing competition and smart shopping to keep costs low, this NDP government has brought forward an agreement that does the exact opposite. There is a choice between freedom and fairness and monopoly and closed doors, and unfortunately, this NDP government has chosen the latter.

The NDP, as we've seen time and time again—and again with this agreement—is they are trying to divide, divide and divide. They are picking winners and losers among Manitobans. So much for one Manitoba.

Our PC team supports smart shopping and procurement that is open and competitive and does not bind government's hands to master labour agreements that are anti-competitive and that will drive up costs and slow down investments in key infrastructure projects. This is about fairness, opportunity and economic growth, the freedom to work, the right to compete and the value of a level playing field.

Through this agreement, the NDP is leaving out an entire workforce of people simply because they are non-unionized. In fact, non-unionized workers make up the majority of Manitoba's construction workforce. Merit contractors has indicated that, through this agreement, the NDP is shutting out 80 per cent of workers who work for open-shop companies.

Progressive union workers and—are in favour of 8,000 traditional building trades unions, so let's just make that very clear: they're shutting out 80 per cent in favour of 8,000. Again, so much for one Manitoba. The NDP is shutting out thousands and thousands of workers that we need here in Manitoba to build—bid on projects to ensure that those projects get done efficiently, at a costly—at low-cost manner for Manitoba taxpayers, and quickly.

The NDP is choosing not to provide those workers with these same opportunities. These individuals, they're tradespeople; they're professionals; many of them are small-business owners who want to work where the opportunity exists. Manitoba should be empowering every qualified tradesperson and contractor by giving them the chance.

And that's what this is about: it's about giving them the chance, the ability, the opportunity to bid and contribute to public projects.

The NDP are actually taking away workers' hope for work. This means fewer jobs for Manitobans, higher costs for taxpayers and a system that is built on favouritism, not fairness.

On our side of the House, we know that competition is in fact a building block to innovation, efficiency and fairness. It does keep costs down and it helps taxpayers get better value for every dollar spent and enhances productivity.

The NDP needs to be reminded that this is not their money; this is taxpayers' money. This is Manitobans' money. And shutting out one group of Manitobans, so they can puff up their coffers and their union-boss friends, is not one Manitoba.

Ensuring that every single Manitoban, whether you're unionized or non-unionized, also ensures that it enhances productivity. We all know that Manitoba and Canada actually have a productivity problem. It's a big challenge. Canada's labour productivity significantly lags behind other G7 countries, particularly the United States, France and Germany, and has been declining and is, in fact, stagnant in recent years, contrasting with the growth and the productivity growth that we see in other nations.

So let's just look at a few examples that I pulled up when we brought this motion forward. In 2023, Canadian labour productivity was around 72 per cent of that of the United States and considerably lower than France and Germany. And between 1995 and 2004, and then again from 2015 to 2023, Canada's average labour productivity grew by a smaller amount than Australia's and fell far behind the US.

So if we look at Manitoba-specific, productivity actually increased under the former PC government but then fell in 2023 once this NDP government took over. It is significantly lower than that of our neighbouring provinces, specifically the Prairie provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

And, in fact, Manitoba and Atlantic Canada have the lowest productivity levels in Canada, producing 22 per cent and 26 per cent less value added per job than Ontario, respectively.

\* (16:40)

So those are just a few statistics to throw out there, which is exactly why we have brought this motion forward, because the NDP should be embracing competition to drive up productivity. Instead, what we're seeing is, again, favouritism over fairness, political favours over job opportunity. That's not fairness nor is that one Manitoba.

The NDP is trying to create a closed-shop monopoly that drives costs up and shuts out Manitobans from economic opportunity. As I've mentioned previously,

they are shutting out thousands of Manitoba workers to appease their friends, the union bosses.

Another key aspect of this motion is ensuring competitive tendering processes. Competitive tendering ensures that taxpayers—let me just remind the NDP again—this is not their money; this is Manitoba taxpayers' money for these public contracts and these public projects.

This ensures that those taxpayers, Manitobans—Manitoba taxpayers—get the best value for their money. Our PC team supports open and competitive tendering processes, where every company and union competes on an equal playing field. Merit construction, progressive unions and many construction contractors believe that this jobs agreement is anti-competitive and will increase cost to taxpayers, as well as government, which in the end also increase taxes to taxpayers.

In an op ed recently, Merit Contractors compared the NDP's announcement to one that happened in BC about five or six years ago and Merit has indicated that the system that BC brought in led to more red tape on projects, costs exploded, projects were delayed and people were denied an opportunity.

And, in fact, in BC's experiences, it's shown that it could inflate project costs by upwards of 30 per cent. So competitive tendering and ensuring that every Manitoban, every tradesperson, every professional who wishes to bid on a project has the opportunity to do so, this ensures that Manitobans—Manitoba taxpayers—get the best price at the best quality.

When governments tender projects, everyone should get a fair shot at the work, no matter the company they work for or how the workforce is organized. Government is now using taxpayer dollars for these projects and as a result, Manitobans—all Manitoban contractors should have the ability to bid on those projects. No special deals, no special favours, no favouritism; just an open invitation to bid in a fair and transparent, competitive process.

Any less sets a dangerous precedent because this becomes open for political abuse and could, in fact, make the process tainted as a whole. And it is unfortunate that this NDP government has chosen to put Manitobans into buckets: unionized or non-unionized. All Manitobans, regardless of whether you're unionized or non-unionized, should want a system that rewards competition, productivity and most importantly, opportunity.

Thank you, deputy honourable Speaker.

**Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain):** Manitoba has long prided itself on being a province of fairness, opportunity and hard-working people.

Tradespeople have been the backbone of our infrastructure and economy, building homes, roads, schools and hospitals, literally shaping the province. However, recent policy shifts, particularly the implementation of the Manitoba jobs agreement has sparked concerns among non-unionized tradespeople and business owners across the province.

This agreement, perceived by many as exclusionary, grants a clear advantage to unionized contractors in accessing government contracts. This effectively shuts out a significant portion of Manitoba's skilled workforce from public infrastructure projects, not on the basis of competence or quality, but due to their union status.

This policy is not only divisive and economically inefficient but also fundamentally unfair. A new strategy must be developed, one that ensures all qualified tradespeople, regardless of union affiliation, can equitably participate in publicly funded projects. Fairness, competition and economic growth must be prioritized over ideological alignment.

The Manitoba jobs agreement, as it stands, mandates that workers on certain government infrastructure projects be employed under terms negotiated through union-only agreements. In practice, this means that if a construction company is non-unionized or prefers to use its own skilled, non-union workforce, it is either barred from bidding on certain government projects or must conform to union rules and wages during the project. This policy mirrors similar project labour agreements seen elsewhere in Canada and the United States.

Advocates argue that such agreements standardize employment conditions and ensure high quality work. However, in reality, these agreements create a closed-shop environment, limiting competition and marginalizing non-union contractors and their employees. Instead of rewarding merit, innovation and cost effectiveness, the Manitoba jobs agreement rewards union membership, a choice that should be voluntary, not coerced by government policy.

A major flaw in the Manitoba jobs agreement lies in its inherent discrimination against non-union tradespeople. By favouring union-only labour, the government is not simply choosing a vendor; it is dictating who can and cannot work on publicly funded

projects. This raises significant ethical and legal questions about the role of government in a free market economy.

Across Manitoba, thousands of skilled workers have chosen to remain non-unionized, either for philosophical reasons, economic considerations or professional flexibility. These tradespeople pay taxes, follow regulations and uphold safety standards just like their unionized counterparts. Yet under this policy, they are excluded from earning a living on projects that their tax dollars help fund. This is not just unfair; it is profoundly undemocratic.

Moreover, small- and medium-sized construction companies, many of which are non-union shops, are effectively frozen out of the bidding process. This not only limits business growth, but also undermines Manitoba's broader economic development by stifling innovation and entrepreneurship in the trades sector.

From an economic standpoint, the Manitoba jobs agreement introduces market inefficiencies into the procurement process. Restricting competition to only unionized contractors reduces the pool of qualified bidders, often leading to higher project costs. Studies from other jurisdictions have shown that union-only project labour agreements can increase the costs of public infrastructure projects by 12 to 18 per cent compared to open-bid models.

This means fewer schools, hospitals and roads for Manitobans, all while taxpayers foot a growing bill. Open bidding, which allows all qualified contractors to compete regardless of union status, fosters greater accountability, cost control and innovation. By reversing the current policy, Manitoba can unlock the full potential of its construction sector, ensuring that public funds are spent efficiently and projects are delivered on time and on budget.

Furthermore, allowing broader participation in government contracts increases employment opportunities across the board. Rather than propping up a narrow slice of the workforce, government policy should be aimed at expanding opportunity and economic inclusion, especially at a time when skilled labour shortages are affecting productivity.

The divisiveness of the Manitoba jobs agreement is not limited to economics. It also erodes social cohesion and trust in government. When public policy clearly benefits one group over another, based on affiliation rather than merit, it breeds resentment and alienation. In communities where non-union labour predominates, particularly in rural and northern

Manitoba, the policy is seen as a top-down imposition that disrespects local values and practices.

Furthermore, the policy politicizes the trades, dragging skilled workers into a labour ideology debate many would rather avoid. Most tradespeople are focused on doing quality work, providing for their families and contributing to their communities. The Manitoba jobs agreement forces them to choose between their principles and their livelihoods, pushing some to join unions simply to access work, not out of genuine alignment with the union's mission. This creates a false labour market, distorting genuine labour relations and undermining the freedom of association enshrined in Canadian law.

Politically, this policy shows this failing NDP government is beholden to union interests rather than serving the broader public. In a democracy, public policy must strive to be inclusive, impartial and representative of all citizens, not just those aligned with powerful interest groups.

At the heart of this debate lies a simple but powerful moral principle: equality of opportunity. Every qualified tradesperson in Manitoba, whether unionized or not, should have the right to compete fairly for work funded by their own taxes. This is not just a matter of policy; it is a matter of justice.

\* (16:50)

The Manitoba jobs agreement violates this principle by creating a two-tiered system that favours some workers over others. It sends a message that one's access to opportunity depends not on skill or dedication but on affiliation. Such a message undermines the dignity of work and the values of fairness and inclusion that Manitoba has long stood for. Instead of divisive, restrictive agreements, Manitoba must adopt a new strategy for public infrastructure development, one that emphasizes inclusion, fairness and open competition.

This new strategy should include open bidding requirements: all qualified contractors, union and non-union, should be able to bid on government contracts under the same terms. Merit-based evaluation: bids should be evaluated based on price, quality, safety record and past performance, not union affiliation. Clear labour standards: all projects should maintain high standards of safety, wages and worker protection, regardless of union standards. Regional inclusion: ensure equitable access to government contracts for rural and northern contractors, many of whom are non-union. Stakeholder consultation:

involve a broad range of voices including non-union contractors, Indigenous businesses and industry associations in developing labour and procurement policy. Such a strategy would not only reverse the harms caused by the Manitoba jobs agreement but also lay the foundation for a more dynamic and inclusive construction sector in Manitoba.

The few myths here that I've heard: union-only agreements ensure better safety and wages. Yes, unions have historically played an important role in advocating for workers' rights. However, modern labour standards and workplace safety regulations apply—already apply to all contractors, union or not. Non-union companies are equally capable of maintaining high safety and wage standards, and many already do. Another myth: this agreement supports unionized labour, which has more training and oversight. Training programs exist in both union and non-union environments. Government policy should support all quality training initiatives including apprenticeships in the open-shop sector. And the final myth: union-only contracts protect project timelines and quality. There is no evidence that non-union contractors are less capable of 'delivering'—delivering quality work on time. In fact, limiting bids to unionized firms can lead to labour shortages, delays and increased cost.

The Manitoba jobs agreement is a symbol of exclusion, inefficiency and unfairness in the Province's infrastructure strategy. It prioritizes ideology over results, union affiliation over merit and divides a workforce that should be united in building a better Manitoba. Today we call on this failing NDP government to immediately reverse this policy and replace it with a strategy rooted in fairness, competition and inclusion. All qualified Manitoba tradespeople, regardless of union status, deserve the opportunity to contribute to the province's growth and prosperity.

Let us not build a Manitoba where opportunity is reserved for a few. Let us build one where everyone has a fair chance to participate, compete and succeed.

Thank you, honourable deputy Speaker.

**Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods):** Friends, colleagues and fellow Manitobans, we all want to see Manitoba grow. We all want new schools, modern hospitals, infrastructure that keeps our communities strong. But we should also want to see these projects built fairly with accountability, competition and value for the taxpayer.

Unfortunately, this Manitoba jobs agreement does none of those. Clouding the reannouncement of four new schools, the NDP, without consultation with the public or construction industry as a whole or any other stakeholders, signed a deal that gives all the control of those projects to a select few while ignoring all other potential builders in the industry.

This isn't about helping families or strengthening our communities. It's about rewarding political allies at the expense of the vast majority of Manitobans, construction workers and at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers.

At the expense of all Manitobans, this deal hands guaranteed work and exclusive control to about 8,000 unionized workers while shutting out more than 80 per cent of the skilled tradespeople in this province, men and women who work for open-shop companies or belong to progressive unions. That's not fairness; that's discrimination against thousands of hard-working Manitobans who pay taxes, follow safety rules, train apprentices and build our communities every day.

Contractors and businesses that treat their employees well are being completely excluded by these jobs agreement unless the employer would relinquish all control to the government through this anti-competition jobs agreement.

And all the other hard-working Manitobans are paying for this with higher school taxes, higher education property taxes, higher income taxes, and likely the NDP will be raising sales tax next.

We are seeing billions of dollars of deficits, and no wonder, as the NDP are spending money out the door as fast as they can with uncompetitive deals like this job agreement.

Let's be clear. The deal doesn't create jobs; it limits opportunity. It doesn't build more schools; it drives up costs, which will result in less new builds, less new schools. We've seen this story before. In 2018, the British Columbia NDP government introduced a similar plan. They called it company benefits agreement. The promise was familiar: more training, more hiring, better value for taxpayers, but the result was the opposite. Projects under the system became mired in red tape, costs skyrocketed. Delays became common, and thousands of qualified workers were denied a fair chance to participate simply because they didn't carry a union card from the right union.

On one BC bridge project, the government's own cost breakdown listed a premium for CBA, a sur-

charge of \$6.6 million on a \$106-million project. That was the third largest cost item on the job behind only steel and excavation. It doesn't go to safety, training or materials; it went to politics, plain and simple. And that's what the—we risk here in Manitoba.

Let's also remember our own history. The Red River Floodway expansion used a 'similar' union-only model, and many skilled Manitobans were denied work on that project. It was unfair then, and it's unfair now. Supporters of this new job agreement will tell you that open-shop contractors don't pay their fair wages, don't follow safety laws or don't train apprentices. That's simply false.

Supporters of this—we already have a Construction Industry Wages Act that sets fair pay for every worker. We already have a provincial safety law that applies to every employer, and open-shop contractors, who represent the majority of our construction industry, invest heavily in training, safety and apprenticeships because their reputation and livelihood depend on it.

The truth is simple: Manitoba's construction workers, union or not, are among the most skilled, professional and safety-driven in the country. They deserve equal opportunity, not political exclusion. At this time of rising NDP deficits and the need to get our economy back on track after the impact of tariffs, inflation shocks and a pandemic, we should be welcoming competition to get the most value for taxpayers' dollars being invested so that our children—and, again, grandchildren—are not saddled with this NDP debt. This NDP side deal is going to mean less roads, bridges, hospitals and schools being built.

\* (17:00)

So what does this jobs agreement really mean? It means less competition; it means higher costs; it means fewer schools, hospitals and bridges for the same amount of public money. It discriminates against Indigenous-owned businesses, most of which are not a part of these select unions. It shuts out family-owned companies that have been building Manitoba communities for generations. And it tells thousands of qualified workers that their skills don't count simply because of who they work for. That is not the Manitoba way.

We believe in fairness; we believe in opportunity based on merit, and we believe that public projects funded by public dollars should be open to every qualified company and every qualified worker. The

Kinew NDP should step back from this costly mistake before it's too late.

Let's learn from the failures British Columbia—in British Columbia instead of repeating them here. Let's restore open tendering: the principle that every qualified contractor can bid and the best value for the taxpayers wins.

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

The members are not allowed to use the word Kinew NDP. Rather, you could use Kinew government; that's acceptable.

Thank you so much.

**Mrs. Robbins:** I apologize.

When governments restrict competition, taxpayers always pay more and get less. When governments pick winners and losers, innovation suffers and public trust erodes. But when we keep building open, transparent and competitive, everyone wins. That's how we built not only better schools, but stronger Manitobans on—based on fairness and respect for every worker in a province.

My son is a journeyman plumber in Brandon, Manitoba. He is not unionized, so I am proud of the work he took on but I'm ashamed that this government is considering him a second-class citizen—and his company.

Thank you.

**Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside):** I'm happy to rise today to speak in strong support of the motion before us, brought to us by members from Borderland and La Vérendrye.

Now, let's be clear about what's at stake here, honourable deputy Speaker. This isn't just a debate about contracts or procurement rules or labour policies; this is a debate about fairness, about inclusion, about opportunity and about whether our government is truly committed to serving all Manitobans or just a select few.

The so-called Manitoba jobs agreement, while dressed in language that sounds co-operative and productive, in practice has had a very different effect. It has created a two-tier system in our province's trades sector, a system where one group—unionized workers—are granted preferential access to publicly funded jobs, while another group—equally skilled, equally hard-working, but non-unionized—are effectively shut out.



That is not what democracy looks like. This is not what fairness looks like, and that is certainly not how we build a strong, united workforce for the future of our province.

Let's talk about some facts, honourable Speaker—honourable deputy Speaker. According to the most recent data, over 60 per cent of tradespeople in Manitoba are not unionized. These are small-business owners, independent contractors, workers who have chosen—for personal, professional or financial reasons—not to be part of a union. That is their right.

As my counterpart from Selkirk said earlier, it's a choice. It's protected under Canadian law. But under the Manitoba jobs agreement, that right is penalized.

We've already seen this play out on major infrastructure projects. Non-union contractors are told they must either unionize their workers temporarily or simply not bid at all. Some are forced to go through convoluted and costly arrangements just to participate. Others don't bother because the message is clear: you're not welcome unless you're part of the club.

This is a public sector policy that actively discriminates against more than half of the tradespeople in our province. I ask the members opposite: How is that fair? How can government be inclusive and representative when its policies exclude entire segments of our workforce?

How can we justify using public tax dollars, collected from every Manitoban—unionized or not—to fund projects that only benefit one portion of our labour force? This isn't just unfair, it's undemocratic. It's divisive and it's economically damaging.

Your honourable deputy Speaker, let's talk about the economic consequences. When you reduce competition, costs go up. That's basic economics. When only unionized contractors are allowed to bid on projects, especially in a province where they make up in the minority, we limit the number of bidders and that limits innovation, efficiency and cost savings.

Multiple studies across Canada, including from provinces like Ontario and British Columbia, have shown that closed tendering systems increase project costs by anywhere from 10 to 30 per cent. That is money we could be using to build more schools, fix more roads, invest in health care and support our front-line workers. We're spending more to get less, all in the name of political favouritism.

Let's not forget the impact on small family-owned businesses. These are often non-union shops that have

served our communities for generations. They've trained apprentices, they've donated to local charities, they've provided jobs in rural and northern Manitoba where union representation is often limited. Under this policy, these businesses are punished, their workers are sidelined, their experience is disregarded and their contributions are devalued.

What kind of message does that send to the next generation of tradespeople?

Honourable deputy Speaker, this doesn't have to be the way. We are not here to argue against unions whatsoever. Unions have played an important role in shaping fair labour standards in this province, and many unionized workers do exceptional work.

This motion is not anti-union; it's pro-choice, it's pro-worker and it's pro-fairness. We can build a system that welcomes all qualified tradespeople, union or non-union. We can create an inclusive procurement strategy that evaluates bids based on quality, safety and cost, not based on a political affiliation or a labour structure.

Let's level the playing field. Let's empower all Manitoba workers, regardless of their membership card. Let's build a system that reflects the diversity of our labour force, not one that forces conformity or—for access.

Other provinces have done it: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia have moved towards open tendering and inclusive workforce policies. They've seen increased competition, reduced costs and broader community involvement in public infrastructure. We in Manitoba can do the same and we must.

To the government members opposite, I say this: You were elected to represent all Manitobans, not just union leaders, not just the politically connected, but every family worker, every business owner who calls this province home. You were elected to be stewards of our public purses; to spend wisely, fairly and transparently; and you were elected to help build a stronger Manitoba, not one divided by ideology and policy.

This motion gives you a chance to correct course, to show that you are listening to the concerns of tradespeople across this province.

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

I would request the member to make their comments through the Chair, please—through the Chair, please.

**Mr. King:** My apologies, honourable deputy Speaker.

Let's not cling to a policy that divides and excludes. Don't double down on a system that limits access and drives up costs. Be bold enough to change it and be brave enough to fix it.

\* (17:10)

In closing, honourable deputy Speaker, let us not allow the Manitoba jobs agreement to become a symbol of division. Let it be a reminder, a turning point that prompted us to choose a better way. Let us build a Manitoba where every tradesperson, regardless of the union status, has a fair shot at all government contracts. Let us remember that inclusion means all, not some.

Honourable deputy Speaker, let us reverse this agreement and replace it with a strategy grounded in fairness, competition and respect for every Manitoban who gets up every morning, puts on their boots and goes to work building this province.

I urge all members of this Assembly to support this motion, not because it is politically convenient but because it is morally right, economically sound and democratically necessary.

Thank you, honourable deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Thank you, honourable deputy Speaker, and to my colleagues. It is an honour to speak to this opposition day motion this afternoon because it's important, but I also sort of feel like it's a sense of déjà vu because it is not the first time that the NDP have attempted to divide workers in Manitoba by the status of unionized or non-unionized.

My friend, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn), will remember well a former government that he was a part of—or that he was close to being a part of, I think—who brought forward a forced unionization bill to require workers on master labour agreements to either be part of a union or to pay union dues if they weren't actually in a union.

And I suspect that this bill has a similar sort of genesis as that bill did. I don't actually think it came from the minister's department or from the minister themselves. I have no doubt that at some point in the last few months, the minister received a call from room 204 and was summoned down to the Premier's

(Mr. Kinew) office and was told that they would be working on an agreement that would force companies to either pay union dues if they were not unionized and to divide and prioritize unionized work for projects that are identified in this particular agreement.

And that member, the current minister responsible for the file, may not have had all of the history in the Legislature of how failed these agreements have been. But, certainly, they have been failed, and I would have hoped that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) would have imparted his years of experience to go to the new minister to say, you know, we've gone down this road before and it didn't work well for us. It didn't work well for them, actually, from an economic perspective, but it also didn't work well from them politically because Manitobans are a fair-minded people. Manitobans believe in having things done equitably and fairly and not divided into status.

Now, notionally, the Premier, I think, understands this as well. He knows this notionally because he's come up with the phrase: one Manitoba. And he talks about it, but he doesn't act in the way that would identify him as someone who actually is committed to that principle. So he uses it as a tagline or he uses it in speeches that he's giving, and that's fine. I'm sure when he's giving those speeches he gets a good response when he says one Manitoba. But then he brings in an agreement like this that clearly divides Manitobans; it splits them, and it's two-tiered Manitobans in terms of whether or not they're in a union or they're not in a union.

Now—[interjection] Well, I'm glad to hear the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) pipe in because he also remembers, having been a key adviser, I think, in the past on these forced unionization agreements.

Now, I suspect he didn't go to the Premier and argue against it because that would take a certain degree of gravitas to actually do that. Where I—I do think, though, the Minister of Agriculture might have because I do think in his heart he knows that when he's on the streets in Dauphin that this isn't going to be particularly popular. And if you look back in the history of that, you'll remember why. You'll remember why. [interjection]

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

Let's keep it low, please.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I know it's hard for the Minister of Justice to contain himself; he's been cautioned in this House several times. In fact, he was the subject of an

unprecedented Speaker's ruling, and I thought maybe he'd learned the lessons of that, but apparently not.

But, speaking of not learning lessons, let's hearken back to the time when the former NDP government brought forward these type of agreements of forced unionization, to say that on projects like the East Side Road Authority, as an example, or the expansion of the floodway, that individuals had to be part of a union; they had to be forced to join a union.

Now, there was, I think, an auditor's report that actually looked into the East Side Road Authority and what an absolute disaster that was. It might enlightening reading for the members opposite if they wanted to go back and see what a terrible, terrible thing that was.

Now, of course, the expansion of the floodway that happened, also under a forced unionization program, the project itself had merit, but there was significant cost overruns, and part of it was because they were forcing individuals workers who were not part of a union to have to pay union dues. This seems to go even further by giving preference to those who are bidding on projects who are in a union.

And, ultimately, it's not about whether a person is your—in a union or not, and the union has nothing to do with how I or others feel about unions. We all know that there's good things that have come from unionization, and there's been work that's been done through unionization. But that's an individual's choice. That's a choice for an individual, to decide whether or not to join a union. Some choose to; some choose not to. But to divide Manitobans based on unionization is not only economically a bad decision that has repercussions from a financial perspective, it also, honourable deputy Speaker, has significant impact on Manitobans themselves and how they view their government, because they should view their government—is an entity that is going to act equitably and fairly for all Manitobans.

And it's been spoken well by my colleagues, my friends on this side of the House, about those hard-working Manitobans who are working in the trades, who get up in the morning, who go to their job site, who work hard, whether it's plus 40° in the summer or -40° in the winter and all the variations that we have between in the province of Manitoba, who earn a solid day's pay, who come home to their families who are trying to get ahead in a time when costs are going up, when it's difficult to make ends meet as a family. And the last thing that they have to worry about is whether or not their individual company is somehow going to

be discriminated against by the government because they may or may not be in a union. That's not something that should be placed upon them. They don't expect that their government is going to pick winners and losers when it comes to these sorts of projects. Their expectation is that the government identifies projects based on their merit, that they put them out to a tender and that the tender is awarded to whomever comes back with the most appropriate bid. That's the expectation for Manitobans who are going out and working.

Now, I said this before in the House, honourable deputy Speaker, and I will say it again: It's incumbent upon Manitobans—and I think that they are now starting to say, okay, what the government is saying, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) in particular, because the Premier essentially is that whole government—we saw that in question period again, where ministers are essentially window dressing and the Premier answers every question.

But Manitobans are looking now and saying what the Premier is saying isn't the same thing as what the Premier is actually doing. He talks about one Manitoba, and it sounds good to the ear, but what actually happens then, in terms of policy or implementation, is something quite different.

#### *The Speaker in the Chair*

And this is, I think, what Manitobans are coming alive to, whether it's issues around the challenges that we've seen from Cabinet ministers, who've gotten into themselves and no end of trouble over the summer—the divisive comments that we heard from the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) when it came to the assassination of a political commentator—doesn't match with the words of one government. It doesn't match with the words of a government who says that they're in it for all the people.

And this is just the latest example, again, not driven, I don't think, by the minister—clearly driven out of room 204 in the Manitoba Legislature, clearly driven by the Premier, who understands that if he says something, maybe people will actually think that that's what he's doing.

\* (17:20)

But just like the master labour agreement that went in place with the East Side Road Authority or the challenge that happened with the expansion of the floodway, ultimately, the truth is borne out, and Manitobans will see as these projects come forward that they're not being distributed fairly, that the

taxpayers are not paying for things that are equitable in terms of the bidding, that there are two classes of Manitobans, that Manitobans are being divided not in one Manitoba but two Manitobans, three Manitobas, four Manitobans. The pie of Manitoba with this government is starting to look like a pizza, there's so many slices because of—they're cutting it up in so many different pieces.

And I think that Manitobans are becoming very, very aware of that, and ultimately, they're going to grow more and more concerned about it. So, you know, my hope would be that the government would take this as a friendly opposition day motion, almost like a friendly amendment, that they would see this for what—I mean, we're not here necessarily to always do what's good for the government, but I think this is one of those cases where the opposition is saying, you know what, let's put aside partisanship, let's do the right thing for Manitobans as a whole, let's give the government an opportunity to save them from themselves and actually, ultimately, do something that will benefit them in the long run by doing away with this particular agreement that's been foisted upon them by the Premier.

So they'll have that opportunity as some point late into the night to vote and to have that put on to the record and do the right thing, and tomorrow they can start fresh. Instead of dividing Manitoba up into a thousand pieces, perhaps the Premier wants to live by his words that there is actually one Manitoba.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain):** I'm actually happy to put a few words on the record here from my colleague from Borderland who put this opposite option—opposition day motion forward when it came to, you know, unionized contracts to individuals, companies that actually have unions.

And, like I said, this is how we say—my favourite saying in this Chamber right now is history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme. Because this is exactly what happened during the Selinger-day government when they raised—the costs of everything went up so much when it comes to contracts that went out there. We saw that with the floodway, the Red River Floodway. You know, it was—companies who did not have a union could not—basically said companies may not apply if you don't have a union.

And the fact is that's exactly what happens. You know, they favour their NDP friends, their union friends, and basically, when they actually understand

when it comes to economics, it's basically saying that when it comes to tendering, you want to have a lot of competition. And they also refuse to do the new western partnership agreement so that brings more competition into the western region of this country.

And the fact is, again, they have to be accountable for taxpayers. Taxpayers are the ones that are being taxed. It's the private sector that does—that drives this economy. It's consumer spending, it's—most of businesses out here are basically small business that have only a number of employees, who treat their employees like family. If they didn't, they would not actually have employees working for them.

Much like myself and my colleague from Selkirk, our staff are family members. And the fact is, we gave—and they give—we gave them incentives. We made sure they were looked after. We had disability insurance. We made sure that they had a group RSP so they had a retirement to look forward to. We also made a share ownership plan. Hey, if this company's going to be successful, we want to make sure our staff are successful.

And that's what a lot of these construction companies do the same thing too. They actually are there to look after their staff and not have them-against-us type of thing. And that's what happens when you actually have a government whose philosophy is like that; it drives business away. It drives businesses away to other provinces in this country. And it's very sad that this government is actually looking at that. They need to take an economic course, how important it is to have competition, because competition brings down prices.

We're seeing that with the tariffs right now with the US. They criticize the US for what they're doing right now. They're not doing anything different here, Honourable Speaker. When it comes to putting specialized interest groups such as only companies that have unionized staff get these contracts, they're doing the same thing that the United States are doing right now to the private sector. And it's this private sector that drives this economy. And they have no clue—they never actually participated.

I know a very good friend who has—owns one of those employment service companies, a major one in this province, by the way. And the fact is he was against them when they did it the last time around in the 2000s, before we took over from 2016. They were saying—he was saying—you know what, Honourable Speaker? He told me that when we got into government, he didn't have to worry about what was coming

at him. But when they—when the NDP are in here, everything comes at them as a business.

And the fact is, they look after employment for other businesses out here, and right now he's saying it's very bleak because a lot of the businesses are starting to go away from out—to the other provinces. By putting more labour laws like that, what they're doing here, more of that business is flowing elsewhere and a lot of—we're going to lose a lot of employees.

Because right now, we're suffering right now, especially in the city of Winnipeg. And the fact is, that is what they represent. And the fact is, when it comes to small business, I'm proud to be part of a small business, when I had—

**An Honourable Member:** Yes, we heard.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes, yes. Mind you, not one of these people in that side have had any kind of business background.

**An Honourable Member:** No experience.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** No experience at all. *[interjection]* Well, except for that unsuccessful lawyer over there, Honourable Speaker. The fact is, she had to join a union; she had to work at Canada Post because she couldn't succeed as a lawyer.

The fact is, this is where we're facing right now, Honourable Speaker, when it comes to the business environment—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The Speaker is standing. I realize it's late in the day, but you will respect each other and you will respect the Speaker.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** And, you know, like I said, when it comes to construction companies, I know when it came to the ones that were putting tenders in for the floodway, that floodway actually—like, the cost accelerated when they—when this happened before. And we're going to see other major projects out there too. Who knows, we're probably going to see major projects up in Churchill, we hope—at someday. And the fact is—or in—anywhere in the Hudson Bay.

And the fact is, this is unfair when it comes to only—basically awarding unionized contract—I mean, contracts to unionized companies. We have a lot of talent out there; a lot of talent don't stick around when it comes to unionized—working in a union a lot of times. They work for private sectors at it—they're

going to be feeling appreciative that they actually can strive at a company that's going to give them a bright future—many, possibly ownership. There's a lot of companies out there that have been taken over by employees. I saw a lot in my own constituency.

And the fact is, these workers work really hard. They're not unionized but they're being taken care of by their employer. And the fact is, this is what the NDP is trying to do right now, is actually discredit them for what they need to be accomplished. This is how this economy is driven by—is companies that are thriving, the companies that have a future, the companies that look after their employees.

There are the futures that are going to be—the ones that are going to prosper. But right now, a lot of these companies are feeling that—well, one of the things that they said when the first budget, Honourable Speaker, was join a union, become part of the middle class. That probably chased away a lot of investment in this province by having that message out there.

As an employer, a lot of them—like, a lot of connections I have with a lot of major employers in this province. I really feel that they're going to go elsewhere; they're going to find places elsewhere to do business.

**An Honourable Member:** Dead last in GDP.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes, they're dead last. And we're seeing a lot of manufacturing jobs being lost here in this province right now. It's going to happen more and more.

The fact is—because, again, if they do any kind of contracts when it comes to schools, building construction of schools, hospitals—again, a lot of these construction companies—sometimes again, you might have a major contractor who looks after the projects, but what happens to the people that he subcontracts it to? Do they all have to have unionized employees? Is that a question that the—the ministry can actually ask this?

Because if that disqualifies that, that takes away a lot of opportunity for a lot of talented companies to do businesses as subcontractors when it comes to these companies. And, like the member for Rossmere (MLA Schmidt)—when she speaks—the fact that she has no clue of how businesses actually work.

And the fact is, business opportunities—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** So, Honourable Speaker, what I say here when it comes to private business. I think this is

a wrong direction. I believe that the province is going to suffer; our taxpayers are going to suffer, because the fact is, at the end of the day, it's hard-working Manitobans that pay for government services right now.

\* (17:30)

And right now, this NDP government have no consideration for the hard-working—the employees out there, many of them working in the private sector. They all really know that there—they're already second class compared to what these—the NDP are looking for when it comes to unionized employees.

And right now, when I talk to the construction industry—I was talking to an individual, the Winnipeg building association. They said only 16 per cent of workers in the construction industry are unionized. So that takes away a lot of opportunity for companies to bid on.

And this is kind of a sad world when we look at actually dividing when it comes to employees out there, Honourable Speaker. I feel the fact is, you know what? It's a free enterprise: let the best get the contracts; let the best company who does a job—that do a great job.

Because we see a lot of times some of these contracts that are completed, they're not always completed on the right—I was a minister. I saw a lot of construction jobs that we had to redo again because it wasn't the right company that actually did the job. They did not have the talent, maybe, that—to make sure that these projects would last for periods of time, Honourable Speaker.

So like I said, I would pass it on to one of my other colleagues to talk about this issue, but for now, this is the wrong direction. I feel that we're on the right side of history right now.

**MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** Today I stand to represent hard-working Manitobans and to express our serious concerns and strong opposition to this—to the government's anti-competitive Manitoba jobs agreement.

I am glad that the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) put forward this private member's motion that calls upon the provincial government to immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs agreement, replacing it with a strategy that ensures all Manitoba tradespeople can benefit from government contracts regardless of their union status.

The information that's been shared is that the Manitoba jobs agreement applies to major construction projects funded by the provincial government, typically those exceeding the threshold of \$50 million. The MJA's first application is the construction of four new schools across the province, and I would be remiss to say mine is still not built in Dawson Trail.

The information that is being shared is that under this agreement, contractors bidding on these large-scale public projects are required to prioritize hiring Manitoba-based workers. The aim is to ensure that economic benefits of these projects stay within the province and support local workforces.

The invasion—information that's being shared is that the agreement established these consistent standards for wages, benefits and working conditions across all work sites regardless of workers' union status or employer. Everyone on the project must operate under the same baseline terms, ensuring fairness and safety for all. Built into the agreement are specific apprenticeship targets. At least 10 per cent of the total project hours must be reserved for apprentices, promoting skill development and creating long-term career opportunities for young or less-experienced workers.

In addition, equity targets are core components: at least 20 per cent of new hires must come from equity-deserving groups such as Indigenous Manitobans, women and newcomers. This requirement is intended to make the constructors—construction sector more inclusive and representative of Manitoba's population.

The Manitoba jobs agreement modifies the traditional competitive 'beening' process. While it does not exclude non-union contractors from bidding, it requires that once a contract is awarded, all workers on-site operate under a unified collective agreement. This approach is intended to reduce disputes and ensure consistency across workforces. And I think the key point here is that all—while it does not exclude the non-union contractors, it does force them into a union once they've been awarded a contract.

To support this union—to support this model, some unions, particularly those in the Manitoba building trades, have agreed to key concessions, including 'reliq'—excuse me—[interjection]—relinquishing certain organizational rights—thank you. These compromises aim to ensure labour stability and predictability on job sites, minimizing delays due to strikes or jurisdictional conflicts. So that—the information being presented, but let's break it down to what it really means. This is essentially a Manitoba job

restriction agreement, a policy that limits opportunity, 'compromises'—

**An Honourable Member:** Compromises.

**MLA Lagassé:**—thank you—compromises fairness and puts millions in public funds at risk.

Some contractors and industry groups have raised serious concerns about the Manitoba jobs agreement. I share many of these concerns. This policy looks a lot like a sweetheart deal that gives unions the clear advantage while pushing out non-union competition and driving up project costs.

I'm also deeply concerned that the agreement will lead to much higher public spending. When wages and benefits are mandated across the board without flexibility, the cost of building schools, roads and hospitals could rise sharply, and that cost falls on—you guessed it—taxpayers.

Enforcement is another major issue. Who's making sure the contracts are actually following these rules? Are apprentices really getting meaningful opportunities? Are equity targets truly being met, or just reported? Without strong oversight, these goals risk becoming empty promises.

There's also the question of fairness. How are qualified contractors being defined? If the criteria aren't transparent or consistent, small businesses and non-union contractors will be shut out, even if they're fully capable of doing the work. And when I think about my riding and the amount of small businesses which I have listed off here in the past, our—it would be incredibly disadvantage—at a disadvantage for these smaller companies that are capable of doing this work when under this agreement.

Finally, I'm concerned that adding new layers of labour rules, equity requirements, and reporting processes can lead to delays, red tape and inefficiencies in how projects are approved and delivered. The public deserves infrastructure that's built on time, on budget and with fairness at its core, not weighed down by bureaucracy or backroom deals.

The Merit Contractors Association has serious concerns about the Manitoba jobs agreement, saying it creates an unfair playing field in the construction industry. They believe the policy gives unionized contractors a big advantage by forcing all workers on major public projects to follow a union-style agreement even if the company doing the work is not unionized. That, they say, shuts out many qualified

non-union contractors from even having a fair shot at this work.

Merit is also worried about how this could impact project costs. With the government setting fixed wages, benefits and working conditions, they believe the price tag for public infrastructure could go up, something taxpayers would ultimately have to cover.

They argue that non-union contractors often get—offer great work at lower costs, and locking them out means Manitobans might not be getting the best value for their money. I say that again: locking them out means Manitobans might not be getting the best value for their money.

On top of that, there are questions about how contractors will be chosen under this new system. Merit says smaller companies could get bogged down by added red tape, especially with new labour and equity requirements. In their view, the jobs agreement moves Manitoba away from open and fair competition and towards a more closed off, restrictive system that limits opportunities instead of creating them. Merit and other contractor industry groups' concerns are valid, and they really should be listened to.

\* (17:40)

Merit Contractors Association is a national organization that represents construction companies operating in the open-shop sector, meaning companies that are not affiliated with unions. In Manitoba, Merit represents a significant portion of the construction industry, giving voices to non-union contractors who often feel left out of government policy discussions that impact their ability to compete for public sector work.

Their opinion carries weight when it comes to the Manitoba jobs agreement because this policy directly affects how the public infrastructure projects are awarded and who is allowed to work on them. Under the M-J-A, even if a non-union company wins a government contract, all workers on that site must still follow a union-style collective agreement for wages, benefits and working conditions.

Today, I urge this government to repeal the Manitoba jobs agreement. We need to preserve a tendering process that welcomes a free market of competition, the same kind that has built Canada. Let's keep playing the field fair and open to all companies. Every qualified worker and contractor in this province deserves a fair shot at public projects, the very ones their 'toxic'—tax dollars fund. This

approach ensures that Manitoba's—Manitobans get real value for their tax money, not the raw deal.

Let's build a Manitoba that values merit, fairness and true worth over politics. The people I represent, and all Manitobans, deserve nothing less.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** No further speakers?

Is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**The Speaker:** Question before the House is the opposition day motion brought forward by the honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter).

Do members wish to have the motion read?

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**The Speaker:** So the motion is that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba call on the provincial government to immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs agreement, replacing it with a strategy to ensure all Manitoba tradespeople can benefit from government contracts regardless of their union status.

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 Nays have it.

#### Recorded Vote

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader):** Could I request a recorded vote, please.

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

So the question before the House is the opposition day motion brought forward by the honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter).

The motion is that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba call on the provincial government to immediately reverse its divisive Manitoba jobs agreement, replacing it with a strategy to ensure all Manitoba tradespeople can benefit from government contracts regardless of union status.

\* (17:50)

#### Division

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

#### Ayes

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

#### Nays

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

**The Speaker:** And just as a note, there are no members sitting virtually, so there will be no virtual vote.

**Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish):** Ayes 17, Nays 32.

**The Speaker:** The motion is accordingly defeated.

The hour being past 5 o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, October 6, 2025

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