



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**

**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report  
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey  
Speaker*



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

<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

Thursday, March 5, 2026

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

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

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 29—The University of Winnipeg  
Amendment Act**

**Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), that Bill 29, The University of Winnipeg Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**MLA Cable:** I am pleased to introduce Bill 29, The University of Winnipeg Amendment Act. This bill modernizes The University of Winnipeg Act to ensure the institution has a governance framework that is effective, transparent, accountable and representative of our provincial body.

It positions the Board of Regents to be able to carry out its responsibilities effectively while continuing to respect the institution's rich history and 'auntonomy.'

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Further introduction of—is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 35—The Adult Learning Centres  
Amendment Act**

**Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 35, The Adult Learning Centres Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**MLA Cable:** I am pleased to introduce Bill 35, The Adult Learning Centres Amendment Act. This bill will amend The Adult Learning Centres Act to allow government to reduce barriers to adult education and advance truth and reconciliation by recognizing and respecting the expertise and self-determination of First Nations and supporting improved graduation outcomes for Indigenous learners.

The intent of this bill is to give First Nations band councils the option to register and operate adult learning

centres either independently or in partnership with a recognized education institution, depending on what best suits their community.

This amendment is well overdue. I thank the House for the consideration.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

**Bill 30—The Intimate Partner Violence  
Death Review Committee Act**

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), that Bill 30, the intimate partner violence death review committee, be now read for a first time.

**The Speaker:** Been moved by the honourable Minister of Justice, seconded by the honourable Minister of Families, that Bill 30, The Intimate Partner Violence Death Review Committee Act, be now read for a first time.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce this bill, which will re-establish the former domestic violence death review committee, established to examine the circumstances of select IPV deaths and to make recommendations to prevent similar deaths in the future. It will establish the committee's structure, role and purpose, define its responsibilities and provide authority for the collection, use, disclosure and storage of information through digital means, ensuring that it's secure and that it's protected.

The bill is a step toward preventing gender-based and IPV deaths here in this province and changing the culture to protect vulnerable Manitobans. It also aligns with the Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag as strategy and Canada's framework to address gender-based violence.

I am pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 31—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act**

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (MLA Naylor), that Bill 31, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, be now read a first time

***Motion presented.***

**Mr. Wiebe:** This bill amends The Highway Traffic Act's licensing and suspension sanctions and restrictions for impaired driving offences. The amendments will increase licence suspension for drivers who register their first warn from three to seven days and a further four days when there is a child in the car, extend the ignition interlock program to drivers receiving a three-month roadside suspension, impose a zero per cent BAC on all drivers who fail or refuse roadside screening or who are convicted of an impaired offence and introduce a new zero per cent BAC requirement for drivers of class 1 to 4 commercial and emergency vehicles.

Honourable Speaker, this is important legislation, another step forward in ensuring that our roads are safe and that impaired drivers are off the roads. I'm pleased to introduce this bill to the Legislature.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 8—The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Amendment Act**

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the Minister responsible for Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation, that Bill 8, The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

***Motion presented.***

**Mr. Wiebe:** This bill amends and builds on The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act, which now regulates the retail sale of machetes and other long-bladed weapons, to also include online retailers as well as secondary sellers expressly to be subject to this act. Bill 8 will also add pepper spray into the act, and it changes the name of the act to reflect this broader scope.

Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 9—The Street Weapons Control Act**

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the minister for municipal relations, that Bill 9, The Street Weapons Control Act, be now read for a first time.

***Motion presented.***

**Mr. Wiebe:** I'm pleased to introduce Bill 9, The Street Weapons Control Act. This bill will prohibit the possession of street weapons, including machetes, swords, axes and pepper spray, in public places, in populated areas throughout the province. Public spaces include areas such as schools, hospitals, buses, parks, playgrounds and the common areas of apartment buildings.

Bill 9 would also allow for law enforcement to seize street weapons with or without a charge and would establish new provincial offences for possession and for obstructing of an enforcement officer. The bill will only apply for First Nations if they choose to opt in, and we will continue to work with them.

Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

\* (13:40)

**Bill 10—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy)**

**Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), that Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy); Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi (congé d'attachement en cas d'adoption ou de recours à la gestation pour autrui), be now read a first time.

**The Speaker:** It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, seconded by the honourable Minister of Families, that Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

**MLA Marcelino:** Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy).

The purpose of this bill is to add a 16-week unpaid protected leave for employees to carry out the responsibilities related to the placement of a child into their care through adoption or surrogacy. The leave will now allow employees in Manitoba to access the new federal employment insurance benefit for this same purpose when it becomes available.

This bill supports our commitment to protect workers' jobs and to always stand up for the rights of working people. It also reflects the different ways that families are formed in our province. I am pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Before I ask for the bill to be passed, I need to read the full and complete name of the bill into the record. So it's Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy).

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 11—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Sick Notes for Employee Absences)**

**Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 11, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Sick Notes for Employee Absences); *Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi (notes de médecin en cas d'absence d'un employé)*, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**MLA Marcelino:** Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Bill 11, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Sick Notes for Employee Absences).

The purpose of this bill is to limit when an employer may require a sick note from an employee who is absent from work due to illness or injury. Employers may only require a sick note if an employee's absence continues for more than seven consecutive days, or if an employee has been absent on more than 10 working days in total in the same calendar year.

When a sick note can be requested, it may be issued by a variety of health professionals. Also, when an employer requests an employee to provide a sick note after the restricted period, the employee will be entitled to reimbursement from their employer for

costs of the sick note if incurred. This bill also provides clarity to verification requirements for long-term protected leaves.

I am pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 14—The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act**

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 14, The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act; *Loi modifiant la Loi sur divulgations faites dans l'intérêt public (protection des divulgateurs d'actes répréhensibles)*, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**MLA Sala:** I'm pleased to introduce Bill 14, The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act).

Our government is committed to accountability and transparency, and these amendments are an important part of our work to rebuild and support a strong public service.

Bill 14 enhances protections for whistle-blowers, closes long-standing gaps in the legislation and ensures that when public servants come forward, their identities are safeguarded and their concerns are taken seriously. These amendments help protect the integrity of our public service and reinforce Manitoba as a national leader in whistle-blower protection. I'm very pleased to bring this bill forward today.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

**Bill 16—The Mental Health Amendment Act**

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister responsible for Mental Health):** I move, seconded by the—by senior—by the Minister for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, that Bill 16, The Mental Health Amendment Act, now be read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Smith:** I'm pleased to rise in the House today to introduce Bill 16, the Mental Health Amendment Act.

This bill will expand the scope of qualified health professionals who can undertake examinations and apply for psychiatric assessments of individuals that may be at high risk of harming themselves or others due to mental health disorders.

The expanded scope will include physician assistants, clinical assistants and nurse practitioners, as currently only physicians may apply for involuntary psychiatric assessments under The Mental Health Act.

Expanding authority of qualified health professionals will improve access to urgent mental health care and alleviate delays in psychiatric assessment and treatment across Manitoba, including in emergency department crisis response settings and remote areas of Manitoba.

While Mental Health Act does not prohibit the use of virtual technology, Bill 16 will—confirms the authority of qualified health professionals to conduct remote examinations and assessments under the Mental Health Review Board to conduct remote hearings. I'm pleased to present this bill to—

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

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

#### **Bill 17—The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act**

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), that Bill 17, The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**MLA Fontaine:** I'm pleased to get up and introduce Bill 17, The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act. This bill will—is the first legislative step to implement recommendations from Justice William Burnett to improve the operations and processes of the Adult Abuse Registry and enhance confidence in the Adult Abuse Registry system.

Currently, provisions in The Adult Abuse Registry Act require a two-step panel process for the Adult Abuse Registry Committee decision-making process. By eliminating the first panel, the proposed bill will preserve procedural fairness while streamlining the process.

I am pleased to present Bill 17 to the House for consideration.

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

#### **Bill 18—The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act (Strengthening Enforcement)**

**Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change):** Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz), that Bill 18, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act (Strengthening Enforcement), be now read a first time. *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

It's been moved by the Honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Innovation and New Technology, that—*[interjection]* Order, please—that Bill 18, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act (Strengthening Enforcement), be now read a first time.

\* (13:50)

**MLA Moyes:** The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act introduces a more robust and progressive enforcement framework to modernize and strengthen Manitoba's waste aversion and prevention efforts. It clarifies the tools available to environment officers in cases of non-compliance, including the ability to issue compliance orders to regulated parties, which include stewards, stewardship program operators and landfill owners and operators, and the authority for the director to impose administrative penalties when those orders are not followed.

In support of greater transparency, the bill also enhances public access to information related to waste reduction and prevention programs, as well as inspection and enforcement activities. I'm pleased to introduce Bill 18 for the consideration of the House.

Thank you.

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

#### **Bill 19—The Animal Care Amendment Act**

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture):** Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), that The Animal Care Amendment Act, Bill 19, be now read for the first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** I'm pleased to introduce Bill 19, The Animal Care Amendment Act. The bill doubles the fines for first offenders. Subsequent offences' fines

may rise to a maximum of \$100,000 and also prison terms to be increased.

In addition, the bill establishes a new 'licensing' regime for selling and transferring pet animals. Through regulations, this approach will work—will first work with those selling of transferring of dogs and puppies. Additional charges to be billed were also made to incorporate animal welfare codes and standards, and the bill also clarifies the procedure for the appeal of an order. Manitoba supports the ongoing effort towards animal welfare.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

### **Bill 33—The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act**

**Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures (Mr. Bushie), that The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire et la Charte de la ville de Winnipeg, be now read for the first time.

**The Speaker:** It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations, seconded by the honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures, that Bill 33, The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

**Mr. Simard:** Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Bill 33, The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act, to uphold and strengthen the autonomy of Manitoba's municipalities, while fixing red tape to support positive outcomes for land-use planning in Manitoba.

This bill demonstrates our government's commitment to continue to improve Manitoba's land-use planning framework, as recommended by the Braid report and outlined in Manitoba's land-use planning action plan. Amendments proposed in the bill will make The Planning Act and The City of Winnipeg Charter more consistent, refine the role of the Municipal Board, increase local autonomy and fix the governance model for regional planning.

I am pleased to present this bill to the House for consideration.

**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**

### **International Women's Day**

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity):** Today we mark International Women's Day 2026. This year's theme: Rights. Justice. Action. For All Women and Girls, is both a declaration and a demand from women across the globe. Women today hold only 64 per cent of the legal rights men do. And at the current pace, it could take nearly 300 years to close that gap. From abortion bans to the Taliban's gender apartheid to the so-called marriage of little girls in patriarchal regimes, laws continue to be weaponized to control women's bodies, silence our voices and erase our autonomy.

These are human rights violations and the clearest illustrations of patriarchy. And the rage women feel in response is not irrational or emotional. It is political clarity.

When we speak of systems—when we speak of patriarchy, we are speaking of systems, systems of governance, justice, economy and power that have historically privileged domination, control and the oppression of women and girls; systems that normalize male violence and protect institutions and the reputations of billionaires more fiercely than they protect women and girls.

For decades, women have tried to reform these systems, to make them kinder, to make them more inclusive, more representative. But the reality is, progress remains fragile and in many places it's getting roil—rolled back.

It's important to acknowledge not all women in positions of power are willing to challenge these systems. Some become enforcers of patriarchy, measuring their worth through the proximity to male power and working to preserve the very structures that harm women, like United States Attorney General Pam Bondi, who suggested naming and prosecuting powerful men could collapse the entire system

To that, I say this: Burn it all down. If a system would collapse under the weight of holding powerful men accountable for abusing women and girls, then it's not a system worth protecting. If a system depends on silence, impunity and shielding predators to survive, then it's a system that deserves to fall.

Women are not asking for permission anymore. Women are demanding justice and transformation.

Here in Manitoba, I am so proud to be part of a government that understands advancing women's rights requires more than just words, it requires action. Our government is investing in what women and girls need to live a good life, to live a safe life: health care, safety, education and training, economic opportunities, family supports and so much more.

And I am deeply honoured to stand in this Chamber alongside such phenomenal, compassionate, brilliant women and gender-diverse colleagues who bring their strength, intelligence and leadership to this work and in this Chamber every single day.

Finally, I dedicate my ministerial statement to all of the women and girls being significantly impacted by the current global warfare we are witnessing from men.

Miigwech.

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** Honourable Speaker, today I rise to recognize and celebrate the amazing women of Manitoba whose leadership, service and determination strengthen our province every single day.

International Women's Day reminds us of a powerful truth: when we invest in women, when we open doors and give encouragement, the return is immeasurable.

Progressive Conservatives believe in creating the conditions and opportunities for Manitoba women to succeed. That means ensuring women and girls have access to education and pathways into high-demand careers. PCs were proud to invest in skills training that empower women in health care, IT, aerospace, construction and so much more.

It means ensuring life is affordable for young mothers, which is why the MLA for Midland continues to fight for reducing the tax burden on low-income and middle-class Manitobans to make it easier to live and raise a family here in Manitoba.

It means ensuring women are safe. That's why PCs passed Clare's Law in 2022 and why the MLA for Selkirk has introduced anti-stalking legislation.

\* (14:00)

It means fostering leadership at every level. The previous PC government welcomed the first woman premier in Manitoba history, as well as electing Manitoba's first-ever Black woman into the Legislature and into Cabinet.

The MLA for Morden-Winkler has advanced the role of women in politics through her work in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians.

The tireless efforts of the MLA for Roblin have brought more attention to breast cancer in Manitoba. Her bill on earlier breast cancer screenings will ensure better health outcomes for women.

And we're proud to have recently gained someone like the MLA for Spruce Woods on our PC team, who's done amazing job advocating for rural women.

And I stand here as a proud female for the PC party of Manitoba, an elected MLA to represent the great people of Agassiz. I applaud all of the women here in this Chamber for their leadership, their work in their roles representing their communities.

To the women and girls of Manitoba: Your ambitions matter, your hard work matters, your leadership matters.

Our role as legislatures is to ensure that opportunity is within reach so that when you step forward, there is nothing holding you back. When women rise, Manitoba rises with them.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Honourable Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

**The Speaker:** Does the honourable member for Tyndall Park have leave to respond? *[Agreed]*

**MLA Lamoureux:** Honourable Speaker, the theme for this year's International Women's Day here in Canada is Give to Gain, and it's once again an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women and girls.

Women are often thought of as givers, and in the process of giving in our chosen fields, we're often overlooked in a system that disadvantages and challenges us. In many aspects of our lives, it is truly sad that women and gender-diverse folks have only 64 per cent of the legal rights that men hold worldwide.

Gender equality is one of the most effective ways to build healthier, more prosperous, and more inclusive communities, workplaces and countries, and we as women excel in generosity, collaboration and shared progress.

I am proud to be a woman and to join with others as we continue to work towards dismantling all barriers

to equal justice, discriminatory laws, weak legal protections, and harmful practices and social norms.

Honourable Speaker, every year I try to highlight one of the events happening in Manitoba in celebration and recognition of International Women's Day. This year, an organization, Latinas Manitoba, is hosting a round-table event here at the Legislature. Together, we will be learning about women's rights in Canada, immigration, family supports, settlement resources and where to go for help, if needed. Latinas Manitoba, led by Fernanda Vallejo, is an example of a strong woman who continues to work exceptionally hard for rights and justice. She's a true community leader, interpreter and advocate whose journey, work and impact has made a difference for immigrant and refugee women here in Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, as a female politician and as a mother of almost two, I know the challenges that women in these chambers have faced to get here and continue to face. My hope is that we can work together to eliminate barriers so we can best work to our full potential.

Happy International Women's Day.

#### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

##### Bill Loewen

**MLA Billie Cross (Seine River):** I rise today to honour the life and legacy of Bill Loewen, a remarkable Manitoban and cherished member of the Seine River constituency.

I had the privilege of meeting with Bill many times and in each conversation, he spoke with an immense passion about his vision for St. Norbert.

Bill was a co-founder of Heritage St. Norbert and a tireless champion of the St. Norbert Farmers' Market. He believed deeply in preserving the history of our community and sharing it proudly so that future generations could experience it not only as a place to live, but as a tourist destination that tells our province's story.

Bill's contributions to Manitoba were profound and far-reaching. Through his leadership, philanthropy and volunteerism, he strengthened our province's cultural life and community institutions. His decades of support for the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra helped ensure that music and the arts continue to enrich families across generations. His generosity also strengthened the Behavioural Health Foundation in St. Norbert, supporting healing and recovery for families across Manitoba.

Bill was also a visionary entrepreneur whose success created opportunities for others. And as a generous community builder, he believed strongly in giving back. His contributions were recognized when he was appointed to the Order of Canada, and as a member of the Order of Manitoba. Yet for all his accomplishments, he remained deeply rooted in community, guided by a desire to leave St. Norbert better than he found it.

Bill passed away on February 4, leaving behind a legacy of service, vision and compassion that will continue to shape our province.

Thank you to Bill's daughters Anne and Louise, and granddaughter Zona, who are here with us today. To all of Bill's family and loved ones, we extend our deepest condolences.

I ask my colleagues to please rise and join me in recognizing Bill Loewen's extraordinary life and lasting contributions to Manitoba.

#### Lymphedema Awareness Day

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Lymphedema is a hidden condition that affects millions of people worldwide, yet many remain unaware of its impact. This lack of awareness can lead to suffering for those living with lymphedema, as they often struggle to find necessary support and treatment. Raising awareness about lymphedema is crucial, and dedicated individuals and organizations, like the Manitoba Lymphedema Association, LAM, play a vital role in this mission.

The story of one of my constituents, Kim Avanthay, highlights the importance of advocacy in raising lymphedema awareness. After facing challenges in obtaining a diagnosis for her son Austin, born with primary lymphedema, Kim chose to educate herself and others about the condition. Her determination led to the creation of LAM, which now helps increase public awareness and supports those affected by lymphedema in Manitoba. By sharing her experience, Kim made it clear that lymphedema can impact anyone, encouraging others to take action.

Lymphedema is not just a concern for cancer survivors; it can affect anyone whose lymphatic system has been damaged and can even be present at birth. The chronic swelling caused by this condition can lead to pain and a reduced quality of life. Unfortunately, the high cost of treatments often places a financial burden on those affected.

Back in 2014, I had the pleasure of passing a private member's bill by unanimous support to recognize

March 6 as Lymphedema Awareness Day, a significant occasion for the lymphedema community to come together and spread knowledge.

I would like to thank current president, Craig Harren; VP Cheryl McAdam; Perla Lopez; Iris Cogger and the rest of the LAM board for showcasing the hard work of LAM and the advocates like Kim Avanthay, who tirelessly push for awareness and support.

We can all make a difference in the lives of those living with lymphedema by spreading the word. Education is the key.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

### **J.H. Bruns Broncos Volleyball Champions**

**Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** Today, I rise to honour an unforgettable season for the junior varsity boys volleyball team at J.H. Bruns Collegiate.

In a thrilling final, the Broncos defeated the Steinbach Regional Sabres to capture the AAAA junior varsity boys provincial championship for the first time in history.

This victory capped off an already remarkable season, which included an SCAC league championship, three tournament wins and an outstanding overall record of 40 wins, three losses and one tie. Their achievements reflect countless hours of practice, outstanding coaching and the unwavering support of their families and classmates.

But what makes this championship even more meaningful is the adversity the Broncos faced along the way. Throughout the season, players adapted to injuries and stepped into new roles, often competing in positions they had never played before. Their willingness to adjust, to push through challenges and to always put the team first speaks to the strength of their character and the true spirit of teamwork.

The Broncos were anchored by exceptional leadership both on and off the court, including Head Coach Kris Funk, provincial all-stars Miles Carnegie and Cian Jonker, as well as provincial MVP Judah Christensen. Their contributions helped guide the team to this historic accomplishment.

\* (14:10)

This provincial championship represents far more than the athletic success. The Broncos have set a new standard of excellence at J.H. Bruns Collegiate and have made their entire school community incredibly proud.

I want to offer a huge congratulations to the Broncos, many of whom are here with us today, and I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the players, coaches and families on an unforgettable season.

I would like to ask leave to have my guests' names entered into Hansard, and I would like to invite all members to give the Broncos the congratulations they deserve.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

*Head coach: Kris Funk.*

*Captain: Miles Carnegie.*

*Emmitt Allan, Daniel Andreyev, Judah Christensen, Mohamed Elsaeet, Cian Jonker, Hendrix Kerr, Bennett Mabelson, Udochi Uguna.*

### **Daniel James Martin**

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** Honourable Speaker, I'd like to tell the story of Daniel James Martin.

Danny was born November 28, 1957, on the Roseau River First Nation and died July 28, 2019, in Winnipeg at the Health Sciences Centre after losing his battle with cancer.

Danny had a very hard life. He was placed in residential school at an early age and was shifted from one foster home to another throughout his young life.

Around the age of 24, Danny became a self-taught Indigenous artist. Struggling with poor mental health and addictions, Danny became a patient of the Selkirk mental health facility. From the early 1990s until just a few years before his death, this was home for Danny.

Anyone who lived in Selkirk during that time would remember him walking all over the city with a satchel filled with art supplies over his shoulder. If you happened to be in the same place as Danny, he would offer to create you your very own artwork.

Many people have great memories of visiting with Danny in a restaurant, cafe or even a store while he created art for them to take home.

While working in my family's business, I would often see Danny walking by carrying his art supplies, heading uptown. One day, I went outside and I asked him in for a cup of coffee. And that started a tradition for the next four to five years. He would come in a couple times a week. He would enjoy a hot cup of coffee while creating art for me.

I enjoyed our visits and often surprised him with art supplies that I had already picked up for him. Over

these years, I purchased over 300 pieces of art from Danny. Danny would sell his artwork all over Selkirk and beyond.

I later found out that Danny had left the Selkirk mental health facility and was living in Winnipeg. What I did not know was that my friend had become homeless. I am saddened by the hardship this—

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**The Speaker:** Does the honourable member have leave to conclude his statement? [*Agreed*]

**Mr. Perchotte:** I am saddened by the hardship this wonderful man had endured throughout his life. My only hope is that his artwork will carry on his memory and bring joy to those who view it.

In Danny's memory, I wish to gift all MLAs their very own personal, original piece of Daniel James Martin's artwork. If you're interested, please let me know.

### **Appreciation for French Language and Culture**

#### ***French spoken***

**Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière):** L'Honorable Président, aujourd'hui j'aimerais souligner le rôle des nombreux Manitobains et Manitobaines qui choisissent la langue et la culture francophones, y compris les dynamiques communautés de francophiles partout au Manitoba.

Bien que le français possède de profondes racines historiques au Manitoba, c'est l'enthousiasme continu de celles et ceux qui choisissent d'apprendre, de parler et de célébrer la langue qui lui permet de continuer à croître et à s'épanouir.

Dans les salles de classe comme lors d'événements communautaires, les Manitobains francophiles jouent un rôle important dans le renforcement du caractère bilingue de notre province. Les élèves qui choisissent l'immersion française, les adultes qui entreprennent d'apprendre la langue plus tard dans la vie, et les familles qui font l'effort de parler français à la maison contribuent tous à maintenir la langue vivante et dynamique au Manitoba. Leur engagement reflète une véritable appréciation de la culture française, de sa littérature, de sa musique et de ses traditions.

Cet esprit de curiosité et d'affection pour la langue rassemble les gens de toutes les communautés. Les enseignants à travers le Manitoba inspirent les élèves

à découvrir la beauté de l'expression française, les bénévoles organisent des célébrations culturelles ouvertes à tous, et les organisations locales créent des espaces où les Manitobains peuvent pratiquer et partager la langue, peu importe leur parcours.

En choisissant d'apprendre et de célébrer le français, les francophiles contribuent à atteindre la portée de la langue bien au-delà de ses communautés historiques. Leur enthousiasme renforce le tissu culturel de notre province et rappelle que le patrimoine bilingue du Manitoba appartient à tous.

L'Honorable Président, je tiens à remercier les nombreux Manitobains et Manitobaines qui adoptent le français, non seulement comme une langue à apprendre, mais aussi comme une culture à apprécier et à partager. Leur passion permet à la langue française de continuer à s'épanouir partout au Manitoba pour les générations à venir.

Merci.

#### ***Translation***

*Honourable Speaker, today I would like to highlight the role of the many Manitobans who choose the French language and culture, including the dynamic communities of Francophiles throughout Manitoba.*

*While French has deep historical roots in Manitoba, it is the continued enthusiasm of those who choose to learn, speak and celebrate the language that allows it to continue to grow and flourish.*

*In classrooms and at community events, Francophile Manitobans play an important role in strengthening the bilingual character of our province. Students who choose French immersion, adults who undertake to learn the language later in life, and families who make the effort to speak French at home all contribute to keeping the language alive and vibrant in Manitoba. Their commitment reflects a genuine appreciation of French culture, literature, music and traditions.*

*This spirit of curiosity and affection for the language brings people from all communities together. Teachers across Manitoba inspire students to discover the beauty of the French discourse, volunteers organize cultural celebrations open to all, and local organizations create spaces where Manitobans can practise and share the language, regardless of their background.*

*By choosing to learn and celebrate French, Francophiles help expand the language's reach far beyond its historical communities. Their enthusiasm strengthens*

*the cultural fabric of our province and reminds us that Manitoba's bilingual heritage belongs to everyone.*

*Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank the many Manitobans who embrace French, not only as a language to learn, but also as a culture to appreciate and share. Their passion allows the French language to continue to flourish throughout Manitoba for generations to come.*

*Thank you.*

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

Prior to moving on, we have some guests in the gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery from Fairholme school under the direction of Evelyn Maendel. The group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza).

And we welcome you here today.

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Tragic Loss of a Child due to Bullying in School Call for Stronger Action against Bullying in Society

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Before I get to my first set of questions, I would like to take a moment and pause and reflect on a very tragic loss of life that's happened and occurred in our province as a direct result of bullying in our schools. Laurenta and Randall Colombe have come forward to share the story of their daughter, Marietta, who was lost far too soon at 11 years old.

Bullying is never okay. We must do more to ensure that all kids are safe and supported. When a child takes their life, we have failed them. This family has suffered a heartbreaking, unimaginable loss, and our heart goes out to them. We are all devastated, we all must stand together against bullying here in the Legislature, in our communities and, absolutely, in schools.

No one could sum this up better than Marietta's grandmother, Freda Moose, when she said, and I quote: My baby's gone. It's so heartless. It's cruel. Bullying is cruel to death. End quote.

May you rest in peace.

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** On behalf of the Province of Manitoba, I want to offer sincere condolences to the family of the late Marietta Star Colombe.

I actually had the opportunity to meet her grandparents at a community event a short time ago, and the details are very heartbreaking. And the loss of any life so young is certainly something that calls on all of us to extend our best nature, our compassion and to extend our hearts.

So, having had the chance to speak to the family directly, I do now repeat publicly that message of support. And to this young soul that's out there: We got your back. We're really sorry for what happened to you in your time here on Earth. And we love you very much.

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

#### Health-Care Wait Times Patient Deaths—Call for Public Inquiry

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Judy Burns, Genevieve Price, Stacey Ross and six-month Luca Teng all died while waiting for care in a Winnipeg ER. And what does the Minister of Health response to the systemic failures that devastated these families? And I quote: We are moving in the right direction. End quote.

No, Minister, you are not moving in the right direction. A grandmother on a gurney for 30 hours is not the right direction. A six-month-old baby dying after waiting for hours is not the right direction. A family being told that their sister and their mother would be alive if she was seen earlier is not the right direction.

These are real stories, real Manitobans. The Premier must stand up and say their names and acknowledge their pain and suffering.

\* (14:20)

Will he call a public inquiry today so the families can have peace and answers?

**The Speaker:** Just prior to the answer, I just must remind all members to make sure they direct their comments through the Chair and not directly at members opposite.

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Honourable Speaker, any time we lose a Manitoban, it's a sad moment. And as I've had the opportunity to share with some of these families that our colleague here has mentioned today, part of the challenge in situations where someone is taken from us too soon is that you have those questions of what if.

So to these families and others in similar situations, I offer my sincere condolences and my heart goes out to you. It's challenging enough when we lose somebody that we care for and then to have those moments of grief compounded by unanswered questions is certainly something that none of us would want to experience.

But we do send you the best of our compassion and our sincere sympathies. As a provincial government, we are also committed to making sure that we repair the health-care system so that people in the future will receive those items that are identified in the processes that you are currently navigating—

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

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

**Mr. Khan:** The families have asked for a public inquiry; the families of Judy Burns, Genevieve Price, Stacey Ross and six-month Luca Teng. The Premier won't even say their names in this Chamber for some reason. Why does the Premier not want to find answers for these families?

The Minister of Advanced Education said Stacey's 'fasses'—Stacey Ross's family is brave. But it's not bravery; it's leadership. The families are stepping up and demanding answers and want a public inquiry so this never happens again to another Manitoban. Why is the Premier refusing to call a public inquiry?

I've asked the Premier to put politics aside, put partisanship aside. It's not about me and him, it's about getting answers for Manitobans. It's what the families are asking for.

So I ask the Premier again: Will he accept my offer and sit down to work up the terms of reference for a public inquiry?

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Honourable Speaker, as the leader of the provincial government, I want to take this opportunity to send our sincere condolences to the Price, to the Ross, to the Teng and to the Burns families. We know that what you're going through is very, very difficult, and the desire to have answers to the questions that you're asking right now are things that, we commit to you, we will find.

I give you my word that we will work with each and every one of you family members to provide the answers that you seek and, importantly, to deliver the

improvements to health care that those answers demand. That's my word.

### **Health-Care Wait Times Patient Deaths—Call for Public Inquiry**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** This morning, members of our PC team once again called for a public inquiry into the systemic failures that have resulted in the deaths of Genevieve Price, Luca Teng, Stacey Ross and Judy Burns: all Manitobans who died after seeking care in Winnipeg emergency rooms.

We watched NDP members give sympathies and condolences, and then we watched NDP members proceed to talk out this resolution and once again deny Manitobans the transparency and accountability and solutions that a public inquiry would bring. Four families are grieving.

Will the Premier call the public inquiry today?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Honourable Speaker, my heart goes out to the family members who've lost people that were so important to them and are indeed important to all of us in your provincial government. We know that health care is such an important priority for everybody out there, and that's why we're committed to repairing our health-care system.

The first: we've reached out, and we really appreciate the time that you have taken to speak to us, and certainly we take very, very seriously the questions which, for some families, are currently unanswered; and so we will deliver answers to those things. And where improvements for the health-care system are demanded, we will deliver those things.

We've been able to do many things in health care so far, but there's a lot more to do, and you have our word that we're committed to continuing the job.

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

**Mrs. Cook:** Honourable Speaker, at least four Manitobans have died in recent months in ERs. They don't want condolences; they want action.

Look, members in this Chamber come from different parties and hold different positions on any number of policy questions, but every one of us represents Manitobans who rely on the same health-care system. Manitobans, including the families of those who have died, want us to work together to solve these problems. They are tired of the blame game. They want answers and they want solutions.

Will this NDP Premier stop with the deflections, stop casting blame anywhere and everywhere, and focus on solving the problem by undertaking a public inquiry today?

**Mr. Kinew:** Honourable Speaker, I give my word to the family members who have been invoked by some of our colleagues here today that we will deliver on two very important but very straightforward and easy to understand things: One, we will get you the answers of what actually happened with your loved ones, and two, we will take immediate action to fix the health-care system. You have my word.

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

**Mrs. Cook:** The Premier has so far not revealed why he refuses to call a public inquiry, so Manitobans can only guess. Is it because he's afraid of what a public inquiry might reveal about his government's failures? Or is it because he's so arrogant that he thinks he already has all the answers and doesn't need to hear—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Cook:** —from any more front-line workers, experts, or impacted families? It's clear now that despite pleas from grieving families, this Premier will not call a public inquiry.

Will he at least tell Manitobans why?

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, I humble myself before you and before all of my colleagues here today, some of whom invoke Manitobans who are going through a very difficult time. And to those family members, I tell you the straight-up truth: We are going to give you the answers of what actually happened in the loss of your loved ones and then we will fix the health-care system.

The reason why it's important for me to make these two simple commitments to you is because when I say something in government, it happens. We promised to search the landfill, we did. We promised to cut the gas tax, we did. We promised to freeze hydro rates, we have. I give you my word that we will deliver answers and action, and we will.

#### **Nurse Staffing Levels Vacancy Rate Inquiry**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Honourable Speaker, this Premier has lost the trust of every single nurse in this province by turning his back—literally turning his back—on the nurses as he

walks away from them. This is what the Manitoba Nurses Union website says: Premier says there are enough nurses. You shouldn't listen to your union. Darlene is steering you wrong. The nurse replies, there isn't. Look at your vacancy rates. I'm not listening to Darlene. I work in a hospital. I see it every day.

The Premier responds: We have enough. The nurse responds as the Premier turns his back to the nurse and walks away. The nurse says, I felt gaslit, heartbroken. I voted for this man; I believed in him. Now he's telling me the staffing issues we face every day aren't real. End quote.

When will the Premier come clean and tell Manitobans that he's been misleading them and there are not enough nurses, or will he continue to gaslight nurses and turn his back on them in Manitoba?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Honourable Speaker, I love nurses. I love doctors too. I'm married to one. I love everybody who's working in the front lines of our health-care system, and health care is the number one priority for people right across the province of Manitoba.

Everybody knows what the PCs did during their time in office. They fired 300 nurses. They closed three emergency rooms inside the Perimeter and closed countless emergency rooms outside of the Perimeter.

But when it comes to the question of what we're doing in staffing, the numbers are very clear: 1,200 more nurses working on the front lines since we have taken office. And, of course, any time that somebody in Manitoba wants to ask about our question and our policy of implementing nurse-to-patient ratios, I'll be happy to have that conversation.

\* (14:30)

The job is not done, but we do have enough nurses to get started. And why are we going to do that? Because it will improve patient care for you right across this great province.

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

**Mr. Khan:** Honourable Speaker, this Premier must be living in another reality because no one believes him. The nurses don't believe him, the nurses union don't believe him, doctors don't believe him, front-line workers don't believe him and the four families of people who have died in hospitals under this NDP government don't believe him.

Don't take my words for it or the data presented; he should listen to his own regional health authority. Prairie Mountain Health government says 482 nursing vacancies; Northern Health Region, 131 vacancies; Southern, 289 vacancies. That's three of the five authorities that responded and 641 vacancies.

So I ask the Premier again: If he's so convinced he's hired all these nurses, why can no one find them?

**Mr. Kinew:** So here's the context that the member opposite needs to share with you, Honourable Speaker. All the numbers he's talking about are improvements over his time sitting around the Cabinet table.

That means that there are more nurses working on the bedside today. How many? Twelve hundred more nurses. These are nurses working in the Health Sciences Centre, in the St. Boniface Hospital, in the newly re-opened Carberry emergency room—again, right across the province.

And if you look at Prairie Mountain Health, well, not only have we hired nurses in the region, we have brought down the rate of use of nursing agencies. Now what does it mean when we have less agency-nurse use in Manitoba? It means that there's more full-time nurses at the bedside who know your loved one's name, who know the way that they like to be greeted, who know their unique things that you can do to provide them comfort.

Yes, there is a lot more work to do, but take it from the head of Doctors Manitoba, health care is—

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

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

**Mr. Khan:** So there's a shift in answer from the Premier. He said we have enough nurses. He turned his back on nurses and says, we have enough nurses. I'm not going to listen to you. And here he just admitted there's 641 vacancies in three of the five regions.

So which one is it, Honourable Speaker, and Manitoba? Six hundred forty-one vacancies and yet he says there's enough.

Let's look at the facts. In St. Boniface, Manitoba, Manitobans are waiting 12 hours right now; Health Sciences Centre, 8.75 hours; Grace Hospital, 11 hours. And the worst one: Children's Hospital, where a six-month died. *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** And the member from St. Boniface wants to heckle me as I talk about a six-month baby who died waiting 10 hours. Class of St. Boniface.

Honourable Speaker, if the Premier is so convinced he has enough nurses, why are there 641 vacancies and why are Manitobans waiting longer today than they've ever waited in the history of Manitoba for health care?

**Mr. Kinew:** So, Honourable Speaker, everybody knows that we've added 3,500 net-new health-care workers in the province of Manitoba, and that includes 1,200 more nurses.

Now, of course, they cut 300 nurses during their time in office. So I'd ask you, I'd ask the member opposite, I'd ask the PCs, I'd ask everybody out there: What do you think is better for health care, 1,200 more nurses or 300 less nurses? The choice is very clear.

Obviously, we need to continue staffing up our provincial health-care system. But the question that he really wants to get at is about nurse-to-patient ratios. Do we have enough to get started on the process of implementing them? Absolutely, we do. And that is why we are moving forward on this advice from the Nurses Union in Manitoba, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, and most importantly, from you, the people of Manitoba, who want an end to the PC cuts and more investments in health care.

#### **Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Closure Loss of Training Programs—Impact on Workforce**

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** Honourable Speaker, when this government shut down MITT, it blindsided Manitobans and put critical training programs at risk. These programs prepared people for urgently needed health-care jobs, like health-care aides, medical assistants and pharmacy technicians.

Given the growing demand to our health-care system, what has the Minister of Advanced Education and Training done to ensure Manitobans are still being trained for these essential roles?

**Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** I thank the member opposite for the question and just want to put on the record that, thanks to the federal government's cuts to international students, we are where we are. We are working closely with Red River College and MITT to ensure that all of the essential labour force needs for our province are being met through the training provided at Red River.

There's more news to come, but I can assure the member opposite that the essential training will not be lost and it will, in fact, be enhanced.

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

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Honourable Speaker, sudden closures undermine the confidence in our education system. When the University of Winnipeg faced financial challenges, this government stepped in quickly with emergency support. Weeks before the government announced MITT would be closing programs, I met with their team and they were positive, telling me they were pivoting to ensure they could continue the training—people for the critical jobs that are needed.

Why did this government not consult MITT about the closures?

**MLA Cable:** Honourable Speaker, I know it's a foreign concept from the members opposite that we would do something that would benefit the entirety of Manitoba and not just their friends' pocketbooks, but I can assure the members opposite that we are doing right by all Manitobans and ensuring that—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Cable:**—institutions are sustainable and that we have the most robust training for our local workforce needs. We've expanded training into remote communities, rural communities, far north, Altona.

We have a good sense of what's happening in the system and we're continuing to work with our partners all across the post-secondary system to ensure that Manitobans get the training they deserve and our economy gets the workers that it needs.

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

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Honourable Speaker, we need these programs because we need graduates. In January alone, Southern Health reported a shortage of 147 health-care aides. That's 147. That means existing staff are stretched thinner and families are feeling the strain.

With these programs now gone, what is the government plan right now to replace that training capacity and address these serious workforce shortages?

**MLA Cable:** Honourable Speaker, once again, I just want to reassure everybody that those training options are not gone. In fact, there will be enhancements across the board. We've been working with K-to-12 education to ensure that there are more dual credit options in

Manitoba and we have more people training in health care than ever under the PCs.

I also want to remind the members opposite that they are the ones in charge when there were cuts after cut after cut to post-secondaries. There was no stability in the system. They cut student aid. They cut the bursaries. So I take no advice from the members opposite—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Cable:**—on how we are going to manage this situation and ensure that the future economy of Manitoba is taken care of.

### **Delayed Access to Health Care Effect on Workers and the Economy**

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** All Manitobans realize that a strong health-care system means much more than just the bedside care. It's also critical for building a strong economy. And when Manitobans can't access timely care, they miss work, businesses lose productivity and families face financial stress. Yet, under this NDP government, Manitobans are facing growing delays across the health-care system, keeping workers on the sidelines and making it harder for businesses to find employees.

Can the minister explain how Manitoba's economy can grow when workers can't access timely health care to remain in the workforce?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Honourable Speaker, to the right of the member who is asking the question is the person who was advising Heather Stefanson and the former Pallister government to cut health-care services across Manitoba. If he has questions about what's going on in terms of the economy and health care affecting the economy, he can literally look to his right and say, hey, my friend and colleague, why is it that you cut emergency rooms, fired health-care workers, cut training and cut what was necessary to make sure that we have health care in place, growing in the right ways across Manitoba?

\* (14:40)

I don't think you'll get an answer because I still haven't gotten one in two and a half years of this person being the critic. But, Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we are focused on making sure that we are building up health care, fixing the damage, hiring, training and retaining health-care workers across Manitoba—

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

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

**Mr. Narth:** Honourable Speaker, under this Health Minister's guidance, thousands of Manitobans remain on wait lists for procedures such as hip and knee replacements, surgeries that restore mobility and allow people to return to work. Many Manitobans are now waiting far beyond the 26-week national benchmark, leaving working-age Manitobans stuck on the sidelines while their health and productivity decline. Under our previous PC government, patients were sent out of province when care could be accessed faster, and they could return to work sooner.

Why has this NDP government allowed surgical wait times to continue holding Manitobans back?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, I'm happy to report that we've actually broken the record for the amount of surgeries done in Manitoba. We are doing more surgeries here in Manitoba than we ever have in the history of this province. That is a monumental step in the right direction.

And I think what's so important to note is that Manitobans who couldn't even get their names on a wait list for surgery under the previous government are getting their surgeries done today. We've identified those Manitobans, we've centralized the structure for surgeries to make sure that their needs are put first, not the needs—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** —of the surgeons who are doing that care. We are doing what could have been done over seven and a half years. They sent people to San Francisco; we're sending people to Selkirk right here in Manitoba.

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

**Mr. Narth:** Honourable Speaker, the results are not supporting those claims. The wait times are only getting longer and those are the facts. And at a time when affordability is already stretched for many Manitoba families, we are hearing more and more stories of Manitobans traveling out of province and even out of the country and paying out of pocket for health care simply so that they can regain a basic quality of life and return to work.

How does this NDP government justify a system where Manitobans who are already struggling to afford

day-to-day life are being forced to choose between paying privately for care or remaining in the workforce?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, the former PC government was working as hard as they possibly could to destroy our public health-care system. They wanted to create a health-care system where only those who had big bank accounts could get access to health care.

On this side of the House, we believe in a strong public health-care system. That is a fundamental Canadian value. And we are going to continue to do everything we can to protect that fundamental Canadian value.

We're doing more surgeries than we ever have before. We're making sure that people who are waiting the longest under the failed PCs are finally getting the care that they deserve. We're hiring more surgeons to deliver that care and I cannot wait to share some very great news. You'll hear it at some point soon in our budget about what we're doing next.

#### **Southern Health Region Nurse Vacancy Rate**

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** Speaker, the Minister of Health seems to have a hard time acknowledging reality, acknowledging the facts today.

So I'll ask the Minister again: Can they tell Manitobans how many vacant nursing positions there are in the Southern Health region right now.

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Honourable Speaker, I have to apologize to the member opposite. I couldn't quite hear all of his question. He was being heckled by his own colleagues on that side of the House.

But I think that he was asking about nursing vacancy rates in the Southern Health region. So, Honourable Speaker, I am happy to share that across the province, including in the Southern Health region, we have a net gain of nurses in that region.

Of course, we recognize that there's so much work to do. Yes, we've hired net-new nurses in the Southern Health region, but we know there's much more work to do. We want to see those numbers continue to climb and increase. We've got some really creative steps that we're taking in partnership with Advanced Education and Training to make sure that we're getting as many folks as we can to every region. But, of course, Southern Health needs some—

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

The honourable member for Borderland, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Guenter:** The answer is 289. According to the government's own data, 289 unfilled nursing positions in Southern Health right now, not including health-care aide vacancies—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Guenter:** —or unfilled allied health positions.

And yet this NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) told media, and I quote: we've got the numbers, that's not in question. We've been giving them all the money, we've been giving them all the staffing resources. They need to start showing improvement. End quote.

I ask the minister: Who's right? *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Guenter:** This Premier or the government's own data?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, I can't believe this. I'm actually going to agree with the member for Borderland. We have been giving them all the money. We have been giving them all the resources. Thank the Premier of Manitoba for giving us and giving me that mandate. Our budget after budget has delivered record amounts of funding to staff the health-care system.

Of course, there's much more work to do. We want to see continued positive momentum to address those vacancy rates, but the fact of the matter is this: We are moving in a direction the PCs refused to take this province for seven and a half years. Vacancy rates are improving, we're welcoming more nurses to the front lines than we have in the past, and we're training more nurses than we have for many—well, ever, actually, in this province.

Manitoba is a place to call home if you're a nurse. We're going to keep training, retaining and attracting.

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

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

**Mr. Guenter:** The minister is making up numbers. Nobody believes their numbers; nobody believes health care is better today. Definitely not the president of the Manitoba nursing union who said she has nurses coming to her and asking, and I quote: Where are they? Where are all these new nurse hires?

And the audacity of the minister to suggest that health care is better today when four Manitobans have

died waiting in an ER in the last four months, when wait times are breaking records and nurses in Southern Health logged 30,000 hours of overtime last fall alone.

One question: When will this minister come clean with Manitobans?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, I think it's pretty telling and somewhat shameful that the member for Borderland would use language like audacity when the president of Doctors Manitoba has said multiple times that health care is better now than it was in 2023. Those are her words. She's an expert. She's helping lead the way in making changes in this province. To call her audacious, to me, speaks to how out of touch members on that side of the House actually are.

We know there is so much more work to do. Imagine, Honourable Speaker, if all of the work we're doing in partnership with the front lines, with unions, with the employer, with experts, was done over seven and a half years instead of cuts, closures and chaos.

We're going to keep doing this work, moving health care in a better direction. We know there's much more work to do.

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

### Access to Primary Care Manitoba Ranking

**MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson):** Honourable Speaker, Manitobans know that access to doctors is critical to strengthening our health-care system. Recently, Doctors Manitoba reported that last year Manitoba added over 100 doctors to our system, the most in our province's history and the largest increase in any province in Canada.

Can the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care please tell Manitobans a bit more about this important milestone?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Honourable Speaker, I'm so incredibly proud to share that Manitoba has added 164 doctors last year. That is the highest increase in not only Manitoba's history but all of Canada. That means more doctors, shorter waits, better care for families across our province.

Our government is focused on fixing health care, recruiting and retaining doctors, supporting our front-line staff and making sure that Manitobans get care at the right time, in the right place, closer to home. Our plan is working, progress is being made, more work to be done, and we're committed to doing it.

### **Long Wait at Emergency Rooms Families Losing Time and Income**

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** Honourable Speaker, working moms across Manitoba are spending hours in overcrowded emergency rooms with sick children, often missing their shifts and losing wages. Families are literally paying the price for a health-care system that is not working.

Why is this NDP forcing working moms to choose between their child's health and a paycheque that they desperately need?

\* (14:50)

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Honourable Speaker, I welcome that question from the member opposite.

One thing that we have done as a government that has really made a difference—and disproportionately affected mothers, actually—is we've made it easier for nurses who walked away from the front lines under the PCs' reign of cuts, chaos and disrespect to come back to the health-care system. So we created a pathway for recently retired or left nurses to rejoin the front lines.

I want to shout out the MLA for Kildonan-River East who's actually been a staple in her community. Nurses have been going—former nurses going to her, moms who left the workplace under the PCs, asking her what's the pathway to get back to the front lines. I'm happy to share that we have welcomed back to the front line dozens of these nurses and we're going to continue to take steps to make sure that the workplace—

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

**Mrs. Stone:** Children's Hospital was a 10-hour wait this morning. A mom earning minimum wage would lose \$128 in lost wages and income and would not even see a doctor for their child by the end of that day. As a mom with two young kids, 10 hours is unacceptable.

This NDP government should expect more of itself. This Premier (Mr. Kinew) should expect more of himself. Under this NDP, emergency rooms are overcrowded and overwhelmed, and families are bearing the cost.

Will this Minister admit that their failure to fix ER wait times is directly hurting working parents?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, we recognize on this side of the House that addressing ER wait times, addressing wait times must be faced head-on.

This is an area that we know takes time to fix meaningfully.

We didn't get to where we are overnight. It was years of cuts to health care but also cuts to our largest emergency rooms that were made, that we're seeing the impacts of that now. But we're committed to continuing to do the work of staffing the front lines, having experts lead the way in terms of how we improve access to care in our emergency rooms and our urgent-cares.

We want to make sure that when Manitobans show up with their little ones—a time that is very stressful and can be pretty scary—that they're getting care in a timely manner. So we're going to stay focused on this work and work with our partners and experts to move this in a better—

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

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

**Mrs. Stone:** Honourable Speaker, Manitoba families are already struggling to put food on the table. Over 50 per cent of Manitobans are within \$200 of bankruptcy.

With a mom and parent losing \$128 on just minimum wage just to wait to see the doctor—and by that point they haven't even seen the doctor; they have to wait more hours—this is putting Manitoba parents, working parents, closer to the brink. Leadership means taking accountability and action for real-life impacts on families.

All this NDP government has done is explode wait times, explode taxes on working families and explode grocery prices. Manitoban families are within \$200 of bankruptcy, and what is this NDP government doing? They're making things—

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, working parents, moms, had more emergency rooms to take their kids to before the PCs cut them and closed them from our system.

And, Honourable Speaker, I want to acknowledge that our government recognizes that parents need more places to take their kids to get access to care. That is why we have opened extended hours primary-care clinics. It's why we've made it more convenient for parents to go online, use Medinav.ca, make an appointment for your child to see a doctor or nurse practitioner. You can get in same day, sometimes within the same hour, in a number of clinics opened across Winnipeg and in Brandon and more to come.

We've also done something really big, which is hire record numbers of doctors here in Manitoba so that you have access to the doctor to bring your child to—

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

### **Prairie Mountain Health Region Nurse Staffing Levels**

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** I recently spoke with a nurse who is having trouble finding the net-new health-care staff that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) keeps talking about. Her unit is constantly short-staffed, reliant on agency nurses, and mandated overtime is now the norm. She hears the Premier talk about having enough nurses, but she isn't seeing any relief at work.

If these new staff exist, why are none available here in Prairie Mountain Health where those communities are needing that front-line coverage?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** I want to thank all of the nurses who are working so hard every day, showing up for Manitobans providing the best care possible at the bedside. I want to thank the over 1,200 net-new nurses who have joined the front lines. I want to thank the nurses who have joined the front lines in Manitoba from the United States.

People are choosing Manitoba first, for the first time in many, many years. This is all a testament to the work we've done with our partners, with unions, with front-line health-care workers, with Manitobans.

Now, if that approach had been taken for years, we might be having a different conversation. On that side of the House, they treated nurses with contempt and disrespect for seven and a half years and drove them out in the numbers of hundreds, maybe even thousands, Honourable Speaker. On this side of the House, we're not only repairing that damage; we're building a better and stronger health-care system for the long term.

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

**Ms. Byram:** Prairie Mountain Health has over 400 nursing vacancies and almost 300 for health-care aides. Those vacancies are why, in December alone, nurses in Prairie Mountain Health clocked in a staggering 16,000 hours of overtime. That's 2,000 shifts that had to be filled.

When have the—we have the numbers right in front of us. This Premier has not addressed health-care staffing shortage.

So why—and we are hearing that directly from those on the front line—why is he pretending otherwise?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker—and I mean this sincerely—members on that side of the House should be ashamed of themselves. They should be embarrassed with their line of questioning. They cut health care and fired hundreds of nurses over—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:**—seven and a half years. The Leader of the Opposition, who's heckling me right now, was at the Cabinet table when they kept firing nurses from our health-care system. They should be ashamed of themselves.

We're doing the work of adding back hundreds, thousands of health-care workers that they denied opportunities in our province. There's so much more work to do. Yes, we need thousands and thousands more health-care workers and guess what? We're not 'taking'—taking our foot off the gas.

But you know what we'll never do? Treat health-care workers with the outright disrespect they did for seven and a half years.

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

The time for oral questions—*[interjection]* Order.  
Order.

The time for oral questions has expired.

## **PETITIONS**

### **Programs for Adolescents with Disabilities**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Children with disabilities often require child care beyond the age of 12. Children with disabilities aged 12 to 17 face a gap with publicly available care programs.

(2) Current—the current adolescent-care service model creates undue hardship on caregivers.

(3) While developing children may be entering into extracurricular activities, school clubs or spending time with friends independently, children with disabilities have reduced opportunities for such social and recreational opportunities due to lack of spaces.

(4) The current self-managed adolescent-care models place additional workloads onto already stressed families,

requiring parents to seek all alternative options and prove their need for care.

The current adolescent-care system, as part of a—overall respite and supports available to families, is failing families of children with disabilities, as identified in the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Bridging the Gaps report.

\* (15:00)

(6) To date, none of the nine recommendations it contains have been completed beyond 50 per cent.

(7) The recommendations in this report touch on many of the issues facing families, with adolescent care being but a small component of their overall needs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to fully implement recommendations in the Bridging the Gaps report.

(2) To urge the provincial government to immediately implement official policies and procedures that are more respectful and collaborative, which also minimize harm faced by families seeking help from Children's disABILITY Services.

(3) To urge the Minister of Families to arrange for a full review of employment supports provided by Children's disABILITY Services for children with disabilities aged 12 to 17, including direct consultation with impacted families and to explore a full spectrum of options to support families, empowering them to choose solutions that best fit their needs.

Honourable Speaker, this petition has been signed by Krista Paulson, by Kristan Parron–Paulson [*phonetic*] and Sam Hunter and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

### Phoenix School

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by Ashley Jensen, Thomas Markus-Nelson, Rhea Whitby and many, many other Manitobans.

### MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Thanks to the investment made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction for the new Portage regional health facility is well

under way. The facility and surrounding community would greatly benefit from added diagnostic machinery and equipment, but specifically the addition of an MRI machine.

*Mrs. Rachelle Schott, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

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

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

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

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

(6) Located in close proximity to the new Portage regional health facility is the Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by Crystal Malenko, Helen Denhard, Ted Denhard and many, many more Manitobans.

### **Provincial Road 482**

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

(1) Upgrading Provincial Road 482 will accelerate economic development as it will enhance connectivity, facilitate efficient transportation and promote economic growth in the region.

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to take the necessary steps to upgrade Provincial Road 482 to meet RTAC standards.

\* (15:10)

This petition has been signed by Tyler Digby, Wayne Bulischak and Brandy Chuchmuch, as well as many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

### **Provincial Trunk Highway 8**

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** Honourable deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Traveling from Winnipeg to Gimli and back on Provincial Trunk Highway 8, PTH 8, is extremely 'treacherous'—treacherous and many near misses involving vehicles attempting to make unsafe passes.

(2) Summer travel and increased domestic tourism has led to more vehicles traveling to PTH 8.

(3) Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure is planning surface reconstruction from Provincial Road 230 south to the Perimeter as part of a multi-year capital plan beginning in 2026.

(4) Public input on Functional Design Study on PTH 8 between Provincial Road 220 and Provincial Road 230 revealed that extensive improvements are being planned.

(5) With years of construction in sight, it is imperative that passing lanes be constructed first in order to mitigate the bottleneck that the construction will create by permitting slower vehicles to pass—to be passed safely.

(6) An online survey conducted from August 4 of 2024 to date has over 1,100 signatures requesting construction of a series of passing lanes on PTH 8 from St. Andrews to Provincial Road 231.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to prioritize the construction of a series of passing lanes along Provincial Trunk Highway 8 between Provincial Trunk Highway 67 and Provincial Road 231 as soon as possible, before commencing the surface reconstruction and other potential improvements on PTH 8 from Provincial Road 230 to the Perimeter.

This petition has been signed by Marcel Lemire, Janet Lemire, Rick Rivers and many other Manitobans.

### **Provincial Road 482**

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** Yes, honourable Speaker—or deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Upgrading Provincial Road 482 will moderate—or accelerate economic development—thank you—as it will enhance connectivity, facilitate efficient transportation and promote economic growth in the region.

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to take the necessary steps to upgrade Provincial Road 482 to meet RTAC standards.

This petition has been signed by Judy Usunier, Sarah-Jane Perrier, Claire Beischer and many, many, many, many, many other Manitobans.

### **Condemning Political Violence**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Democracy is sustained through free speech, respectful debate and the peaceful exchange of ideas, never through violence or intimidation.

(2) Recent tragedies, including the assassination of public figures and elected officials in the United States, serve as grim reminders of the dangers of allowing political grievances to justify violence.

(3) Words, ideas and debate, absent objective incitement to harm, are not violent and remain the only legitimate means by which a free people can resolve differences.

(4) The political space in our society has been damaged by virulent rhetoric, bullying, belittling and minimizing those whom one disagrees, as well as by

elected officials who have excused or minimized politically motivated murders, rather than condemning them without qualification.

(5) The ever increasing tendency of political extremists to frame themselves as victims of some unseen, malevolent force is undermining our shared beliefs in hard work, independence, empathy and community.

(6) The fracturing of society into ever-smaller silos has led to an unhealthy focus on differences, overshadowing the values of reason, respect and our shared humanity, which must prevail if democracy is to endure.

(7) The people of Manitoba expect their leaders to rise above partisan passions, to repudiate violence in all its forms and to defend freedom through expression and respectful disagreement.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To unequivocally condemn those who employ violence, or attempt to justify violence, as a means of silencing speech.

(2) To affirm that the proper way to settle political and social differences is through words, reason and democratic debate.

This petition is signed by Michael Ledarney, Amma [*phonetic*] Janzen–Aaron–sorry–Aaron Janzen, Duncan Hamilton and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

### Medical Assistance in Dying

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

\* (15:20)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition has been signed by Lisa Sawatzky, Susan Peters, Rachel Hildebrand and many, many Manitobans.

### Green Valley School Expansion

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition has been signed by Colleen Edmunds, Christine Purnell and many, many other Manitobans.

#### **MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility**

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

(6) Located in close proximity to the new regional—new Portage regional health facility is the Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, honourable Acting Speaker, this petition is signed by Bernadette Graham [*phonetic*], Dean Calder, Ihan [*phonetic*] Calder and many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

\* (15:30)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Located in close proximity to the new Portage regional health facility is the Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients from air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

#### **Programs for Adolescents with Disabilities**

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

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

(1) Children with disabilities often require child care beyond the age of 12. Children with disabilities aged 12 to 17 face a gap in publicly available care programs.

(2) The current adolescent-care service model creates undue hardship on caregivers.

(3) While developing children may be entering into extracurricular activities, school clubs or spending time with friends independently, children with disabilities have reduced opportunities for such social and recreational opportunities due to lack of spaces.

(4) The current self-managed adolescent-care models place additional workloads onto already stressed families, requiring parents to seek all alternative options and prove their need for care.

(5) The current adolescent-care system, as part of overall respite and support available to families, is failing families of children with disabilities, as identified in the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Bridging the Gaps report.

(6) To date, none of the nine recommendations it contains have been completed beyond 50 per cent.

(7) The recommendations in this report touch on many of the issues facing families, with adolescent care being but a small component of the overall needs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to fully implement recommendations in the Bridging the Gaps report.

(2) To urge the provincial government to immediately implement official policies and procedures that are more respectful and collaborative, which also

minimize harm faced by families seeking help from Children's disABILITY Services.

(3) To urge the Minister of Families to arrange for a full review of employment supports provided by Children's disABILITY Services for children with disabilities aged 12 to 17, including direct consultation with impacted families and to explore a full spectrum of options to support families, empowering them to choose solutions that best fit their needs.

This petition has been signed by Randy Garrioch, Dakota Pollard-Fletcher and Danica Benson and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

### **Funding for Outlet Channels Project**

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Since 1958, the Province of Manitoba has known about the potential increase in Lake Manitoba water levels due to the operation of the Portage Diversion and the necessity of increasing outflows from Lake Manitoba at these times.

(2) The Province of Manitoba commissioned studies into the control of Lake Manitoba water levels in 1958, 1973, 1978 and 2003, in addition to studies conducted after the devastating 2011 Lake Manitoba flood. In all of these studies, the residents surrounding Lake Manitoba made it known that they were not pleased with the way Lake Manitoba's levels were being managed.

(3) The level of Lake Manitoba is regulated to between 810.5 to 812.5 feet above sea level. One 13 of the last 18 years, lake levels have exceeded this range.

In 2011, Lake Manitoba levels reached 817 feet above sea level. On May 31, 2011, record-high water levels combined with northwest winds gusting to nearly 100 kilometres per hour caused levels to approach 820 feet above sea level, which resulted in unprecedented flooding and widespread damage to areas around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. Previously, lakefront properties found themselves three kilometres offshore.

(5) In 2011, over 7,100 people were evacuated due to the Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin flooding, including over 4,000 First Nations residents.

Many people did not return to their homes until years later.

(6) Flooding on Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin is well known and a documented occurrence. It has, for generations, cost Manitobans billions of dollars in compensation, lawsuits, lost agricultural productivity, lost economic activity and flood recovery projects, all of which has taken an incalculable social and emotional toll on its victims.

\* (15:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse its decision to cut the funding for Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin outlet channels project and to immediately take steps to expedite its completion.

This petition has been signed by Trey King, Sandy Scott, Murray Scott and many, many Manitobans.

Thank you.

### **Education Property Taxes**

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Speaker?

**The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott):** You were already announced.

**Mr. Ewasko:** The light is on. You're correct.

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government's decision to cancel the Education Property Tax Credit and the property tax offset grant has enabled and encouraged school divisions to introduce massive tax increases.

(2) These massive increases have been felt by all Manitobans and compounded by arbitrary and punitive changes to the education property tax rebate have made many Manitobans ineligible.

(3) Residents of the rural municipality of Victoria Beach are currently subject to a 26.6 per cent increase on their 2025 property tax bills as they fall within the catchment of the Lord Selkirk School Division.

(4) Victoria Beach residents are paying a disproportionate rate per pupil, totaling almost \$300,000 in taxes collected per student in the RM.

(5) Secondary property owners are subject to taxation without representation as they are ineligible to vote for trustees who set the rates but are still required to pay.

(6) Additionally, families can only claim the reduced education property tax rebate on their primary residence.

(7) These increases and the revocation of rebates were done suddenly and with no consultation, punishing Manitobans who maintain family cabins by trying—by tying taxation to property taxes—property values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately reverse these unfair and punishing tax policy changes and restore education property tax rebates for all Manitobans.

Speaker, this petition is signed by Byron Southern, Roger Gateson, Bruce Owen and many, many more fine Manitobans.

#### **MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility**

**Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

#### *The Speaker in the Chair*

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

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

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

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

(6) Located in close proximity to the new Portage regional health facility is the Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by Melba Morrey, Douglas Morrey, Bernie Latoski and many, many other Manitobans.

#### **Location of Safe Injection Sites**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

\* (15:50)

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition was signed by Nella Moreilia [phonetic], Ermelinda Mendezi [phonetic], Fatima Perreiri [phonetic] and many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** No further petitions? Orders of the day. Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Excellent.

Can you please call the start of second reading of Bill 4, The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act; followed by the start of second reading of Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act.

**The Speaker:** It is been announced that we will now proceed to second reading of Bill 4, The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act; followed by second reading of Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act.

## SECOND READINGS

### Bill 4—The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act

**The Speaker:** Therefore, we'll call for debate on Bill 4, The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act.

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education, that Bill 4, The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Wiebe:** I'm pleased to rise in the House today for second reading of Bill 4, The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act. This bill will amend The Constitutional Questions Act to require that, after the Legislature passes an act that declares section 33 of the Charter—which is more commonly known as the notwithstanding clause—applies to a provision of that act, the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council, the LGIC, must seek the Court of Appeal's opinion on whether the provision violates the Charter.

The notwithstanding clause enables Parliament and provincial legislatures to override certain Charter rights by expressly declaring that the act or certain provisions will operate notwithstanding fundamental freedoms protected by section 2 of the Charter and the legal and equity rights of—that are guaranteed by section 7 to 15 of the Charter. In effect, section 33 gives the democratically elected legislature the final say on whether a particular legislative policy is justified notwithstanding the impacts on Charter rights. As such, it is important to have robust public debate whenever the notwithstanding clause is contemplated or, of course, invoked.

At present, The Constitutional Questions Act enables the LGIC to refer legal questions to the Court of Appeal or to the Court of King's Bench for consideration and opinion, including questions related to the constitutionality—sorry—constitutional validity of provincial legislation. The amendment proposed in this bill would make it mandatory for the LGIC to seek the court's appeal—Court of Appeal's opinion whenever the Legislature invokes the notwithstanding clause.

The amendment requires two specific questions to be referred to the court: No. 1, whether the provision operates that—let me start again, Honourable Speaker. Number one, whether the provision that operates notwithstanding of the provision of the Charter violates sections 2 or 7 to 15 of the Charter;

and No. 2, if so, whether the provision is reasonable and demonstrably justified pursuant to section 1 of the Charter.

The referral to the Court of Appeal would've been made by the LGIC within 90 days after enactment of the relevant act. Under this bill, the Court of Appeal would be required to review the legislation and provide its opinion about Charter compliance. The court's opinion would not affect the act's operation, but it will help to inform public debate and assist in the democratic process.

Judicial commentary can serve the valuable function of providing voters with reliable and impartial information about the effect of the legislation in question on Charter rights and provide a better understanding of the implications of invoking the notwithstanding clause. In addition, since the invocation of the notwithstanding clause only remains in effect for up to five years unless it is re-enacted, the court's opinion would then provide important context for any legislative debate surrounding the potential renewal of section 33 after the initial five years.

Honourable Speaker, this is important legislation, but it's also come in the spirit of balance, ensuring that voters, that the public, have all the information necessary to understand why the notwithstanding clause may be invoked in the province of Manitoba. And it's very necessary because, of course, what we see happening in other jurisdictions outside of Canada is very concerning. But even within the country of Canada we have provinces who are using this clause to impugn or impinge on the rights of minorities. It is so important that the public understands the gravity and the nature of those uses of the notwithstanding clause, and this legislation is a balanced way to approach this issue and this question.

I seek all members' support of this legislation. It's important legislation, and it really sets out the Manitoba value that we have that, ultimately, the public needs to be involved and decide what is important to them, but we need to understand what the factors and what the circumstances are, and we ask the courts to be a part of that important process.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

### Questions

**The Speaker:** A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any opposition or independent member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions

asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** I hope that the minister is going to take the question period seriously, because this is something that's important to Manitobans and important because not a lot of Manitobans understand it. And the reason for that is that the notwithstanding clause has never been used before in Manitoba's history, so it's important that we showcase to Manitobans what exactly this changes and what would be the benefit to them.

So, Honourable Speaker, could the minister confirm for Manitobans which Charter rights cannot be overridden by section 33 of the Charter?

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Yes, Honourable Speaker, you know, I take it that the member opposite wants to play lawyer here in the Chamber, and he can have fun for the next 15 minutes doing that. I'm—I'd love to entertain his—entertain his dalliance in that work.

Honourable Speaker, I'd just ask the member opposite if he can just let us know in Saskatchewan, Alberta, which were the cases that the notwithstanding clause was either used or proposed to be used, and what were the circumstances of those cases.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** Honourable Speaker, families across Manitoba are struggling with rising costs for groceries, housing and utilities.

How will this legislation tangibly improve the financial situation of Manitoba families?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, Honourable Speaker, he's reading our platform and the work that we're doing as a government around affordability, around improving health care. I agree with him. Let's get to work. Let's pass this and let's move on to important legislation.

**Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot):** Families across Manitoba are struggling with raising property tax rates.

How will this legislation 'tangibly' improve the financial situation of Manitoba families?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Member opposite should table his most recent tax bills for his property or properties that he

owns. I'd be happy to take a review of those and compare those to the people that live in my constituency as well as most people that live in his constituency. Let's go ahead and compare those bills to those that existed under the previous government.

**Mr. Narth:** Well, I wish I could say that this wasn't to be expected, but it seems to be par for the course for this minister in particular. But I'll restate my question because this isn't supposed to be theatrics today. This is supposed to be the minister responsible for bringing forward legislation, answering a question to justify the decision to Manitobans. Manitobans want to know from the minister or from this House.

And my question again is, can the minister confirm for Manitobans which Charter rights cannot be overridden by section 33 of the charter? This is something that the minister should know and be prepared to answer in this question period.

**Mr. Wiebe:** You know, the member opposite should know that ChatGPT will write him another question if he just asks it, you know, but—and maybe—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Wiebe:** —he can just go ahead and do that here.

Honestly, Honourable Speaker, these are important issues because they're all about minority rights. It's about protecting Manitobans. Now, we've been clear about our position around the notwithstanding clause, but other provinces, provinces that are represented by his friends over in Saskatchewan and Alberta that—have used the notwithstanding clause, and I would suggest in pretty disgusting ways.

Member opposite can stand up and he can talk about why he thought it was important for them to use that in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Guenter:** Well, here's the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), the MLA for Concordia, giving his non-answers in his usual style, hiding them behind a lot of bombast. But I think he must answer these questions. Manitobans sent us here to do a job and he's proposed this legislation, and it's fair for him to fulfill his job as minister and answer questions.

Given the pressures facing our health-care system, why is legislative time being devoted to this bill instead of measures that would directly improve health-care access and outcomes for Manitobans?

**Mr. Wiebe:** What an unserious party opposite, Honourable Speaker. You know, I don't get it. We offer the opposition time to come in, get a bill briefing,

hear from the constitutional experts. In fact, we brought some of the best in the country to my office this morning to sit down with members opposite and they were a no-show. I guess, slept through the alarm. I don't know what their excuse was.

Honourable Speaker, be happy to give, you know, the—all the detail around the constitutionality of what we're talking about here and how important it is, but the real issue that Manitobans want answered is, are members opposite going to protect those minority rights? Are they going to stand up for or against trans kids in the next provincial election?

**Mr. Narth:** We're just trying to ask some simple questions, the simple questions that all Manitobans have. So I guess since the minister's staff aren't present here in the Chamber right now, it's going to take some time for the answers to start filtering in, but we welcome that. In the meantime, we'll keep asking some questions and hopefully get an answer.

So, Honourable Speaker, democratic rights, as we know, are already explicitly protected in the Charter and cannot be overridden by section 33. If those rights are already shielded, how exactly does this bill for—the minister's bill protect something that is already constitutionally protected?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, it protects trans kids. So members opposite ran a campaign in the last election where they specifically targeted the most vulnerable in our society. They went after trans kids. They put them front and centre in their deplorable campaign.

And where did they get this idea? Did they make and Alberta who are using the notwithstanding clause to go after those communities, to target trans kids.

We're going to stand—you've heard the Premier (Mr. Kinew) say it: we'll stand up every single day for the most vulnerable in our society. Members opposite have no clue. Maybe they do. Maybe they they've already decided what their next campaign slogan it's going to be, and it's going to be the same disgusting stuff that they brought in the last one.

**Mr. Guenter:** Honourable Speaker, the minister hasn't answered any questions to this point. I've asked him about how this legislation would tangibly improve the financial situation of Manitoba families who are dealing with the rising cost of groceries, housing, utilities, and maybe it's because under this NDP government Manitoba has the worst record in the on affordability.

I asked him about health care, and maybe he's refused to answer that question because under this NDP government, three hospitals have been grey-listed, which has never been done before, and wait times are breaking records; and, tragically, in the last four months, four Manitobans have passed away waiting in an ER, again under this NDP government. Maybe that's why he's not answering any questions because he has no record to stand on.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, let's talk public safety, Honourable Speaker. Members opposite, they cut 55 officers in the City of Winnipeg. Did that make HSC more safe or less safe?

Now, we added 36 new officers. We've seen the crime rates start to come down after they skyrocketed under members opposite. We hired institutional safety officers. Members opposite did nothing to make anyone safer in our health-care system.

So we're hiring up in the health-care system. We're hiring up in public safety. If member opposite wants to get on to those important—other important issues, great, let's do it. Let's pass this legislation. Let's move on to the next bill. In case he hasn't heard we got a few coming, so we're ready to debate anything that he wants any time.

**Mr. Narth:** Well, I think we're on to about our eighth question and still no notes from the minister's staff.

But as we ask questions of clarity on The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act from my last question, the minister said that this is in fact a bill about trans kids.

Nowhere have I read anywhere in the briefing that this is the bill about trans kids, never mind transgender people; it's trans kids, so maybe I'll let the minister expand on that, on how this bill is for trans kids, and maybe he can clarify a little of the uncertainty in this bill.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, you didn't come to the bill briefing. Honourable Speaker, member opposite didn't show up, but if he had, of course he would have heard all about what they're doing in Saskatchewan. It's being used—the notwithstanding clause—being used preemptively to keep provincial law that's affecting school pronouns and name-change policies in force even though a court has found that the policy has violated Charter rights.

Now members opposite, they can go ahead and stand behind that, and I would imagine if we really got the truth out of them, that's what they'd want to do; so

go ahead, stand behind that. What this bill is doing is allowing all voters, all Manitobans, to see exactly what a party like what the members opposite are a part of would do in this case.

Saskatchewan doesn't have that protection. In Manitoba—

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

**Mr. Guenter:** Judicial review already occurs whenever Charter questions arise. What practical purpose does an automatic reference to the Court of Appeal serve if the legislation in question has already been fully litigated through the courts?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, he's lost again, Honourable Speaker.

\* (16:10)

Now, again, he didn't come to the bill briefing either, so he—I mean, he's completely out of his element, but at the very least listen to the opening statement, the opening speech—maybe the member opposite could learn something. I—you know, I'm learning something every day: full accountability there. I'm always learning, and I think we all should be, so I'll just school him again.

So the amendment proposed would make it mandatory for the LGIC to seek the Court of Appeal's opinion, whereas right now it isn't mandatory in all cases, and this allows for when the notwithstanding clause is going to be invoked for that work already to begin. That's important. Voters need to know. What are these guys up to?

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet. *[interjection]*

Order.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** It's obvious that the Justice Minister didn't show up to his bill briefing, Honourable Speaker, because unfortunately today he fails to answer any of the simplest questions.

So I'll ask the minister today, quickly, if he can answer this one: Who did he specifically consult with on this bill?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, I showed up to the bill briefing. And what was great about it is, like I said, we had some of the smartest people in the province also show up, right? Some constitutional lawyers that are employed by the Province of Manitoba who are heading over to Ottawa to do important work in representing our province when it comes to the question of section 33 invocation in Quebec.

This is an extension of that work, and I would invite any member opposite to come and listen to the important work that's being done because, ultimately, Manitoba is being a leader in this regard. Where other provinces are using it for political games like the members opposite want to do, we're standing up for Manitobans, for voters and for the Constitution.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Honourable Speaker, it's unfortunate that this minister stands in his place today and once again puts misinformation on the record in regards to who he's consulting with. He's not consulting with anybody, and on top of that he's not even answering any of the questions.

Earlier in December of 2025, I had invited the minister to have a conversation with some of my constituents about very important topics within his constituency—or within his portfolio. He sat there, fed them a bunch of BS and then never got back to—

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

The member will withdraw that comment.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Honourable Speaker, the minister sat in front of my constituents and—

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

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) will withdraw that comment. Now.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Honourable Speaker, the minister—*[interjection]*—the minister failed to provide service. He promised—

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I've asked you twice to withdraw your comment. If I have to ask you again, then we'll start down the road to naming you.

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet. *[interjection]*

Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Honourable Speaker, the acronym BS is the bad service that he promised. I withdraw it, but I encourage the minister to actually follow his own stakes, Mr.—or Honourable Speaker.

So thank you, since we've run the clock, Honourable Speaker, on him providing bad—

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

When I ask a member to withdraw a comment, it has to be unequivocally withdrawn. Doesn't come with

explanations or extra verbiage. So will the member for Lac du Bonnet withdraw his comments unequivocally?

**Mr. Ewasko:** Honourable Speaker, which comment specifically?

**The Speaker:** Honourable member for Lac du Bonnet knows very well what comments he has to withdraw. He knows very well, because he did a sort-of apology but went on to explain. That's not allowed by our rules.

So I am asking the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet to withdraw the words complained of and to apologize immediately to this House. And if I have to ask again, then I will start the naming process.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I apologize, Honourable Speaker, as you said that I've apologized; and I withdraw those comments.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. I appreciate that, the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet. *[interjection]*

I will give the honourable minister the opportunity to respond and then the time for questions has expired.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, what we saw here on display, Honourable Speaker, is deplorable, and, you know, I think it's exactly what we expect from members opposite.

This is serious. These are serious matters, and we're taking a serious stance here in Manitoba to protect minority rights, to protect religious communities and, yes, to protect the most vulnerable kids in our society, trans kids and kids from the queer community.

That's what it's all about, Honourable Speaker. If you're not here for that, Manitobans are asking what are you really here for? And I think they—when they look opposite, they see exactly what that party is made out of.

Thanks, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Time for questions has expired.

### Debate

**The Speaker:** The floor is open for debate.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** It's a pleasure to be in the House this afternoon and speak to this important issue.

I want to welcome my friend, Reg Helwer, the former member for Brandon West, back to the Assembly here. I'm not trying to do the Speaker's job, but I'm very honoured to be among a good friend and a great

Cabinet colleague and a great former minister in our province. And I'm sure that all members share in that sentiment.

This is a very important topic and one that I think is getting bandied about in a way that doesn't bring the seriousness to it as it should. And the issue of the notwithstanding clause, section 33 in our Charter, is one that's been the subject of a litany of debate and academic writings over many years, and anybody who has done any studying on section 33 can find a variety of different opinions on it on either side.

Of course, the former Prime Minister, Prime Minister Justin—or Prime Minister Trudeau Sr. referred to this and felt that it was part of a flawed Charter. There are others who feel that it was the ultimate in a compromise in Canada to bring about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

There is confusion in my mind, and I think in the minds of many Manitobans, when it comes to what exactly the NDP's position is on the notwithstanding clause, and that confusion has been created and sown by the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself who at one point came into this House a few months ago and proclaimed for all to hear—and it's in Hansard—that the NDP would never use the notwithstanding clause.

And that proclamation was met with great cheers and fanfare by members in the government benches until about three days later when the Premier came in and said that they were great defenders of the notwithstanding clause—the NDP are—and that that defence of the notwithstanding clause went back to 1999 and a proclamation in a Throne Speech by then-premier Gary Doer.

So we were all left a little bit confused about how—and I'm sure that the members in the NDP were confused, too. They wouldn't put it on the record, I know, but I could see it in their faces, that on one day they were the great proclaimers that the notwithstanding clause would never be used in Manitoba, and three days later, the Premier was here saying that the NDP had always supported it and cited Gary Doer in 1999 as proof that they always supported the notwithstanding clause.

And so the current position of the NDP when it comes to section 33 is as clear as mud. It is completely confusing. And so they stack upon it this particular piece of legislation, which to be clear, does nothing to change the notwithstanding clause. It does nothing to change section 33. It is beyond the powers and capa-

bilities of this House and the members who are assembled within it to actually change the Constitution.

There is a long-standing formula for changing the Constitution that is well-known in Canada and provinces, and the former premiers have scars to prove it, about how difficult it is to change the Constitution in Manitoba—or, sorry, in Canada.

\* (16:20)

And the provincial government here in Manitoba, or any provincial legislature in Canada, has no ability to do that. This bill doesn't do any of that. This bill doesn't enhance section 33 of the Charter; this bill doesn't weaken section 33 of the Charter; it does nothing to section 33 of the Charter.

So the minister's proclamation about what it does or doesn't, or who it protects or doesn't protect, is entirely wrong, because it changes nothing in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And it is worth noting, actually, the history in Manitoba about section 33, because in a lot of ways Manitoba often punches above its weight when it comes to population, compared to other parts of Canada, when we get into these constitutional discussions.

And when the Charter and the Constitution was being brought back to Canada, being repatriated here in our country, there was a lot of debate in this Chamber, as there were chambers across Canada. And Gary Filmon, the then-premier, and other premiers—Peter Lougheed and others in Canada, certainly western Canada—argued for the inclusion of section 33 as part of their support for the Charter.

And their rationale at the time was that, in a constitutional democracy, that the supremacy should always be with the people as represented by the legislature or parliament. That was the notion, or that was the premise of section 33, that ultimately—the ultimate say when it came to governance and authority, with a few delineated exceptions, democracy is—as an example being one of the delineated exceptions, would be held within the parliament and would be held within the legislature; and section 33 ensured that.

Now, much of the debate when it comes to section 33 over the years is sort of focused around, you know, do you trust the legislators more than you trust the courts; and sometimes when the debate happens in an academic setting or another setting, that's where it sort of breaks down. Then it's about trust in one institution or the other.

That's probably a little too simplistic of a debate, and there are other scholars who've weighed into them, and I was reacquainting myself with some of them in recent days, and I would cite in a public document that's been published, one of the discussions that happened from a professor in Canada.

And this was a well-known professor, Peter Russell, a constitutional scholar who asserted—and he wasn't a great defender of section 33, but ultimately came around to the notion that it was better than alternatives.

And Russell asserted that his support was because judges are not infallible; and given the fact that there should be some process, more reason than simply court packing as they do in the United States, and less cumbersome than a constitutional amendment to ensure that the legislature could do something where it felt that the court had gone astray. So that was a constitutional professor who isn't necessarily enamoured with section 33 of the Constitution but who believed that it was better than the alternative.

So Gary Filmon and Manitoba and this Legislature as a whole agreed with section 33 at that time because—and western provinces, essentially western provinces—Quebec as well—would come along to support and use it most predominantly in Canada, to support section 33.

Now it's interesting that Gary Filmon at that time, I think, echoed the sentiments of premiers that came after him by saying, well, we support the ability and the 'preminancy' of a legislature and of the people of Manitoba to determine these issues. And section 33 gave them that power. They also didn't believe it should ever be used if it didn't have to be used.

So the Manitoba position—and this was echoed at the time by other provinces—is that, yes, let's maintain the supremacy of the Legislature when it comes to most issues; again there are some specific delineated exceptions, like democratic rights, but let's maintain those—that right, but let's then try never to actually use it. And Manitoba is actually the classic—the perfect example.

Manitoba is the example, actually, of how things worked well, in that successive governments—Conservative, NDP; I don't know the exact position of the provincial Liberals on this issue, but I've never heard anything contrary—believe that the notwithstanding clause is important. Not quite sure where the current Premier (Mr. Kinew) sits on this. One day he said he'd never use it, next day he said they always supported it.

But whatever, the long-standing position of Manitoba is that the notwithstanding clause is important, but that it shouldn't be used.

And that's exactly what's happened in Manitoba. It's never been used in Manitoba. Counter that to Quebec, which has used it many, many times; in fact, almost routinely, and a few other provinces to the west that have used it; not a lot, but they certainly have used it. Manitoba is the perfect example of how the compromise was supposed to work. Support for the supremacy of the Legislature, but let's not use section 33. And so, once again, there's an example of how Manitoba demonstrates and punches above its weight in a constitutional discussion, but then actually fulfills what it says it was going to do.

And Manitoba has a long history, and I'll give one example, of defending rights and defending minority rights. And one of these is actually something that members on this side and the other side actually agree upon. And that's a law that's happening or that happened in Quebec and started up a few years ago that would prevent public service workers from wearing religious symbols on the job. And that became quite an issue in Canada when the premier of Quebec brought forward that law to ban civil servants from wearing religious symbols on the job. I think it was bill 21 if I'm—I'm going off of memory.

So the premier at that time, Brian Pallister, spoke out against it and tried to rally other premiers in Canada to speak out against that bill. I remember him going to a council of federation, and in advance of the council of federation meeting said that he would be bringing this forward, and he did, and a number of premiers sided with Premier Pallister at the time and said, we don't support this particular bill that would ban people of faith, many different faiths, from wearing religious symbols. And, of course, at that time, Quebec said—and they did—said that they would apply the notwithstanding clause to the bill if it was found to be unconstitutional.

During my time as the attorney general, I made a commitment on behalf of the government that we would intervene, that Manitoba would intervene, when that case reaches Supreme Court and would speak against that bill as a violation of freedom of religion.

Now, this is where the hands-across-the-aisle part of my speech comes in because the current government, the current Premier, announced not too long ago that they were going to continue on with that commitment on the intervention. And that's a good

example of how, even across parties, between us and the NDP, there is consistency on some of these issues as it relates both to protecting minority rights and the notwithstanding clause.

So Premier Pallister made the issue, brought it to the national attention, and said that we were going to fight against this Quebec law. I was honoured as the attorney general to say we would intervene as a province.

The current Department of Justice is continuing with that intervention, and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) of the day said that he supports that intervention. And it is an example of how things actually properly work in the Manitoba context. That's actually how it's supposed to work. Manitoba is a great example of how we can respect the supremacy of Parliament but still advocate strongly for minority rights and not use the notwithstanding clause.

And yet, here comes along the Premier of the day and says, well, we're going to bring in this law that doesn't actually change anything, that doesn't actually do anything, and put it in place in a province that is actually doing an extraordinary job, and has for decades, on the issue around the notwithstanding clause. We've never used it. We've consistently, across different political parties, advocated both in our province and in other provinces—and I use the Quebec as one example—to support and defend minority rights.

So what is the need of the law? Who's asking for this law? When individuals of all political parties were door knocking in the last election, were people saying at the door, can you bring in something on the notwithstanding clause here in Manitoba that's never been used and where we have, across party lines, a good track record of standing up for minority rights.

\* (16:30)

Who is asking for this? What is the need for this particular piece of legislation? And the government hasn't been able to properly explain what it's going to do to make things better in terms of the notwithstanding clause itself. It doesn't enhance it. It doesn't change it. It's not within the power of this provincial Legislature or any provincial government to change the Constitution, and yet they bring it in as though it's some sort of a panacea.

I mean, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) tried, in his own way—some might call it bombastic; I'll let others define it—but in his own way to try to make it sound like this is going to change something. It changes absolutely nothing.

Whether the courts opine on whether or not a law is unconstitutional; or the constitutional law branch of government, of which there are many capable and qualified lawyers within, provide that opinion before a bill becomes before the Legislature or the public decides to discuss it, this bill doesn't change the fact that the notwithstanding clause is in place, that it is used, it can be used by Manitoba even though it's never been used. It doesn't change the fact that the NDP have two positions on it, both in favour and opposed to the notwithstanding clause. I'm not quite sure if they've ever clarified where they are on that. None of it changes.

And so you bring that into the Legislature at a time when people aren't sure if they can pay for groceries next week, when they're making decisions between milk and medicine; when, if you were to go into any coffee shop, a Tim Hortons, or you're to go and watch your child's hockey game and you're to talk to the parents beside you, I can assure you that they wouldn't say, you know what, I'm really wondering what's going on with the notwithstanding clause in Manitoba. Nobody's asking about it because it's not a problem in Manitoba. It's not an issue in Manitoba, and this is a made-up solution in search of a problem. It doesn't solve anything.

So the issues that people are actually concerned about aren't touched in the smallest way by this particular legislation. It doesn't change anything, it doesn't have the ability to change anything, it's not designed to change anything. It's just taking time away from the issues that Manitobans are really concerned about.

And if the members opposite or even members on my side don't believe me, if people don't believe me, then go into the coffee shop or go and talk to a constituent. And when they raise the inevitable issue to you that we're struggling with the cost of groceries, as one example, that I would encourage the NDP MLAs to look those constituents in the eye and say, you know what, I hear you, I feel your pain, but I want to tell you about what we're doing on the notwithstanding clause. And look at the response that you're going to get from those constituents. Look at the response that you're going to get.

First of all, they're going to be entirely confused because they're not going to know that this bill exists, and then when the MLAs try to explain what it does, they're not going to be able to because they know it doesn't actually do anything. It's simply a distraction, it's political theatre. When a government isn't able to

actually solve the issues that are really concerning to the constituents of which they purport to represent, they come up with other things, they come up with shiny objects and say, well, yes, we're not doing very well over here, but look at this.

And it's not going to work. Because Manitobans know what their concerns are, Manitobans know what their problems are. They're confronted with it every day. Now usually, a government would at least try to, when they bring out the shiny object and try to distract people with political theatre and try to get them to look another way and not think about the things that are actually concerning them, they would try to bring in a piece of legislation, as vacuous as it might be, that somewhat touches on the issue, that somewhat kind of relates to the issue that people are dealing with, that people are concerned with.

This one doesn't even come within the ballpark. It doesn't even circle within the universe of the issues that people are worrying about. And people are worrying about food prices and where people are worrying about health care, and they're worried about a number of other things that are touching their lives. The notwithstanding clause is not touching upon any of those things, even if there was the power in the Legislature to do anything about it.

So we see this for what it is. And Manitobans, to the extent that they're paying attention to this particular debate at all, would see it for what it is. It's an attempt by a government that is struggling to fulfill its election promises, that is struggling to—I mean they very—on the campaign trail they made it sound like they could fix everything in one day. They kind of went a little Trumpian by saying they could fix everything in one day: Just watch us, 24 hours, I'll pick up the phone and it'll all be fixed.

And now they're struggling with that, and so they shine this little distraction over here and say, well, hopefully people will forget about that. It's not going to work. This particular piece of legislation doesn't do anything; it's not going to change anything. And ultimately, the most important thing is it's not going to change the struggles that people are having day to day.

And I would encourage members opposite to take their jobs seriously, to take these serious 'ishals'—issues seriously, and to try to bring in legislation and policies that actually address the concerns that are impacting Manitobans on a day-to-day basis.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Prior to recognizing another speaker, I want to draw members' attention to the loge on my left, where we have joining us today the former member for Brandon West, Reg Hewler [*phonetic*].

And we welcome you here today.

\* \* \*

**The Speaker:** And now if there's no further members wishing to debate, is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**The Speaker:** So the question before the House then is second reading of Bill 4, The Constitutional Questions Amendment Act.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

Now as previously announced, we will proceed to second reading of Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act.

### Bill 6—The Sign Languages Recognition Act

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I move, seconded by the Minister of family—no, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn), that Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act; Loi sur la reconnaissance des langues des signes, now be read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

**The Speaker:** It's been moved by the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture, that Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

The honourable Minister of Education—

**An Honourable Member:** Just a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Pardon me?

The honourable member for Waverley, on a point of order.

### Point of Order

**MLA David Pankratz (Deputy Government House Leader):** You know, as the deputy House leader, I occasionally do need to get some extra clarification just on the processes in the afternoon. So I appreciate the opportunity just to make sure the orders of

business—this was the correct order that we were supposed to go in, just for my own understanding.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The honourable Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader):** Yes, well, obviously, members opposite seem to remain clueless, even though they've been here for a number of years—*[interjection]* And they continue to heckle. *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

Honourable member—the honourable Opposition House Leader has the floor.

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, obviously, he needs to continue to maybe study his rule book for a while if he's going to be deputy House leader. That's an utter embarrassment that he doesn't know the order of the bills being called. It's obviously a stall tactic. There's no point of order.

And now that the Government House Leader is here, we can continue on with business, possibly. *[interjection]*

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

I would just point out to the honourable member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) that he does not have a point of order.

\* \* \*

**The Speaker:** So now we will resume debate on Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act.

\* (16:40)

**MLA Schmidt:** It gives me great pride to rise and introduce the second reading of Bill 6. And I look forward to the support of this full House.

### Questions

**The Speaker:** So now, as per the rules, question period of up to 15 minutes will be held and questions may be addressed in the standard rotation and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Seeing no—the honourable member for Agassiz.

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** Okay, well, I am—thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am prepared to speak to Bill 6 today. I do have some questions here at hand and I want to ask the minister to clarify whether Bill 6,

The Sign Languages Recognition Act, creates enforceable standards or is it primarily symbolic recognition without mandatory requirements for departments?

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility):** I'm really pleased to get up in the Chamber today to be able to answer some questions in respect to Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act. I want to just put on the record, and I'm looking forward to putting some words officially after this 15-minute question period is over. But we're really excited for the second reading of Bill 6 and to formally recognize sign languages in legislation—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I'd just point out that the question period is not over. The member was asking a question—the question period is open. Sorry, I thought you were starting to debate—my mistake. I apologize.

Are there other questions? Seeing none, the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** So I'd like to ask the minister who decided to introduce this who they consulted with on this bill.

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech to the individual who asked the question. We had lots of conversations with all kinds of folks in community who really—including the, you know, the Manitoba Deaf Association—who really did illustrate to us the importance of having official recognition in Manitoba law. I appreciate all of the conversations that we had with folks and the training.

We took several of our members and our team took training with folks to really get a good history on the importance of sign language, and, again, the need to be able to formally recognize it here in Manitoba.

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

**Ms. Byram:** I will give the minister an opportunity to answer my initial question. Can she clarify whether this recognition creates enforceable standards or is it primarily symbolic recognition without mandatory requirements for departments?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes. I mean, the member who is my critic should know that Manitoba is one of the first jurisdictions across Canada that actually has an Accessibility for Manitobans Act and—in which those are the standards that are applied across Manitoba for accessibility.

She should know that. She is the critic. And you know I take exception and I would disabuse her that this is merely symbolic. This is important for deaf and hard-of-hearing Manitobans to be formally recognized in Manitoba's law. It's unfortunate that members opposite, in their seven and a half years, didn't think about doing this themselves. So the critic should know that Manitoba is one of the few jurisdictions—

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** Honourable Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand up and ask some questions on this very important bill, and I'd like to thank the ASL provider for the last few days, providing the services to all of us in the Chamber, and those thousands of Manitobans that watch that on a daily basis.

I'd like to ask the minister, or the minister who introduced the bill, when exactly did the discussions for this bill begin?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, that's a good question for once from the member opposite.

In fact, we actually had been working on this legislation for almost a year and a half, and we were finally able to get it through SRB and be able to introduce this. But we actually had been working with community and with AMA to, or with our team and our staff, to be able to develop the law for about a year and a half now.

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** Just wanted to mention that we are welcome to the steps of expanding accessibility and inclusion and we're very supportive of this bill, but just wanted to ask, then, the question of the minister: will she be—will the minister be supporting the MLA for Brandon West's bill to establish a deaf awareness week and day of sign languages in Manitoba?

I just think it's great because he has the transcripts in front of him, as well as other ways for him to be able to hear what's going on, and I just wanted to ask whether she will support that member.

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, that's a great question, or a good question. It's important to recognize that Bill 6 also aligns with international frameworks which affirm the inherent right to use sign languages and recognize them as part of a cultural heritage, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

And so we do have this separate act for sign languages recognitions and it allows for a preamble to provide the context about sign language and explain its importance for all Manitobans, not only the individuals that are in this Chamber.

**Ms. Byram:** We heard from individuals and in health-care settings communication barriers can lead to serious consequences. How will Bill 6 ensure deaf Manitobans can access qualified interpretation services in hospitals, emergency rooms and medical appointments?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, in fact—and I think that that's a very valid concern that—concern that has been brought forward by deaf and hard-of-hearing Manitobans.

In fact, there is a service for deaf and hard-of-hearing Manitobans, that they can ask for a live ASL interpretation through, like, electronic means, so that there is an individual that can sit there on a, like an iPad or whatever it may be, that be able to do that interpretation for a citizen who is at the hospital or at the doctor's. So that infrastructure does currently exist right now.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I appreciate the acknowledgement by the minister that I ask good and sometimes really great questions.

It's interesting that the minister said that her and her department, and the minister who introduced it, the Minister for Education, started on this for about a year, year and a half ago. I'd like to ask the minister what other ways can the provincial government provide support for the deaf community?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, through our Manitoba Accessibility office we have so much information on our website on how to work with and also support folks who are deaf or hard of hearing, and there's a wealth of information on our website about all of the work that the office does, all about the standards. And quite often there's a lot of workshops that are going on and information sessions that our office offers the public.

So I would encourage the member to get on the website and go and look at our Manitoba Accessibility Office's website, and all of the information is there. He might do well to learn some information there.

\* (16:50)

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Understanding and using sign language allows Manitobans to create connections, build cultures, foster inclusion and helps in their personal and professional lives both.

My question would be, is the government currently possibly thinking of other ways to encourage more sign language? Are we going to be—is there going to be programs for more education so more people can learn how to—the language of sign language?

**MLA Fontaine:** One of the things that—certainly here in the Chamber, we've seen that there's been a move towards having ASL picture-in-picture interpretation. Every event that I do as Accessibility Minister, as the Minister for Families, we have ASL interpretation. One of the things that we really heard from folks in the last little while, particularly from First Nations citizens, is that there's not an opportunity on-reserve to learn ASL. And we are in the process right now of partnering with an institution to be able to provide some of those additional training. We haven't announced it yet and we're just in the, hopefully, end stages of confirming that partnership.

**Ms. Byram:** We know that there's many deaf students and hard-of-hearing students in our school system that rely on interpreters and specialized supports. I just want to ask the minister, what steps will she be taking to ensure that recognition of sign languages leads to improved educational supports for these students?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, as my critic knows, unlike when the PCs were in, our government works together. So all of our ministers work together to ensure that we have a whole-of-government approach, truly a whole-of-government approach.

And so, the Minister of Education, you know, we know and she's announced that there's increased funding to schools. She's building schools, and in that provides that infrastructure to ensure that deaf and hard-of-hearing students have the supports that they need to ensure that they're getting the education and the proper education for themselves and their families as well.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I'd like to ask the Minister of Education, who brought forward this bill today, a question in regards to accessibility for these students. What types of additional supports has she provided in this year's funding for education for the students that need ASL interpretation?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, I mean, I'm surprised that the member opposite is asking that question after he was disastrously the Minister for Education and he made all kinds of cuts. Our Minister of Education has increased funding to the education system, which includes funding for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Our Minister of Education is building more schools, bigger schools. Our Minister of Education is repairing the damage that that very member did.

I don't remember that member getting up once in the Chamber while he was, like, the most disastrous of ministers for Education and talking about deaf or hard-of-hearing students or any accessibility issues as it—

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

**Ms. Byram:** We know that across Manitoba, the deaf community consistently raised concerns about the limited access to qualified interpreters, particularly in health care and rural communities.

So I want to ask the minister, how will Bill 6 improve interpreter availability in health-care facilities, as well as across rural Manitoba?

**MLA Fontaine:** Again, I think Bill 6 is—you know, it's important for us as Manitobans and for us as government and for us as legislators to in—formally entrench in law—in our law for history that sign language is a language and it deserves to be recognized. It deserves to be celebrated. It deserves to be included whenever possible and also, you know, to encourage folks to be a little bit more cognizant. All of us can be a little bit more cognizant in ensuring that we're being accessible ourselves for deaf and hard-of-hearing Manitobans.

And this bill, Bill 6, does just that by entrenching this in law and ensuring that, you know, sign language gets the—

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** It's unfortunate that the Families Minister, the Minister of Accessibility, stands up and tries to throw shade over on this side of the House, Honourable Speaker. I haven't even started getting into her multiple failings as a Families Minister.

I would just like to point out that in 2023, the PCs established a new \$12.6-million grant program to assist eligible seniors experiencing hearing loss. Can the minister educate the House on how that program's going, and how has she added to it?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, I—the member opposite should know that that program still exists, and, you know, maybe the member opposite and their government did maybe one good thing for accessibility. But, certainly, under our government, we have included—we are moving towards all of our fine—our standards. We're actually on the final standard of our AMA.

And, again, you know, the member opposite can get up, but they had seven and a half years to formally recognize sign languages, and they never did. And so I'm really proud that our team and our government are formally recognizing Bill 6 and that we've created an infrastructure, including two positions for ASL interpreters for government, which was also never done during their—

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

The time for question period is also expired.

### Debate

**The Speaker:** The floor is open for debate.

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** I rise in the Chamber today to speak to Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act. This will be a speech of recognition: recognition of language, recognition of culture, recognition of history and, most importantly, recognition of Manitobans who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafened and deaf-blind.

We are all know language matters, and especially here in this Chamber. But before seeking to the substance of this bill, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the broader context in which this legislation came to be.

Last June, the Minister responsible for Accessibility (MLA Fontaine) had a hot mic moment, disrespecting and complaining about an American Sign Language interpreter who was sharing the stage with her. This moment caused deep concern for many in the deaf and hard-hearing community. Comments that refer to sign language in dismissive terms were hurtful to many Manitobans who rely on these languages not as a tool

but as their first language and as a central part of their identity and culture.

The reaction from the community was immediate and understandable. Individuals across Manitoba, including Canada's first deaf parliamentarian, Gary Malkowski, described the comments as deeply troubling and reflective of attitudes that the deaf community has worked for decades to overcome. I heard these issues come to my office. Our PC caucus office received hundreds of emails asking for the resignation of the Minister of Families, the very person who is supposed to advocate and defend those.

It is moments like this that matter. Words matter, and the actions and attitudes of those entrusted with responsibility for accessibility matter. For Manitobans who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafened or deaf-blind, recognition is not symbolic. It is about dignity, respect and full participation in public life.

I understand bill sticks—Bill 6 stands apart from other accessibility legislation because it recognizes what the deaf community has long known: that sign languages are not simply accommodations; they are languages, languages with their own grammar, their own history and their own cultural heritage. Sign languages are not simply tools of accessibility. They are not a collection of gestures. They are not signed English or signed French. They are complete, complex, visual languages with their own grammar, structure and—

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 27 minutes remaining.

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

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 5, 2026

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