



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

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CORBETT, Shannon	Transcona	NDP
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	Ind.
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

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 26—The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Eliminating Mandatory Overtime for Nurses)

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), that Bill 26, The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Eliminating Mandatory Overtime for Nurses), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 26, The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Eliminating Mandatory Overtime for Nurses).

This bill limits the use of mandatory overtime to circumstances where a patient's life or health may be affected. It enables the minister to establish benchmarks

for eliminating the use of mandatory overtime for nurses, and it requires operators in the health-care system to develop plans to ensure compliance with those benchmarks.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Bill 28—The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Nurse-to-Patient Ratios)

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I, move, seconded by the First Minister, that Bill 28, The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Nurse-to-Patient Ratios), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to 'introdil'—introduce Bill 28, The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Nurse-to-Patient Ratios). This bill will enable the minister to establish nurse-to-patient ratios by regulation. It will require health authorities, health-care organizations and health corporations to prepare a plan to ensure compliance with the ratios.

And, Honourable Speaker, I want to take a moment to say thank you to the thousands of nurses who've been working the front lines and working with our government to take this very important step today.

Thank you.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

Bill 15—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn), that Bill 15, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Sandhu: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 15, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act.

Many consumer goods have become harder to fix and maintain. Repair today often requires specialized tools, difficult-to-obtain parts and access to software and information such as manuals. This bill introduces the requirement of suppliers and manufacturers to make the parts, tools, software and manuals necessary to repair the goods available to the buyer.

These amendments will help make life more affordable for Manitobans by giving consumers more choices and information on the repair options available to them.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

Bill 21—The Drinking Water Safety Amendment Act

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I move, seconded by the Minister of Public Service Delivery (MLA Sandhu), that Bill 21, The Drinking Water Safety Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

* (13:40)

MLA Moyes: I'm pleased to present Bill 21, the first substantive update to Manitoba's drinking water safety legislation since its inception over 20 years ago. Manitoba is committed to protecting public health by ensuring that tap water that is used by the public for drinking and other domestic uses, such as bathing, is protected from contamination through The Drinking Water Safety Act and its regulations.

The Drinking Water Safety Act is Manitoba's primary legislation for regulating the construction and operation of over 1,300 licensed drinking water systems. However, the act contains gaps in authorities and outdated clauses that have led to inconsistent regulation of smaller water systems and difficulty pursuing enforcement.

Bill 21 will address these gaps and ensure that the regulatory requirements applied to Manitoba's water systems are aligned with risk to public health. The bill also streamlines enforcement efforts where unlicensed water systems are found and modernizes outdated record-keeping provision.

I'm pleased to introduce this bill to the House for its consideration.

Thank you.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Waverley Heights Community Group

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): Every so often, you see a neighbourhood that shows how strong a community can be when people choose to stay connected and look out for one another. And in Waverley Heights, that spirit is alive and well.

We're joined today by three outstanding community leaders: Leslie Walsh, Lisa Jordan and Marj Pullen. Their efforts have helped build a neighbourhood where people stay informed, they stay engaged and they stay connected, not through any formal program but through genuine care for one another.

And a few weeks ago, I had the chance to visit Leslie's place and see first-hand the connections that have been cultivated. And these gatherings, they began during COVID, when people needed a safe way to still feel human and connected. And what struck me immediately was the atmosphere. Neighbours quickly relaxed into challenging conversations, shared personal stories, laughed together. When you're face to face, tensions ease a little, conversations flow and the opportunity to really connect goes up.

And what's remarkable is that these Monday happy hours didn't stop when the pandemic did. They've continued, week after week, strengthening that sense of belonging in their community, their city, their province. It's simple, it's grassroots and it's making a real difference.

This kind of community connection works hand in hand with the practical steps our government is taking to keep Manitobans safe: hiring more police; pushing for stricter bail reform; doubling ankle monitors; helping people move from tents into homes; and cracking down on weapons and drug trafficking. These actions matter, but they become even more powerful when neighbourhoods like this one in Waverley Heights build trust from the ground up.

Violent crime is coming down, and that's progress. But progress like this doesn't happen without the people who care, people who put in the time, who bring others together, who turn neighbours into a community.

So, Honourable Speaker, I want to close by recognizing this remarkable group and ask that all of their names be included in Hansard. And I also ask all my colleagues in the House to join me in showing our huge appreciation and support for the efforts of Lisa, Leslie and Marj who are joining us here today.

Robby and Jean Balkara, Irma and Bruce Charney, Brad Hilton, Lisa Jordan, Kerry Kohut, Lisa Kurytnik, Marj and Mark Pullen, Bill and Kathy Shaver, Gary and Carol Smith, Conrad and Michelle Stoesz.

Mason Family Farm

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): It is truly an honour to rise today to recognize an outstanding Manitoba farm family, the Mason family of Mason Farms in Oak Point, and they join us today.

Darcy and Lanna Mason, along with their children Andrew and Laila, represent the very best of what family farming is all about.

The story is one built on dedication, innovation and a deep love for the land and livestock they care for every day.

In the Interlake, farms like the Mason's families are the backbone of our communities. They support our local economy, feed our province and help keep rural Manitoba strong for the next generation.

The Mason family's farming roots go back to 1948, when Darcy's grandparents, Nelson and Anna Mason, first started the farm, make-milking a few cows by hand. Over the decades, the family has continued to build on that legacy.

Today, Mason Farms is a diverse operation with a 60-cow Holstein dairy herd, Black Angus cattle and crop production that supports both their livestock and their farm's future.

In 2013, the family made a major step forward by building a new dairy barn and installing a robotic milking system. That investment in technology improved efficiency and cow comfort while helping balance the many responsibilities of a modern mixed farm.

Their success has also been recognized beyond the farm gate. The Mason family was recently featured on the cover of Better Farming magazine in an article titled, flexibility in farming, highlighting their thoughtful approach to modern agriculture. As Lanna wisely said: Success on the farm often comes from a lot of little successes.

Those successes add up to something meaningful: a strong family farm and a bright future for agriculture in Manitoba.

Please join me in recognizing Ken, Sylvia, Darcy, Lanna, Andrew and Laila from Mason Farms.

National Pandemic Observance Day

MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to recognize national Pandemic Observance Day, marked each year on March 11. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a global pandemic, a moment that changed lives across the world and here in Manitoba.

This day gives us an opportunity to remember those we lost and reflect on the profound impact the pandemic had on our communities. In Manitoba, 2,571 lives were lost to COVID-19. Behind each number is a loved one, a parent, grandparent, friend or neighbour whose memory continues to live on.

We also recognize the many ways the pandemic affected people across our province. It placed enormous pressure on our health-care system and deepened challenges for many vulnerable Manitobans and communities already facing barriers.

Honourable Speaker, today we also express our sincere gratitude to front-line workers who stepped forward during an incredibly difficult time. Health-care professionals, first responders, long-term-care staff and essential workers showed remarkable dedication and courage while caring for Manitobans and keeping our province safe and moving forward.

National Pandemic Observance Day reminds us not only to remember, but also to learn from the past and prepare for the future. By reflecting on the lessons of the pandemic, we can strengthen our systems and better support Manitobans in the years ahead.

Today we remember those we lost and show our sincerest gratitude to those who cared for us all.

Thank you.

SOL Designs

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Today I would like to recognize a remarkable entrepreneur and artist from my constituency, Sol Desharnais of St. Pierre Jolys.

Sol is the creative mind behind SOL Designs, a business that brings new life to materials many people would normally overlook, transforming reclaimed and

upcycled materials into unique, functional works of art.

Through clever and unexpected combinations of materials such as recycled rubber tires, upcycled vinyl flooring, seatbelts and eco-felt made from wood and corn fibre, Sol has created products that are now showcased in artisan markets and fine boutiques all across Canada. One of his designs was even displayed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts as part of their Bon Appetit! exhibition.

But what makes Sol's work even more remarkable is the purpose behind it. Sol partners with EPIC/SMILE of St. Malo, creating meaningful employment opportunities for adults living with different abilities. I have had the opportunity to see first-hand the pride that EPIC/SMILE participants take in producing these high-quality fashion pieces of artwork. Their work reminds us that when people are given the opportunity to contribute, the results can be extraordinary.

Honourable Speaker, Sol's work shows us that innovation is not just about new ideas. It's about creating value, building community and recognizing the potential in both materials and the people.

I recognize—I encourage everyone to take a look at SOL Designs online and see these remarkable creations for themselves.

* (13:50)

It is my pleasure to welcome Sol Desharnais to the gallery today and thank him for the creativity, opportunity and inspiration that he brings to our region.

Thank you.

Willard Reaves

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I want to use today's member's statement to recognize the leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, Willard Reaves.

I have had the honour of working alongside Willard for just over four years now, and I have learned a lot about him.

Willard has a passion for making Manitoba better, with his strong ethics, incredible focus and team-building mentality.

As a football star, he set many team records and helped the Bombers win the 72nd Grey Cup. And among his many awards, he is a member of the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame.

I believe his experiences have shaped him into being a strong leader, and I am grateful to be part of

his team that is truly a team, where I feel valued and that my voice is heard, and I want to thank Willard for creating this culture of respect.

Willard grew up in a modest household, and his great-great-grandfather, Marshal Bass Reeves, whose fearless pursuit of justice left a lasting family legacy.

After hanging up his cleats, Willard chose to remain in Winnipeg where he married Lise, a dedicated nurse of 39 years, and raised two sons, Ryan and Jordan, both professional hockey and football players.

After football, Willard worked in law enforcement, serving with distinction in the Manitoba Justice Department as a sergeant with the Sheriff's office.

Honourable Speaker, Willard's commitment to community safety and justice reform led him to politics, and his leadership has ushered in a new era for the party, emphasizing grassroots engagement and social justice.

I have had the pleasure of attending events with Willard and have witnessed first-hand how genuine he is. His commitment to service, integrity and deep connection to communities across Manitoba is what makes him a great leader.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to moving on, there are some guests in the public gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery, from Assiniboine College, 22 post-secondary students under the direction of Delise [*phonetic*] Martin. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Simard).

We welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Safe Consumption Site Request Not to Open Facility

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker and Manitobans, I've stood in this House for days and asked the Premier to put a stop to his careless drug consumption site. I've asked the Premier to say no to letting youth into the drug consumption site and to check their ID. He says no. I've asked the Premier to say that he will not inject pregnant women with illegal drugs. He refuses to answer. I have asked the Premier to not let first-time

users in there, and he refuses to say no. These are simple questions I'm asking the Premier.

Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario have all put an end to their drug consumption sites, and yet somehow, under this misguided NDP government, they want to open a drug consumption site.

So I'll ask the Premier today: Will he put a stop to the opening of his drug consumption site today?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Did we just hear another PC MLA about to make a statement to the House? Was that what we just heard there?

Honourable Speaker, I've made it very clear, nobody in our society should be using drugs. Member opposite, however, though, in a committee of this House, very understanding and supportive of supervised consumption; then he comes into this Chamber, now he's against it. He's a phony Conservative; I think any real Conservative can see that. And it's not just the Manitoba voters; it's the PC MLAs who are voting with their feet.

Today is an important day in the House. Today is the day that the PC caucus must eject the MLA for Red River North. We voted to sanction him. He broke the law. He ignored your votes in the last election to push through a project that benefited his wealthy friends.

Will the Leader of the Opposition listen to the member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé) and kick the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) out of the PC caucus today?

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

Mr. Khan: You can see the behaviour of the Premier there where I ask him questions about not opening a drug-supervised consumption site, and what does he do? He makes jokes. He laughs. He completely pivots and refuses to answer the question on whether or not he will allow youth into the centre. He says no one should use drugs, but yet he wants to provide them a space to use drugs.

Honourable Speaker, and Manitobans, we know better. We know common sense. Common sense and compassion is not to enable or give Manitobans the chance to do illicit, illegal drugs.

Why will the Premier simply not stand up today and say, we will not let youth into the drug consumption sites, we will not let pregnant women into the consumption site and we will not let first-time users into the consumption site? Instead, we will base our

decisions on compassion and support and recovery. It's not that hard, Honourable Speaker.

Will the Premier simply stand up and do the right thing? *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: No one should use drugs, but people do. So the 'capassionate' thing is to keep them alive long enough so that they can turn their lives around.

The member for Red River North has not turned his life around. He continues to sit in the caucus of the PCs. The member for Dawson Trail had the moral courage to walk out of that caucus room yesterday, saying, and I quote: To still be sitting beside the member who directly was found in violation and not thrown out of the party was extremely problematic for me. End quote.

Will the Leader of the Opposition finally take action and eject the member for Red River North?

I can tell you, if it was up to me, he would have been long gone.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, a study published yesterday in a scientific journal called Addiction reports that—statistics after a year of what happened when a drug consumption site was closed.

And what did this scientific journal find after one year? Number one, users sought out medication to help with recovery and addictions at an increased rate than when the centre was open.

What else did it find? That the closure of the site did not cause an increase in emergency room visits. What else did it find? That the closure of the site did not lead to an increase in emergency medical services. And lastly, the study found that the closure of the drug consumption site did not lead to an increase in overdose sites—deaths, Honourable Speaker. *[interjection]*

The Minister of Health wants to heckle me because they are failing Manitobans when it comes to health. On this side of the House, we want to help—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —Manitobans with compassion and recovery.

Will the Premier listen to the science and put a stop to his drug consumption site today?

Mr. Kinew: It's kind of sad, isn't it, Honourable Speaker? This very member said, oh, we shouldn't be using language like drug consumption site; we should be listening to the expert. And then he thinks it's going to benefit him in conservative circles. So he stands up and tries to talk tough against drug consumption sites. And then he goes and hires an Alberta Liberal campaign manager who supports our position when it comes to supervised consumption and harm reduction.

The contradictions abound. We know that Manitobans are sick of the PCs. In fact, PC MLAs are sick of the PCs. On his way out the door, Dawson Trail—

An Honourable Member: Mark Wasyliw.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, we ejected an unethical NDP MLA. You did not have the courage to do the same.

Another quote from the member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé) on the way out the door: There's no accountability when you think about it. We have someone who has an ethics violation—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Khan: The Premier stands up and he talks about learning and listening. You can grow. You can learn. I have grown and I have learned in this role and I have learned that a drug consumption site is wrong.

* (14:00)

But will the Premier be willing to learn and grow and listen? Will he listen to Joseph Fourrier [*phonetic*], the founder of Singing Red Bear Foundation addiction recovery help? Will that—in recovery for seven years— [*interjection*]

And the Premier wants to heckle me as I get emotional—

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —about Joseph losing his son to addictions and overdose.

The Premier wants to laugh at me and heckle me right now in the Chamber. [*interjection*] And now the Minister of Health wants to heckle. And Honourable Speaker will allow this behaviour to continue. It's shameful; it's disgusting that the Premier would attack me when I talk about a man losing his son to overdose.

Honourable Speaker, the question is simple: Is the Premier willing to listen, learn and grow and put an end to his drug consumption sites?

The Speaker: I would ask us to keep the heckling down because I'm having a hard time even hearing what the question is.

Mr. Kinew: So what's going on here today is the PCs had somebody who broke the ethics law here in Manitoba, and instead of addressing that head-on, they want to swing down and politicize people struggling with addictions. What are we going to do? Not going to play that game. We're going to help people with addictions. We're going to make the community better.

But that does not mean that those PC MLAs should escape accountability. Again, we know that PC MLAs are leaving. Is it 25 per cent of their caucus that is already headed for the exit so far? Is it 30 per cent the member for Spruce Woods (Mrs. Robbins) is now trying to correct me on in the back row? I'm not exactly sure.

But yesterday when the Dawson Trail MLA left, he said, and I quote: I have a difficulty as someone who has a moral compass and someone who has ethics to sit with a party that seems to be okay with allowing a member to continue. End quote.

So there, of course, is a condemnation of the leader of the PCs but really a condemnation of all of those—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Just before I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition, I would caution reflecting on the Chair is not allowed.

Mr. Khan: The Premier wants to stand up and make jokes. He doesn't want to answer questions on the reality of people dying and being stuck in the cycle of addictions.

A study of over 681 people that were suffering through addictions found that the closure of a drug consumption site did not lead to any increase in overdose deaths. The Premier has been standing up and putting false information on the record time and time again. These drug consumption sites do not work. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, BC have all closed their drug consumption sites.

Why is the Premier so arrogant, so guided by his ideology in injecting Manitobans with drugs instead of listening to other provinces, following what they've done, learn and help Manitobans break the vicious cycle of drug addictions?

Will he commit to doing that today?

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker, I don't need to use name-calling because I got the facts on my side, I got morality on my side and I got ethics on my side. And we are taking action to help Manitobans living with addictions.

So, again, just to repeat the quote for the leader of the PCs to reflect on, the most recently departing member of the PCs said, and I quote: I have a difficulty as someone who has a moral compass and someone who has ethics to sit with the party that seems to be okay with allowing a member to continue. End quote.

I would certainly have difficulty sitting with all of them too, permissive as they are of the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) breaking the law, being fined and—most importantly—violating your will, your democratic will that our veterans fought for.

So will the member opposite not only stop this divisive politics, but will he acknowledge that he has no moral standing to be able to criticize—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Khan: I've asked five questions on if the Premier will put a stop to his misguided drug consumption site and all five times the Premier has stood up and attacked, take shots, insulted and not even addressed the question once, when he wants to stand up and preach on some moral, ethical high ground.

Well, let's go to that high ground. He has a DUI. He assaulted—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —Tara Hart in 2003. He assaulted her again in May 2003. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of Education needs to come to order.

Mr. Khan: When we want to talk about morals and ethics, let's dig into the Premier's past here again: assault, counts of DUI, failure to attend court, failure to comply with conditions.

And let's fast forward now because he supposedly says he's a changed man. Well, how about when people say, and I quote: He's a dysfunctional and toxic leader who pressures, bullies, demeans those who disagree with him. You could see it on display right here today, Honourable Speaker and Manitobans. This is the Premier who has no moral ethical ground to stand on.

Will he do the right thing and put a stop to drug consumption sites today?

Some Honourable Members: Hear, hear.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: For all the political watchers who've been watching all the doings here at the Legislature this week, just note that the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) did not stand up. So times are tough for the PCs.

On this side of the House, however, we're helping people with addictions. We're using harm reduction; we're using enforcement. But, again, I'll quote somebody who sat in the caucus room with this person, who watched him sit at the Cabinet table in government: I have a difficulty as someone who has a moral compass, for someone who has ethics, to sit with a party that seems to be okay with allowing a member to continue.

Of course, The Canadian Press asked the Leader of the Opposition in a scrum yesterday: What does it say if somebody would rather sit as an independent and run the high risk of not winning as an independent rather than to continue to sit in your caucus?

What did the leader have to say in response to that? Yes, another great question.

Well, let that show that there are sometimes great questions in this building; it's just that none of them ever come from the PCs.

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Safe Consumption Site Substance Use Risk During Pregnancy

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Manitobans regularly see public health warnings about the risk of alcohol use during pregnancy because of the potential harm to children. And I will table that document.

Yet this government is moving forward with its drug consumption site. Many families are asking how those two align, those messages. We already recognize the serious risks that substances can pose during pregnancy.

Honourable Speaker, how is this government ensuring that its addiction policies protect both mothers and their children while supporting pathways to treatment and recovery?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): We are working with experts on this issue. We are ensuring that people are getting supports and services and a balanced approach. Unlike members opposite, who buried their heads in the sand, covered their eyes, didn't want to address this issue. We're listening to Manitobans. We're making sure that they're getting the supports and services that they so desperately needed for so long.

We had an overdose spike in our province for years. In 2020, we had 472 overdoses. In 2021, we had 582–81 overdoses. In 2022, 608 overdoses. In 2023, 794. That's under their government.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a supplementary question.

Safe Consumption Site Location Impact on Property Values and Insurance Rates

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Families and businesses near the proposed drug consumption site are sounding an alarm. They're being told they may not be able to get mortgages, may lose access to insurance and could see their property values absolutely plummet. For many Manitobans, their homes or businesses is their biggest financial investment, and many of these people have been here for 30 to 50 years.

Before forcing this drug consumption site into their neighbourhood, did this government assess the impact of mortgages, insurance and property values? It's a simple question, yes or no?

* (14:10)

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): We have been working very closely with all of the partners. I've been meeting with the businesses. I've been meeting with the community members. We're going to be working very closely—and in fact, if that member read the McGill report, they would know that crime went down, and we are going to be monitoring to assure that, you know, services and supports are well in that community, to make sure that businesses are well supported, community members are supported.

We're working with downtown community safety patrols to make sure that there's mobile units, that there'll be foot patrols, as well as community wellness workers to ensure that the supports and services that these folks—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Ms. Smith:—will get so that they can get on a path to recovery, unlike members opposite, who didn't want to support and provide—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Last year, homeowners across Manitoba saw massive increases to their education property taxes. The NDP quietly removed the 2 per cent cap on school divisions, eliminated the education property tax rebate and failed to fund education to inflation.

Instead of relief, this NDP offers nothing but band-aid solutions while ripping away every single guard rail that protects Manitoba homeowners. The first year, it was sloppy planning. This year, it's plain idiotic.

Will the minister stand up and admit that his tax scheme has failed Manitoba families?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, we're cleaning up the mess the PCs left for Manitobans. For years—for years, what did they do? They didn't fund education. They cut education and they left our kids without the funding that they need to make sure that they could succeed.

Finally, what is our government doing? We're funding education now, two years in a row, and now, of course, recently we announced 80 million more dollars for our education system in this upcoming year.

And in addition to finally funding education the way it needs to be funded, we're also making education property taxes more affordable. Last year, Manitobans received a \$1,500 reduction. This past tax season, \$1,600. Honourable Speaker, we're doing the work of funding education and making education property taxes more affordable.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Stop the clock, please.

If the clock's stopped, I want to caution both leaders that hollering back and forth when people are asking and answering questions makes it very hard for the Speaker to hear what's going on. Plus, it sets a bad tone for the rest of the members. So I'd ask you both to please stop.

Mrs. Stone: The only thing this NDP tax scheme did was increase education property taxes for 55 per cent of property owners within the city of Winnipeg.

For years, safeguards were there to protect homeowners from massive swings in their school division taxes and their education—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: —property taxes. Yet the NDP removed all of those protections and now homeowners are paying the price.

Families in Louis Riel, River East Transcona, St. James, Pembina Trails, among all others across the province are paying more, thanks to this NDP government.

Band-aid solutions won't work. Until education property taxes are removed from property tax bills altogether, the issue will continue to grow.

Will this Minister admit that it's been his grand plan all along to hike the taxes on—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, the members opposite left a disaster in education due to their underfunding. Same thing they did in our health-care system. They cut, they cut and they cut and they created a huge number of problems for Manitoban students.

What is this team doing? We are finally funding education the way it's supposed to be funded and, while we do that, we're lowering the cost of education property taxes through our Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, again, last year saving Manitobans \$1,500 off their education property taxes and this past tax season, \$1,600. We're making it more affordable and we're fixing the mess they left for Manitobans. We're cleaning it up and we're going to keep funding education the way it needs to be.

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

Cap on School Division Taxes

Mrs. Stone: New question: School divisions are forced to once again raise taxes as a result of this NDP failing to fund school divisions adequately. Manitoba families want to see a fair funding model and fair levels of taxation of where they live and where their children go to school.

The MLA for Southdale's constituents in Louis Riel School Division are seeing a 12 per cent hike. The Minister of Finance has enabled a 9 per cent hike on his own constituents.

Will the minister commit to a cap on school divisions to protect homeowners from continued increases to their school division taxes?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, it's absolutely bananas to me that after years of underfunding education, the members opposite would come in here and accuse this team, who's funding education every year beyond the rate of inflation—most recently put another \$80 million into education—that they have any leg to stand on in accusing this team of underfunding education.

Manitobans know—Manitobans know—that for years they created a mess in our education system because of their underfunding. Finally, we're doing—we're providing funding as needed and we're saving Manitobans money on their education property taxes.

Again, the critic—nine out of 10 people in their community are saving more money as a result of our measure, and I know that's the same for members across the way, reducing costs for Manitobans while we fund education the way it should be funded.

Education System New Funding Model Needed

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Manitobans have yet to hear a plan from this NDP in what they are going to do to protect homeowners and property owners from annual increases through school division taxes and education property taxes. This issue is not going away. The NDP is offering band-aid solutions. Education property taxes, school division taxes, need to be removed from property tax bills altogether—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: —and a fair and sustainable, equitable education funding formula needs to be developed. This is what Manitobans want to see.

When can we expect to see an education funding formula that's sustainable and equitable for all Manitobans? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, after years of underfunding, this team is finally funding education the way it needs to be funded. Years and years of cuts had an impact, and we know that. If the members opposite had of a single conversation with a divisional leader or people across the province, they would recognize the mess that they created.

And again, finally, under the leadership of our incredible Education Minister, our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and this team, we are doing the work. We're ensuring school divisions get the support that they need. We're ensuring our students get the support that they need, and we're doing that while we help to keep costs as low as possible.

Again, that education property tax rebate, \$1,500, \$1,600 at this lax-tax time. We're doing that important work of lowering costs for Manitobans while we fund education properly—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Homeowners in Charleswood are about to be hit with a whopping 9.9 per cent increase to their education property taxes, thanks to this NDP government. How much did Pembina Trails School Division get from this NDP government: 0.9 per cent. It's a de facto cut, and it doesn't even cover inflation and wage increases, and it certainly does nothing to make schools better for kids and teachers. This is how the NDP are making the affordability crisis worse, by forcing a 10 per cent property tax hike on Charleswood homeowners.

Why is the NDP hitting homeowners with a massive tax hike and shifting the blame to school trustees?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, if the members opposite want to understand some of the pressures we're seeing in our—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Sala: —school divisions, they should look in the mirror. Because we know that for years, they underfunded education and created a crisis in school divisions across the province. That's every single one of those members' responsibility. They need to look in the mirror.

They cut education just like they cut health care, just like they cut child care, just like they cut municipalities. That's their record.

Look in the mirror. Take responsibility for what you did. On this side of the House, we take accountability, we're funding education, finally the way it needs to be funded, while we reduce costs for Manitobans. Manitobans can count on this team to get it done.

* (14:20)

Mrs. Cook: Not in Pembina Trails—0.9 per cent is a de facto cut. In fact, Pembina Trails' superintendent, Shelley Amos, said this government's funding will not meet the division's needs. She told media, quote: This won't cover our increased expenses due to contractual obligations and inflation. This funding announcement may result in reductions to programming or increases in local taxation. Unquote.

This is this minister's failure, not the school division's.

I ask the minister again: Why is she forcing a massive property tax hike on Charleswood homeowners in the middle of an affordability crisis?

MLA Sala: Again, Honourable Speaker, an over 3.5 per cent overall increase in funding to education this year, including an overall \$80-million lift for our education system.

And what happened for years under the members opposite? Cuts, cuts—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Sala: —and more cuts. Again, not only in education, across the board: education, health care, municipalities. That's their record, taking a chainsaw to everything that Manitobans care about.

On this side of the House, we're doing the important work of fixing the mess that they left for us to clean up. Manitobans sent us here to fix all of the challenges, all the terrible problems that they left for us. We're doing that work, we're funding education properly and we're doing that while we reduce the cost of education property taxes for Manitobans—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Sala: —with the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit.

Honourable Speaker, we're going to continue that important work each—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Homelessness Among Seniors Contributing Factors

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, in 2022, the Winnipeg Street Census counted 1,256 Manitobans experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg, where in 2024, under this government, that number increased to 2,469. Shockingly, it was found that one quarter of people who are homeless are aged 50 or higher.

Honourable Speaker, can the minister tell us why, under their watch, Manitoba has seen so many seniors, in particular, becoming part of our homeless population?

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

Under the former government, they took 55+ buildings and they made them accessible to everyone. We're reversing that and we're actually making 55+ buildings back to seniors' housing. We want to ensure that, you know, seniors are safe in their housing, something that members opposite made unsafe.

When I came into this portfolio, you know, coming into these buildings, like I said before, it was like going into Detroit in the '80s. People didn't want to come out of their housing. You know, they didn't feel safe.

And the member from Portage la Prairie, you know, we—we're fixing up the damage that his failed government created. We are making sure that safety and security is the No. 1 priority—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Seniors at Risk of Homelessness Effectiveness of Provincial Strategy

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, seniors at risk of homelessness or living rough are looking for solutions and answers. We often hear stories, some about seniors, specifically, who are taken to St. Boniface Street Links by Winnipeg Police Service.

Willard Reaves, the leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, told reporters last November that we have to start putting our seniors first, getting them back and keeping them in their homes.

Will the government explain how their homelessness strategy specifically impacts seniors?

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

So, to date, we've housed 186 folks out of encampments; that includes some seniors. Again, these were folks that, you know, were put out of their housing due to the previous failed government. It took seconds to sell. It's going to take years to build. We're committed

to building. You know, that includes seniors' housing, ensuring that folks have safe, affordable housing to live in.

We've brought 2,183 Manitoba units back into the stock, something that the previous government failed to invest in. We're making the investments to ensure that those units stay in, you know, the Crown—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Growing Problem in Manitoba

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, there's no doubt that Manitoba has particularly cold winters, and the sad reality is that many unhoused individuals often find themselves struggling in the unforgiving cold. Oftentimes, people who are seniors, who are renters, who don't have family in Winnipeg to help them out are all at risk of being forced to live unhoused in these conditions.

The high cost of living is hitting seniors particularly hard because many are on fixed incomes, and with the rising cost of food and rent, they can suddenly find themselves in very difficult circumstances.

What is this government doing to specifically address the growing issue of seniors' homelessness here in Winnipeg?

Ms. Smith: Again, thank that member for that question. So, in addition, we've added 183 social and affordable units. Again, the previous government didn't bring any—zero units online. We're building more units.

We also brought 125 market rent units. That's a part of the continuum, so making sure that people that are in Manitoba housing, that are in school, that are moving on that continuum have a place to move to.

We're prioritizing seniors on fixed incomes because we know that they, you know, have less income to bring to the table. So we're ensuring that we're working alongside them.

And, again, we're turning 55+ buildings back into what they were supposed to do, unlike the members opposite failed government—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Member for Dawson Trail Seat Resignation

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): Honourable Speaker, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) and the PC Party broke the law. They tried to ram through the Sio Silica licence after Manitobans had voted them out of office and you'd think that might be the sort of thing that might cost someone their seat in caucus, but apparently, in the PC Party, breaking the law is not disqualifying. Speaking up about it is.

So yesterday the member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé) told the PC leader that enough is enough. We know that Manitobans believe in accountability. They believe in our democracy. The PC corruption has to stop.

Can the Premier please tell the House how the former PC member for Dawson Trail took a stand against the corrupt PC leader?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): People in southeastern Manitoba do not want the Sio Silica project, and that's why we said no to Sio.

Now, the members opposite lost the election and they could not take no for an answer. The member for Red River North broke the law, along with Heather Stefanson and Cliff Cullen. They were fined. They were found guilty. The leader of the PCs did not kick them out.

So the member for Dawson Trail said, and I quote: to still be sitting beside the member who directly was found in violation and not thrown out of the party was extremely problematic for me.

The member for Dawson Trail knows that Sio Silica is not popular in southeastern Manitoba. We know that it is not popular in southeastern Manitoba. I wonder if the PCs understand how things would turn out if we had an election or a vote on the topic.

Education Property Tax Increase Impact on Local Property Taxes

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Brandon residents are being asked to pay more school taxes year over year over year under this NDP government. People in Brandon are already dealing with rising costs for groceries, fuel, housing, all because this government's failure to act on affordability measures.

And now this government's failed education policies are pushing the load onto local property taxes. Brandon school board chair, Linda Ross, stated as

much, saying: We're trying to tell you this is bad; it's really bad.

So my question is simple: Will the minister agree that their year-over-year tax increase for Brandonites is bad? It's really bad.

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Again, Honourable Speaker, the members opposite need to look in the mirror and understand what happened after many years of them underfunding and making cuts to education.

And now, of course, this government is doing our part. We're ensuring that our education system gets the funding it needs year over year above inflationary increases; this year alone an \$80-million lift. We're doing that important work of ensuring our education system gets the funding it needs after years of cuts under the members opposite.

And while we do that, we're working to make life more affordable with an Education Property Tax Credit, along with the long suite of other measures like our hydro rate freeze, our permanent cut to the gas tax, our personal income tax cuts and more.

We're doing the work of making life more affordable after years of the members opposite failing Manitobans.

Education System New Funding Model Needed

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Each and every day, I stand to sound the alarm of this NDP government failing Manitobans on affordability. Despite the cost of living increasing, Manitoba families are seeing costs rising. Families in the Louis Riel School Division will now be facing a 12 per cent increase in school taxes.

* (14:30)

With year-over-year increases over different school divisions, how high do these education property taxes need to go before this government will introduce a sustainable funding model for education?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Again, to come in here and talk about sustainable education funding after years of making cuts to education—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Sala: —funding in Manitoba, it's beyond the pale, Honourable Speaker.

There's no recognition on this side of the House of their role, of their responsibility. Members here sit with members who were in the former Cabinet from the last government that made cuts to education, year over year. Take responsibility before you ask something like that. Recognize your role in creating the challenges that we're seeing.

And finally, of course, we're very proud to be doing that work of responding and cleaning up the mess that they left us. Finally, we're funding education at the rate it needs to be funded above inflation while we do the work of reducing costs for Manitobans.

They created a disaster. We're cleaning it up.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I would just remind all members to direct their comments through the chair at all times, not directly across to other members.

School Division Chronic Absenteeism Rate Request for Government to Disclose

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Last year on July 22, I made a request to the Kinew government for records showing a breakdown of chronic absenteeism numbers by school division. September 11, I was told they don't exist and that the Kinew government did not collect that data, and I'll table the response.

On September 26, I made a request for all ministerial briefings—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —regarding chronic absenteeism. After a very long delay, I received a response including an undated brief, and I'll file it.

The problem is none of this is actually true. A full year before I made my request, the Kinew government culled collective—sorry, they collected absenteeism numbers from school divisions, and the numbers are shocking. And despite having the numbers, they deliberately and fraudulently misrepresented the facts.

Why is the Premier (Mr. Kinew) withholding these numbers from Manitobans?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): It gives me great pleasure to rise in this House and talk about the fantastic work that we are doing in not only funding education, but investing in our kids. And, certainly, absenteeism has been a problem here in Manitoba and across the country. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Schmidt: We're still recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that we heard our friend, the MLA for Tuxedo, speak so eloquently about earlier this morning—this afternoon, Honourable Speaker.

And the fact of the matter is that we are going to do incredible work, and that work starts with our \$30-million investment in a universal school nutrition program. We are seeing kids coming to school early where they would have come late. We're seeing them stay through the lunch hour, and we're seeing them show up to school.

That is just one of the things we're doing to address absenteeism in this province. I'm so proud to do that work—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wasyliw: Honourable Speaker, how do I know that the Kinew government isn't being straight with Manitobans on chronic absenteeism? Because I was able to obtain the real numbers. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: On July 26, 2024, the Kinew government created a briefing note to the Minister of Education that included chronic absentee numbers for all school divisions, and I'll table it.

Honourable Speaker, 24 out of 37 school—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable member for Red—for, sorry—the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott) needs to come to order.

Mr. Wasyliw: Honourable Speaker, 24 out of 37 school divisions had chronic absenteeism rates over 10 per cent, six divisions over 30 per cent and one division a shocking 68 chronic absenteeism. That is clear that the government didn't want to let Manitobans know this. This is absolutely a cover-up.

Ask this Premier who is responsible for this, was the Premier aware of this and for how long?

MLA Schmidt: Manitobans know who they can trust when it comes to education, and that is the Manitoba NDP. We know that the best place for students to be every single day, Honourable Speaker, is in the classroom. That is the best place for them to be, and

that's why we've taken real concrete steps to address absenteeism here in Manitoba.

One of the things that we've done, Honourable Speaker, is we've updated our Safe and Caring Schools policy to, again, make sure that every student is in class all day, every day, because we know that's the best place for them to be.

Another thing we've done, Honourable Speaker: a \$30-million universal school nutrition program. That ensures that no student has to show up to school without a breakfast or a lunch. That is just one of the things that we're doing, on top of building schools across this great province.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

And the time for oral questions has also expired.

Grievances? Petitions, I'm sorry.

PETITIONS

Hospital Staffing in Eriksdale and Ashern

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, I wish to read—present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) E.M. Crowe Memorial Hospital in Eriksdale and Lakeshore General Hospital in Ashern are essential health-care facilities serving rural and northern Manitobans, including seniors, families, agriculture workers and Indigenous communities.

(2) Rural communities rely on local hospitals to provide timely emergency and in-patient care, particularly when travel distances to alternative facilities are significant.

(3) The previous NDP provincial government closed 16 rural emergency departments and Manitobans' physicians-to-patient ratio fell below the national average, rural communities 'disproportionally' affected by reduced access to care.

(4) The ER at E.M. Crowe Memorial Hospital in Eriksdale is currently only—is currently open only two days per week, resulting in the hospital being closed approximately 261 days per year.

(5) On many occasions, both E.M. Crowe Memorial Hospital and Lakeshore General Hospital ERs were closed at the same time, leaving residents with no local emergency departments available.

(6) Unexpected ER closures place patients at risk, particularly during medical emergencies when time-sensitive care is required.

(7) Publishing operating schedules that cannot be reliably maintained creates confusion and uncertainty for patients, families, emergency responders and surrounding communities.

(8) Chronic staffing shortages rather than physical infrastructure limitations are the primary cause of service disruption and unexpected closures at rural hospitals.

(9) While investments in hospital buildings and equipment are necessary, infrastructure improvements alone do not ensure reliable access to care when 'adekit'—adequate staffing and contingency 'coveraget' are not in place.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

(10) Reliable rural health-care delivery requires sufficient base-line staffing and contingency staffing to address illness, vacancies, emergencies and unforeseen absences.

(11) Rural Manitobans deserve dependable access to hospital services comparable to that available in urban centres.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to increase staffing and contingency staffing levels at E.M. Crowe Memorial Hospital in Eriksdale and Lakeshore General Hospital in Ashern, so these facilities can remain open on their advertised days and hours without unexpected closures.

* (14:40)

Honourable Speaker—Deputy Speaker—honourable Deputy Speaker, this petition was signed by Austin Paterson, Kim Ferguson, Austin Read and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

New Neepawa Health Centre

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) Thanks to the investment made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical-preventative services plan, construction for the new Neepawa Health Centre is well under way.

The facility and surrounding community would greatly benefit from added diagnostic machinery and equipment, but specifically the addition of a CT scanner.

(2) The new hospital is being built east of Neepawa, on the north side of the Yellowhead Highway, PTH 16. It will be nearly double the size of the existing hospital and will better serve patients from this broader, western Manitoba geographic area.

(3) CT scanners are standard equipment that combine X-ray images from several angles to create detailed, three-dimensional models of structures inside the body. They perform critical diagnostic procedures that will support the diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of injuries and diseases, and the new equipment will be able to complete these important scans faster and with sharper, clearer images.

(4) The average wait times for Manitobans to receive a CT scan is currently seven weeks, and there are over 14,000 patients on the wait-list to receive the diagnostic imaging procedure.

(5) The new CT scanner will reduce these wait times as it would decrease the need for patients to travel long distances, sometimes involving overnight stays, to access the care that they need.

(6) The new scanner will reduce pressure on emergency response services, who would no longer have to transport these patients, opening up appointments in other communities and allowing more people to get the care they need sooner.

(7) A CT scanner in the Neepawa Health Centre will enable further treatment and diagnosis to take place in community, reducing wait times for patients in surrounding areas and reducing the burden of travel to other facilities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support the investment and placement of a CT scanner machine in the Neepawa Health Centre in Neepawa, Manitoba.

This petition is signed by Kensi Rainkie, Barb McLachlan, Shirley McConnell and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Road 482

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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—excuse me—safer roads further benefit both communities or—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 as 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 Brady Burla, E. Kate [*phonetic*], Pat McClause [*phonetic*] and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Education Property Taxes

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): 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) 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, and those changes have made many Manitobans ineligible to receive the \$1,500 rebate.

(3) Secondary property owners are subject to taxation without representation as they are ineligible to vote for trustees who set the rates; yet, second property owners are still required to pay full education taxes in their division.

(4) Additionally, families can only claim the reduced Education Property Tax Credit on their primary residence.

(5) These increases and the revocation of rebates were done with no consultation, punishing Manitobans who maintain family cabins by tying education taxation to assessed property values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove education funding and taxation from property taxes and find a fair and equitable way to fund education in Manitoba.

This is signed by Ron Laurencelle, Katrina Walker, Kod [*phonetic*] Johnson and many, many more Manitobans.

* (14:50)

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

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

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

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

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

(5) The provincial government has the ability and the responsibility to advocate for and implement

measures that protect its citizens by ensuring that repeat violent offenders are not released into our communities without proper safeguards.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This is signed by Tiffany Ediger, Timunol [*phonetic*] Sebastian and many, many other Manitobans.

Provincial Trunk Highway 34

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): Honourable Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Trunk Highway—PTH 34, is a two-lane provincial primary highway that runs from the US border where it meets from North—ND 20 to PTH 16 at the town of Gladstone.

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

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

(4) The deterioration of the PTH 34 has raised many major concerns due to its narrow shoulders and numerous deep potholes that pose serious safety risks

considering farmers often need to use the highway to transport heavy equipment.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by Kelly Hill, Lloyd Drummond, David Drummond and many, many more Manitobans.

Provincial Road 482

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): 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.

This petition has been signed by Bert Marshall, John Hunter, Wyatt Melnyk and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

* (15:00)

Provincial Road 210

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

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

(1) Provincial Road 210, PR 210, is a 117.3 kilometre–72.8 mile–highway in the Eastman region of Manitoba that connects the towns and communities of Woodridge, Marchand, La Broquerie, Ste. Anne, Landmark, Linden, Île des Chênes and St. Adolphe.

(2) A significant portion of PR 210 also runs through the constituency of La Vérendrye.

(3) PR 210 is a significant commuting route for Eastman families and is also notably used by those in the agriculture, tourism, trade and commerce industries.

(4) The condition of PR 210 from Woodridge to Highway 12 is in an unacceptable state of disrepair.

(5) The planned pavement upgrade was promised more than 20 years ago when it was constructed with a flat surface suitable for pavement but has yet to be completed.

(6) The condition of PR 210 from Woodridge to Highway 12 is in such bad shape that firefighters, police and paramedic services are severely delayed when responding to emergencies.

(7) The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure as well as the Premier have a duty to respond to infrastructure needs identified by rural communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to prioritize the reconstruction of Provincial Road 210.

(2) To urge the provincial government to include the stretch of Provincial Road 210 from Woodridge to Highway 12 in its reconstruction plans.

This petition has been signed by John Unrau, Jerome [*phonetic*] Landry, Wendy DesChamps and many, many other Manitobans.

911 Services in Rural Manitoba

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

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

(1) Reliable access to emergency services, including 911, is a fundamental public safety necessity and can mean the difference between life and death.

(2) On March 23, 2025, a resident in the rural municipality of Fisher tragically passed away after family and friends were unable to reach 911, despite making numerous attempts, due to an internal 911 routing malfunction at a major cellular provider.

(3) During the emergency, loved ones attempted to provide CPR while frantically trying to connect with emergency medical services—EMS—ultimately only reaching help by contacting a local RCMP officer directly.

(4) The March 2025 tragedy is not an isolated incident, as there have been other reports of failed 911 cellular calls in neighbouring rural municipalities.

(5) In April 2024, the provincial government indicated that it was undertaking a review of 911 services, with a final report expected in the following months.

(6) In August 2024, following another 911 service failure, a provincial representative repeated the same assurances previously made, but as of March 2025, no report has been released.

(7) Rural Manitobans continue to face challenges accessing emergency services due to unreliable cell service and gaps in the ability of some providers to connect to emergency telecommunications infrastructure, particularly in regions like the Interlake.

(8) The 911 dispatch centre servicing rural and northern Manitoba, located in Brandon, was not made aware of the March 2025 service interruption, raising concerns about the lack of real-time monitoring and co-ordination between telecommunications providers and emergency response systems.

(9) Local officials, including representatives of the RM of Fisher, have previously raised concerns with the Province and the RCMP regarding the reliability of 911 services in rural areas, calling for immediate action.

* (15:10)

(10) The public has a right to expect that 911 service will be accessible during an emergency, regardless of location or mobile service provider.

(11) The provincial government must ensure that emergency communication systems are adequately staffed and resourced, particularly for rural and northern regions.

(12) Access to 911 must not be compromised by infrastructure failures of private service providers.

(13) Timely and transparent communications between telecommunication companies and emergency service providers is essential to protect public safety.

(14) Effective government oversight and accountability are necessary to ensure public confidence in emergency response systems.

(15) Failure to invest in resilient, province-wide emergency response systems and telecommunications infrastructure puts rural lives at risk and undermines public trust in essential services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to investigate the 911 network failures that contributed to the March 2025 tragedy in the Interlake region and to publicize those findings.

(2) To urge the provincial government to work with municipalities, telecommunication providers and first responders to strengthen 911 reliability and ensure uninterrupted access to emergency services for all Manitobans, especially those living in rural and northern communities.

This petition was signed by Tannis Yuzwa, Todd Mazur, Emily Mazur and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Carbon Tax and Rising Food Prices

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by Keshu Patel, Niral Patel and Oma [*phonetic*] Patel, and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) 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.

* (15:20)

(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.

And this petition has been signed by Susan Arnott, Randy Burnell, Bryan G. Davies and many, many Manitobans.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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.

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 it's on No. 1 Highway in the Southern Health/Santé Sud Health Authority. Currently there is only one MRI 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 Portage la Prairie—in Portage regional health facility will bring care closer to 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. The aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

(7) The average wait 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 investment and placement of an MRI machine in the Portage regional health facility in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

This is signed by Tom Hyde, Hugh Owens, Marguerite Owens and many, many more Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Phoenix School

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I wish to present the following petition, and 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 many 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 is part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction for the new Portage regional health facility is well under way. The facility and the 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'.

* (15:30)

(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.

And honourable Deputy Speaker, this petition is signed by Andrea Roteliuk, Jackie Letkeman and E.S. Ducharme, in addition to many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): 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 investments made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction of 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

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.

An MRI machine—sorry—(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.

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

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.

And, Honourable Speaker, this petition was signed by Dong Nguyen, Jeff Foreman, Tamara Bollman, along with many, many other fine Manitobans.

* (15:40)

The Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, you have to unmute yourself.

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

Other provinces have taken proactive steps in strengthening bail enforcement, not—but Manitoba has not used all the available tools to address this issue effectively.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by Tracy Beck, Gil Moar, Christina Overton and many, many more fine Manitobans.

The Speaker: No further petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, can you please call the start of second reading of Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy); followed by Bill 8,

The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Amendment Act; followed by Bill 9, The Street Weapons Control Act.

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now go to second reading of Bill 10, followed by second reading of Bill 8, followed by second reading of Bill 9.

SECOND READINGS

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

The Speaker: Therefore we will now call Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy).

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I move, seconded by the Minister for Municipal and Northern Relations, 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 second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Marcelino: Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to rise to provide comments on Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy). This bill will 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.

In 2024, the federal government made changes to employment insurance legislation and the Canada Labour Code to add a 15-week benefit and protected leave for employees taking on responsibilities for a newly arrived child, either through adoption or surrogacy. These changes are expected to come into force later this year.

With this bill, Manitoba will align with the new employment insurance benefits, along with Ontario, and build on existing protections in Saskatchewan, Quebec, British Columbia and Newfoundland that are specific to adoption.

Currently, Manitoba families welcoming a child through adoption or surrogacy have access to the same longer parental leave as biological parents, but they do not qualify for an initial period of maternity leave, which is limited to pregnant employees. Adding a new 16-week attachment leave would provide Manitobans

adopting or welcoming a child through surrogacy access to the same amount of job protection and EI benefits as families who currently can combine maternity and parental leave.

By promoting an equal, supportive environment for all families, the new leave will ensure parents have the necessary time and resources to bond with their newborn or integrate a child into their family during the first crucial period of attachment. This amendment implements the Labour Management Review Committee's consensus recommendations and follows advice from the Child and Youth Permanency Council of Canada and Interwoven Connections. I would like to reinforce that all working parents in Manitoba should have access to the same job protection they need while bonding with and caring for their newest family members.

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 member. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I thank the Minister of Labour for bringing this bill forward. I would like to ask the minister how the government arrived at the seven-month figure in section 57.2(2) for eligibility.

* (15:50)

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I think the member opposite is referring to maybe what—for the seven months you have to be working at the same employer for at least seven months and that is similar to the provisions that we have for qualifications for maternity leave at this point. And so that's why we chose to make it the same amount of qualifying time, so that you could have that ease of reference.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Because employment legislation can have operational impacts on businesses and employers, what consultations did the minister

conduct with employer organizations or business groups like the Winnipeg and Manitoba Chambers of Commerce?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that important question.

So we did—we do go through a process where we ask the Labour Management Review Committee, and that's who we consult with for when we're trying to go through this period of consultation for bills.

And on the Labour Management Review Committee, we have the Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba, the Manitoba Employers Council, Sobeys Inc. and the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. These represent over 490 organizations including the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Retail Council of Canada, Manitoba Hotel Association—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Guenter: I thank the Minister of Labour for her answer to my earlier question, and I have a follow-up on that one.

Is this leave available to only full-time and permanent part-time employees, or is it available to any Manitoban who has worked seven months for a single employer?

MLA Marcelino: I would have to get further clarification, but from what I understand, it's for folks who have been working for seven months with the same employer.

To qualify for EI, however, that is a different component, and you would have to qualify to work 600 hours, either part time or full time, to be able to access the EI benefit. But for our attachment-leave provisions, we are requiring seven months of employment with the same employer.

Mrs. Stone: Has the minister or department estimated the number of employees who might access the attachment leave on an annual basis, and if so, can the minister please provide what that number is?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that important question.

Currently, last year, there were 56 families that adopted children into their homes. We currently do not have access or keep statistics for families who have newborns through surrogacy, but the estimate was about the same number—so I guess doubling 56.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Given our affordability crisis that many families are struggling with, that the—I'm just wondering if the federal EI benefit referenced by the minister will come into force at a later date through order-in-council. Will the Province be—provide supplemental benefit for these families until the federal income support program becomes optional?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that question as well.

We don't know when the federal government is going to make their bill come into force that will allow for these EI payments to go through, so I don't have that type of time frame except to say that it's expected to happen this year, in 2026, and that's why we're trying to be prepared with this legislation to be in line with that time so that folks can have the job-protected leave.

We do know that this would just be for the minimum standards. Other employees, other workers, they might have, you know, better top-up rather than just EI, depending on their collective bargaining agreements. So this would—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Guenter: With regard to section 57.2(3), if the goal of this leave is attachment between parent and child, I'm wondering why the—a person is able to start that leave six weeks prior to receiving that child.

MLA Marcelino: Each family is different. Each requirement is different. Some folks, they've been preparing for this arrival for their child for a long time. Similar to maternity leave, folks have the ability to have their maternity leave up to even 17 weeks before the arrival of the child. So sometimes people have to prepare in different ways.

We did consult with Child and Youth Permanency Council of Canada and Interwoven Connections. This is—these are two groups that advocate for families who adopt and families who gain children through surrogacy, and this was some of the advice that we were able to get from advocates.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Stone: Given that surrogacy arrangements can vary widely, will these provisions apply equally, regardless of whether the child was born through surrogacy—is biologically related to one of the intended parents?

MLA Marcelino: I think that's a very complicated question that I don't know specifically the answer to.

All I know, these provisions are just for people—for workers who are gaining their families through adoption into surrogacy. So I don't think there would be any more further complications, depending on who was related to the surrogate.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Hiebert: Given that there's provisions for adoption and surrogacy, would there be anything available for foster parents if foster parents are accepting new children into their home and they work during the day, but they actually—the kids are in school. Is there provision for foster parents to stay home from their jobs, as well, to make sure that they can bond with those children?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that question. You know, I hear just—I have so much respect for foster parents. I know a lot of foster parents who welcome children to their homes.

But this is not a bill that is for foster parents. This is for folks who—for workers who are gaining their families through adoption into surrogacy. And that's because this bill is meant to match a federal bill that's providing employment insurance for families that go through adoption and surrogacy.

So that federal bill does not talk about foster parents, and so we're trying to just match this bill with the provisions that are going to be afforded in employment insurance at the federal level.

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Mr. Guenter: Can employers hire someone to cover that position for the interim period that the employee is away?

MLA Marcelino: This does not speak to—this bill does not speak to what the employers can or can't do. But this is just job-protected leave for that employee when they will come back from their leave.

So I'm sure it's possible for employers to consider the different ways that they have to provide for their business, but this is just to have job-protected leave for that time, for when the employee needs to return to work.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Stone: Considering the Province of Manitoba is a major employer here within our province, how will the minister ensure consistency across the broader public sector?

So I'm asking the minister if there are any—or how does the minister and government department intend to ensure that policies that are supporting adoption and surrogacy families are applied consistently across the broader public service as well as Crown corporations?

MLA Marcelino: Our department has consulted with the Department of Families and has consulted with the broader public service to inform them of these changes. This is not the first time that we are adding changes to the Employment Standards Code.

* (16:00)

Whenever the federal government makes different kinds of provisions for new EI benefits, it's actually pretty standard practice and very widely accepted between the labour advocates and also among employers to follow suit to provide the job-protected leave whenever the federal government makes those types of decisions regarding EI.

So this is not the first time and this is not going to be the last time, and we have consulted throughout the different departments to let them—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Hiebert: Just another quick question for the minister, if she would reconsider expanding her bill and including foster parents. I know there's a lot of children. For example, I have a constituent who has two beautiful Indigenous twins that she is—was placed in her home at, like, six weeks old, and they're staying in her home up until 18. And it just would be really beneficial for that family to be able to bond with those children as well.

So I think—just asking if she would consider amending the bill to add foster parents in those situations.

MLA Marcelino: No, I will not be considering doing that at this time because this bill needs to match with the provisions of the federal bill that's allowing for employment insurance. And at this time, that federal bill is only for attachment leave for workers who are undergoing surrogacy arrangements and also adoption arrangements. And there is nothing in that federal bill regarding foster parents.

So this job protected—these job protection measures will have to match with the federal provisions. So at this time, there is nothing like that for foster parents. But I appreciate the member's suggestions, and we do have an upcoming federal-provincial-territorial meeting with labour ministers across Canada and I can bring

up that worthwhile suggestion to the federal labour minister at that time in April.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Seeing no—the honourable member for Midland (Mrs. Stone).

Mrs. Stone: Given that other jurisdictions are adopting similar pieces of legislation, did the minister do a cross-jurisdictional analysis of other legislation in other provinces? And if so, is it—is the bill that's in legislation that she's bringing forward today consistent with what those other jurisdictions have to date?

MLA Marcelino: So far, Quebec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland currently have protections, job protections in place for workers who are—who have adopted into families. And Ontario and the federal government currently have these types of existing protections almost similar to what we're proposing right now. And that's it right now for what's happening across the jurisdictions.

But again, this is, again, to be in line with the coming changes of what the federal government has passed. I think they passed it in June of 2024, and it's only coming—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: If there are no further questions, the floor is open for debate.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, respecting attachment leave for adoption and surrogacy.

And I want to begin by saying clearly that the principle behind this legislation is one that deserves support in this Chamber. At its heart, this bill recognizes something that is both simple and profound, something that most members of this House understand, not only as legislators but as people who have lived it themselves: that the arrival of a child into a family is one of the most important and meaningful moments in a person's life, and that the time immediately following that moment is critical for both the child and the parents as they begin building the bond that will shape the course of their lives together.

When we speak about this legislation in this Chamber, we often focus on—when we speak about legislation in general in this Chamber, we often focus on technical language, statutory clauses and regulatory frameworks. We talk about amendments and subsections,

definitions and procedures, and those things matter, of course, because laws must be precise and workable. But sometimes legislation reflects something much deeper than the words written on the page. Sometimes it reflects fundamental truths about how people live their lives and how our society understands the importance of family.

Bill 10 is one of those pieces of legislation. Beneath the technical amendments to the Employment Standards Code is a recognition of the importance of family formation and of the role that time, presence and connection play when a child enters a home.

If we take a moment to look around this Chamber, Honourable Speaker, we will see that many members are parents. Many members are grandparents as well. And some members have young children at home. Others have adult children who've gone on to build families of their own. Some members have experienced the joy of welcoming grandchildren into their lives.

Regardless of where each one of us is in that journey, most of us understand, in a very personal way, what it means when a child enters a family. There is something remarkable about that moment.

And I can say for myself, I always feel like I get a new lease on life every time we welcome a—we've been blessed with a child. It's a very special—

An Honourable Member: That's quite a few leases you've had.

Mr. Guenter: The member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) says it's been a few—quite a few leases that I've had, and that's true. But it's always a special time. It's a very special time.

For parents, the arrival of a child is not simply another event in the calendar of life; it is a moment that changes everything. Priorities shift, schedules change, sleep schedules certainly change.

But, more importantly, the emotional landscape of a family changes in ways that are difficult to fully capture in words. Suddenly there is a new person whose well-being becomes central to everything that a parent does. The rhythms of daily life reorganize themselves around that child and the family begins the process of building routines, relationships and memories that will last for decades.

The experience of welcoming a child is one that carries enormous emotional weight. For many parents, the moment they first hold their child is one that stays

with them forever. It is a moment that combines excitement, relief, anticipation and a profound sense of responsibility. Parents look at their child and begin imagining the life that lies ahead. They begin thinking about the kind of home they want to create and the kind of guidance they hope to provide.

Those first days and weeks are therefore incredibly important, not only in a practical sense but in an emotional one as well. Parents are learning the needs and personality of their child. They are learning feeding schedules, sleep patterns and countless small details that quickly become the routines of family life.

At the same time, the child is beginning to form an understanding of the world around them. Even at a very young age, children begin learning whether the people around them are consistent, caring and safe.

That early process of connection is what we refer to—often refer to—as attachment. Attachment is more than a sentimental concept or a term used casually in discussions about parenting; it's a concept rooted in decades of research into childhood development and psychology. The bond that forms between a child and their caregiver during the early stages of life provides the emotional foundation upon which the child's development is built.

When children develop secure attachments, they gain a sense of safety and belonging that allows them to explore the world with confidence. They develop emotional stability and resilience. They learn to trust the people around them and to form healthy relationships throughout their lives.

* (16:10)

For children who enter families through adoption, the importance of attachment remains just as significant. Adoption is, in many ways, one of the most meaningful commitments that families can make. Families who adopt a child are making a deliberate and thoughtful decision to open their homes and their lives in order to welcome a child into their family and raise them as their own.

The process that leads to that moment is often long and complex. Prospective adoptive parents may spend months or years navigating home studies, background checks, legal procedures and co-ordination with agencies and social workers as they prepare for the day when a child will finally arrive.

And when that day comes, it represents something far more significant than the completion of paperwork or the conclusion of a bureaucratic process. It represents

the beginning of a lifelong relationship. It represents the moment when a child becomes part of a family and when that family begins building a shared future together. For the parents, it is a moment of profound joy and responsibility and for the child, it is the beginning of a life shaped by the care, attention and guidance of that family.

Even in cases where children are adopted from birth, the transition into a new family involves a period of adjustment for both the child and the parents. Those early weeks, therefore, carry enormous importance. They are the period during which trust begins to develop, routines are established and the child begins to understand that they are surrounded by people who care deeply for them and who will guide them as they grow.

Surrogacy represents another pathway through which families are created and expanded. Families who pursue surrogacy often do so after facing significant challenges or obstacles on their path to parenthood. The journey toward welcoming a child through surrogacy can involve medical procedures, legal arrangements and months of anticipation as the pregnancy progresses.

Throughout that process, parents invest tremendous emotional energy and commitment in preparing for the arrival of their child. When that child finally arrives and enters their parent's care, the experience is every bit as profound as any other form of family formation. The parents hold their child for the first time and begin the same process that every family experiences: learning who this new person is, building routines together and beginning the lifelong bond that defines family life.

It is important to recognize that the experience of welcoming a child into a home, whether through birth, adoption or surrogacy, is fundamentally the same at its core. In every case, a family is growing. In every case, parents are welcoming a new member into their lives. In every case, the early period following that arrival is essential for building the relationship that will shape the future of that child.

Honourable Speaker, I will say on a personal note that my own family recently experienced that joy when we welcomed our fifth child into our home just three short months ago. Moments like that remind us of the deeply human experiences that connect us beyond the debates and differences that sometimes characterize political life. The arrival of a child is a moment of celebration and gratitude. It is a reminder of the continuity of family and community, whether it is a

first child or a fifth child or, in my grandma's case, an 18th child or 19th child, in my other grandma's case, a 12th child.

That moment carries with it a sense of wonder and excitement that is difficult to fully describe. Adoption and surrogacy reflect the same experience of welcoming a child into a family. They reflect the same sense of anticipation and joy. They reflect the same responsibility and commitment that parents feel when they take on the task of raising a child and guiding them through life.

Bill 10 recognizes that these families deserve support through the early stages of that journey. This—the legislation creates a form of leave known as attachment leave, allowing parents who welcome a child through adoption or surrogacy to take time away from work in order to focus on bonding with their child and establishing the routines that will support their family. The bill allows for up to 16 weeks of unpaid leave for that purpose and sets out the conditions under which that leave may be taken.

It is also worth noting, Honourable Speaker, that Manitoba is not entirely breaking new ground with this legislation with Bill 10. Other jurisdictions have already taken steps in this direction. The Province of Ontario, for example, has enacted a placement of a child leave that explicitly recognizes both adoption and surrogacy and provides job-protected time away from work so parents can focus on bonding with their child during those early weeks following placement. In that respect, this legislation reflects an approach that is already being adopted elsewhere in Canada.

It is reasonable that the Manitoba's—that Manitoba's employment standards framework should keep pace with developments in other provinces and it is appropriate that this government is following Ontario's lead and extending these leave provisions to families welcoming children through adoption and surrogacy.

It is also worth noting, Honourable Speaker, that this recognition of the importance of attachment is not—is not occurring only at the provincial level. In recent years, the federal government has also acknowledged that adoptive parents and intended parents through surrogacy should have access to income supports comparable to those available to biological parents during the early period of bonding with a child.

In the 2023 federal budget, the Government of Canada announced the creation of a new employment insurance adoption and surrogacy benefit designed

specifically to support attachment. That reform created a 15-week EI benefit available to adoptive parents and intended parents through surrogacy, providing income support during the period when families are welcoming a child into their home and beginning the process of attachment.

Importantly, that new benefit was designed to sit alongside existing EI parental benefits, meaning that families welcoming a child through adoption or surrogacy could receive financial support during the same critical bonding period that other parents experience. In other words, both orders of government—federal and provincial—are recognizing that the same—recognizing the same fundamental reality that the time immediately following the arrival of a child is vital for the development of the parent-child bond and that public policy should reflect and support that reality.

While the technical details of the legislation involve eligibility requirements, notice provisions, and the interaction between different forms of leave, the broader purpose is clear. The goal is to recognize that the arrival of a child is a major life transition and that parents benefit from having the time and space to focus on their family during that period.

Honourable Speaker, while this legislation addresses the important question of job-protected leave, there remains another issue that deserves attention and that is income support during that leave. The federal government has recognized the importance of attachment by providing EI benefits for adoptive parents and intended parents through surrogacy, but many families still rely on employer top-ups in order to make that time away from work financially manageable. And that's all the more important in today's affordability—given today's affordability challenges.

If the government truly believes that adoption and surrogacy families should be treated the same as other families welcoming a child, then it should demonstrate that commitment in its own employment practices.

* (16:20)

They should ensure that all collective bargaining agreements entered into by the Province reflect the importance of attachment leave for adoption and surrogacy. Failing to do so creates a distinction that does not reflect the spirit of this legislation because the purpose of attachment leave is to support the bonding between parent and child, not to draw lines.

If the government is serious about supporting families formed through adoption and surrogacy, then it should lead by example and ensure that income top-up

provisions apply to those families without qualification, just as they do for other parents welcoming a child into their home.

Of course, whenever legislation addresses workplace leave, it is also important to consider the perspective of employers. Many businesses in Manitoba, particularly small businesses, rely on stable staffing and predictable schedules in order to operate effectively. When employees take extended leave, employers often need to adjust workloads or bring in temporary replacements to ensure that operations continue smoothly. Clear rules and expectations, therefore, play an important role in helping workplaces adapt to these situations.

Balancing the needs of employees and employers is always part of the challenge when designing workplace policies. Families benefit when parents are able to spend time with their children during critical moments of transition, but workplaces also need clarity and predictability in order to plan effectively. Legislation that provides clear guidelines and expectations helps create that balance and allows both employees and employers to understand their responsibilities.

Ultimately, however, the most important consideration in this discussion is the well-being of children and families. Children thrive when they grow up in environments where they feel safe, supported and loved. The early stages of family life play a crucial role in establishing that sense of security. When parents are able to devote time and attention to their child during those early weeks and months, they create the conditions that allow attachment and trust to develop. Families that are given the opportunity to build those strong foundations are better positioned to support their children as they grow and face the challenges of life.

Communities benefit from strong families and society as a whole benefits when children grow up in stable environments where they are encouraged to develop their potential. For those reasons, legislation that recognizes the importance of attachment and family bonding deserves careful consideration and thoughtful support.

Bill 10 reflects an understanding that families formed through adoption and surrogacy experience the same profound transitions and emotional milestones as any other families welcoming children. At its core, this legislation is about recognizing the importance of those moments when a child enters a home and a family begins a new chapter in its life

together. Those moments are among the most meaningful experiences that people have. They shape the future of families, communities and ultimately our society as a whole.

For that reason, it is appropriate that our laws to acknowledge and support the process of attachment that occurs when children and parents begin their lives together as a family. By recognizing the importance of that period and providing parents with the opportunity to focus on their child during those early weeks, this legislation affirms the value that we place on families and on the well-being of children.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Honourable Speaker, it's—it is a pleasure to speak on this bill this afternoon to follow my friend from Borderland who, as he has already noted, welcomed a fifth child into their growing home, growing almost yearly. And we congratulate him on that welcome, and it's always—you know, everyone knows it's—you sort of feel like you're part of the family as you get to know somebody and their family continues to grow. And so all of us take great pride and pleasure in that, and congratulations to him again.

I think it's one of the better things that we can talk about in this House when we talk about supporting families and children, and it is something that has—maybe dominated is the wrong word when it comes to discussion in the House, but it's always been an important part of the discussion here in the Legislature.

I recall back when Bonnie Mitchelson, who was the great MLA for River East and the minister of Families, brought forward—I think at that time it was called babies first and maybe it's now called Families First. But at that time it was a fairly revolutionary program. That seems hard to believe now, but at the time it was to provide support to families, to those who were expecting a new baby and those who've just had a baby born into their home. And the idea was to ensure that there was support for those who needed it. There could be home visits, there could be education, there could be other supports provided in terms of baby food and clothing, if needed, through that particular program.

And that became a very respected program. I think it was emulated in other provinces across Canada. It was expanded by successive governments, provincially, including Progressive Conservative and New Democratic governments, over the years. It was never an issue of

controversy or debate. Everybody recognized in this House, the various MLAs who have come and gone and those who are still here, that it was an important thing to provide support to families and to babies who were being born into Manitoba where that support was required.

So I think that this debate should be framed and looked at through that lens. This is not a political debate in the sense of whether or not there is support for families who are adopting or through surrogacy. That is something that I think is well established in this House as a non-political and a bipartisan issue.

I think all of us who have experienced the joy of welcoming a child into our home—and I've had that opportunity one time, and I'll speak a little bit about that further in my comments—often feel overwhelmed by that experience. I don't have the experience of my friend from Borderland. Perhaps by the fifth time the joy is probably the same, but the sense of being overwhelmed maybe isn't quite as great.

But I certainly know the first time, and for us the only time, when we brought home our son Malachi from HSC—he was a high-risk birth, so we were at the Health Sciences Centre, not in our home community—that you really do feel like you're not equipped to do the job.

You walk out of the hospital—and, again, I'm sure many have shared this experience—and you're holding your newborn and you have that sense that many parents have of where's the instruction book? How can they just let me walk out of the hospital with this new life without some closer support? And that was certainly our feeling, I think, driving home from the Health Sciences Centre that day, back to my home community of Steinbach, we—I probably drove 30 kilometres an hour the whole way because you're so worried that you have this new life in your hands and you want to do everything you can to protect it.

And we had, fortunately as a family, had great support around us, and yet we still had that feeling. So you can imagine that families who might not always have that support, whether it's a natural birth, whether it's surrogacy or an adoption, they need that additional support because for those who already have a great support system, for them to feel that, you can just imagine what the feelings are for others.

So when you look at the development of support, in this case for surrogacy or for adoption, but just in birth in general, there's been great advancements in Canada, and I suspect through the Western world,

certainly maybe the world more generally, when it comes to supporting parents who are expecting or who've already had a newborn come into their home. And that support is often, most recently, been in the form of leave.

* (16:30)

So federal government's often been the lead in this, but there's been increases and advancements in terms of the amount of leave that a parent can take, and sometimes that leave can be split between the parents, but that a parent can take when they've had a child born into their family. Some of that is paid leave for a certain period of time, and then it can also be extended into unpaid leave or maybe reduced pay, depending on the employer that you have and the benefits that they have attached to that employment.

That was certainly the case for my wife, who was working at that time with the federal government. So she had a—I would say was a generous plan where she was able to be home with our son for the first year. And because it was our first time, you know, you didn't quite know what exactly to expect, but I grew to see how valuable that year was, both for our young son at that time, but also for my wife as well. And now I've seen, looking back—he's almost 20 now, about to leave his teenage years—but we look back and we see that that formative year was really important for both my wife and for our son.

So when we look at the expansion of leave provisions now through surrogacy and adoption, well, it makes complete sense to ensure that the expansion happens in different ways that people are bringing in children into their home.

And my colleague from Borderland expounded on the fact that the challenges are the same, that those need for time and for attachment are the same, regardless if it is surrogacy or an adoption or a more natural and expected birth procedure. That is certainly something that makes sense, to have that expanded to all the forms of parenthood that we are seeing today. And so we look at this and we go, it's an—it's not an evolution, but it's a continuation of the things that we have debated in this House going back many, many years.

I often talk about the interchange or the rationale or the reasons that people will adopt, and we've had different—and when I talk about adoption, a lot of the same elements of that will come into surrogacy as well. The challenges can sometimes be interchangeable even though they are different.

But we've talked about motivation when it comes to adoption. In this particular House, we've talked about support when it comes to adoption. Adoption can be a very expensive procedure. Often it's international adoption, sometimes it's through private adoption; it can cost tens of thousands of dollars. And there has been, over the years, changes to laws here in Manitoba as well as at the federal level to provide some support for those who are adopting from a financial perspective.

Now, my friend from Borderland talked about income support when it comes to this particular bill and how that might be a further advancement, and I think that that is certainly worthy of consideration. But we do know, looking retrospectively, that there have been changes to the tax rules when it comes to adoption, so that some of those fees and the expenses of adoption can now be written off, or there's tax credits for it.

And, again, that's a bipartisan, non-political issue. It's been supported by both the NDP when they were in government or in opposition, and been supported by the Progressive Conservatives, both in opposition and in government.

And so that is something that we can unify around that I think is very important. When you look at the reasons why people might choose adoption, they are—there are many. The most obvious one and the one that comes to mind most quickly to people, because statistically it is the most likely reason that somebody might consider adoption, is because they're having difficulty having natural childbirth.

That's something—actually, I've spoken about this in the House several times before in similar contexts, Honourable Speaker—that my wife and I considered. We had a great challenge having our lone son, Malachi. We experienced a number of miscarriages over the years. And so adoption is something that we looked into because we were told that it was unlikely that we would be able to have a child on our own. So we went through an adoption process, went to a private adoption agency, Adoption Options, here in Manitoba, listened to their programs, and heard about the different things that we can do.

Now, obviously, we ultimately were able to have the one child, and we're very blessed for that. But we certainly understand from our own perspective the longing that parents who aren't able to have children have to have a family and that adoption is an excellent option for many. And anything we can do to support that option for families is important to look at.

When we look at the different stories of adoption, and I've heard many of them around the Legislature from colleagues on both sides of the House; I've heard them, of course, from constituents and from Manitobans more generally. It's a very personal thing for people to engage in and to do. It's a big step and it comes with the same uncertainty that any parent has who is having—going through a more natural birth process.

So that uncertainty can somewhat be alleviated by bills like this, which provide that—unpaid in this particular case—leave. So there can not only be the attachment, as my friend from Borderland was talking about, but also the preparation. Because there is a preparation, you have to prepare your home. So there's physical preparation, getting ready to welcome a child into your home. There is an emotional preparation that has to happen with this as well. There's often family supports that come in around it as well, and those are certainly important.

So I do think it is critically important that we have the debates here in this House about how we can support those families who are, either through surrogacy or through adoption, are looking to fulfill their desire for a family. We should extend that debate, not on this particular bill, Honourable Speaker, but we should have a continuous debate about how we can help those families who are looking to adopt from a financial perspective. Because there is a significant financial—I don't want to use the word hardship, because I mean these families are fulfilling their individual desires and goals for families. But it is, it is a financial hardship for those who are putting out often tens of thousands of dollars, and tax credits are great and being able to deduct off your income taxes some of those fees is fine. But it ultimately doesn't fulfill all of the costs that many families have to go through for adoption.

And we know how many thousands of families across Canada and many in Manitoba who are looking at adoption because of issues around infertility. We—as Health minister and in other roles I've had—and just as an individual, when we were looking at other ways to fulfill our desires for a family, we went to the Heartland Clinic here, a renowned clinic in Winnipeg in regards to fertility. And we saw so many families who were there and sort of sharing the same experience. And often, because it isn't easy for every family to have children, it becomes a bit of a shared community.

When it comes to the issue of miscarriages—I mentioned before—ultimately my wife and I were very open in talking about the challenges that we were having in having a child and many people came around and offered support.

In fact, I often say—and I'll mention here for the record—that one of the people who was the kindest and most supportive, particularly for my wife in offering incredibly gracious words and gifts from their own culture was former NDP MLA Kevin Chief, who came and visited us in our community, and I won't get into all the details because some of them are private, but was incredibly gracious to myself and in particular to my wife when we were going through that difficult time. And I often say—somewhat in jest, but not completely—that the only way my wife wouldn't vote for me in an election is if Kevin Chief was running against me because I think she would probably vote for Kevin in that scenario, based on the fact that he was such—*[interjection]*—yes, thank you, my colleague from—and, again, finally we have bipartisan support across the House and Kevin would beat me in election. Well, he certainly would if the vote was held in my house and only my wife was home, but that's okay because we really appreciated the support that he provided and it is, in a different topic, a way in which we can demonstrate that we represent different political parties, but we're all sort of part of the human race and we can support each other.

So to conclude on the issue, though, of infertility and the most obvious and statistically the most likely reason a family is going to adopt, I think this is an important piece of legislation because it provides that opportunity for those families to be able to have the same binding time and the time to have those attachments that other families have as well.

* (16:40)

Looking at it from a statistical perspective, when I was doing some research prior to being able to speak, I found some other reasons why families often turn to adoption, and one of them is that the prospective mother in a family may have a medical condition that it's not that they aren't able to conceive a child, but it might actually put their risk—their life at risk. And this isn't something that my wife had, although we, you know, we sort of saw ectopic pregnancies and those sort of things that are risky for sure.

But it is true that there are many women who, the act of getting pregnant and going through a pregnancy can actually endanger their life and they know that before getting pregnant. So they choose instead to

look towards adoption and that makes complete sense. So the ability to provide a leave perspective for those families is also critically important.

Another reason that many people look towards adoption is simply because they want to provide a child with a loving home that might not otherwise have that loving home. Coming from a faith perspective in a community where there's a strong faith culture in Steinbach, that I see a lot. And for some it is a fulfillment of faith. Of course, it isn't driven specifically or only by faith. There are many people who adopt, who have that same rationale and desire to provide a loving home to a family out of the good graces that they have.

I—while we, as I mentioned, Honourable Speaker, ultimately didn't end up adopting because we had our son Malachi, my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law in Alberta, they did end up adopting two children from Louisiana, I believe it was, who were in need of a home. They have two of their own children, naturally born, but they just decided that they wanted to provide a loving and a stable home for two children who otherwise would not have had those children.

Now they're older. They have one, Katrissia, who is a great artist. In fact, she had done some artwork and was—won a contest and she came to Manitoba and was able to display it. And their other son is Jaxon, who is a—he is the top-rated U-20 curler in the province of Alberta. He'll be representing Alberta at the upcoming U-20 games, is part of one of the two Alberta teams that go to the U-20 games. We just watched him win as one of the teams in the Alberta trials recently and he has a dream to curl in the Olympics.

Well, he would never have had that opportunity but for adoption. While I don't know all of the personal history of his family that he was born into, the reality was that the strain and the strife within his parental family, they would not have been able to have had the experiences if he'd not been adopted by my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law in Alberta.

So that was their motivation. They wanted to provide two children who were in difficult circumstances with other opportunities and in that situation we see the opportunities that they were provided.

So it's important that the Province and others come alongside and say, okay, if there are families who are willing to—and, again, I'll use the word sacrifice, and I don't mean to sound like it's sacrificial in the way that these families are unhappy to do it, because they're not; they are very willing to do it and

they want to do it, but there still is a sacrifice involved in the sense that they have to give up something.

So if the families are there and they're willing to do that through adoption, it makes perfect sense that society, through government, also says, all right, how can we support these families who are going through this adoption process, in this case through a leave, unpaid as it might be, but still a leave provision so that they can prepare their families and prepare their homes. And that is critically important.

And so we should continue to look for ways that we can support those families that are adopting, that we can support those families that are going through surrogacy, because, ultimately, it's something that pays for itself.

Now, it's not a monetary calculation but everything in government has some sort of a monetary effect; it has some sort of a downstream effect, and sometimes the challenge in government is that you can make an investment one day but you don't see the payoff for 20 years. And it's a challenge for governments that often have a window or a vision that is four years or less.

And I'm not saying that as a critical statement of this government or previous governments; that's what all electoral governments go through, and weigh the difference between shorter term success and longer term success.

In this particular case where you're having support for adoptive families—we have leave in this particular case—you're going to see—I believe you're going to see a financial impact. It's true that the Health Department spends, I think, about 90 per cent of their money supporting those in the first five years of their life and the last five years of their life. That's the reality when it comes to spending within—in health because that is where the greatest need happens.

And sometimes we see that. We've seen it in the Legislature here before. We recently saw—and I think it was an NDP member who had a member's statement on a young child who had a cochlear implant. And I knew the family from my time as Health.

And, actually, one of the—as a sidebar and then I'll get back onto relevance, Honourable Speaker. One of the most amazing things, if you ever have the opportunity, is if you're there when a child who is, you know, two or three years old, is able to hear for the first time, and they click the switch and they can hear for the first time. The expression on that child's face is incredible—absolutely incredible. And I would say

to anybody who has that opportunity as a legislator, as a parent, as a Manitoban, as a Health minister, you really see in real time the impact that technology and investments in technology for health care make in the difference.

But in that particular case—going back on point, Honourable Speaker, before I make you do it to me—is you can see that there's a cost benefit in the long term. There's a lifestyle benefit for that child, but for society there's a long-term benefit.

In the same way with this particular bill, while the government isn't incurring a direct cost here—and maybe at some point they'll want to look at changing the legislation; that might cost them something more directly—but when they look at it down the road, I think you're going to see there is a savings.

It's hard to, of course, measure that calculation because it's hard to know where a child would have gone but for that particular attachment to their parents. But I think it's intuitive and some studies would say and show that, where a child has that support at a young age, they do better in their life. When they do better in their life, they're more productive within society. When they're more productive within society, society itself does better because they then return back to that community.

So, in that way, it has an economic benefit for the government even though it probably pays off in a few governments down the road if Manitoba history is any lesson for us.

We know that we will look at other reasons why people decide to adopt. Sometimes it's actually to help a family member raise their child. And I've seen this on a few different occasions where there's a member of a family who is giving birth to a child; sometimes it's a close family member, sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's even just a friend or an associate.

So it's not a surrogate situation in the sense that it was planned to be that way, but there's a recognition that the mother—or the family, the birth mother, isn't able to provide the support that otherwise would be needed and another person—a family or a friend—decides to step in and say, we're going to adopt that child. Now that's not the most common way that adoption happens, but I certainly have heard of those situations.

So, again, that's a sacrificial way for somebody to decide to help someone. Now you might say or others might say, well, is there the same need for attachment in a situation like that? And, of course, there is, because

the attachment is between a child who has no attachment otherwise when they're born and the individual who then is going to be the mother and the father in that situation. So it's just as important in that particular situation.

An Honourable Member: Or the mother and the mother, or the father and the father.

Mr. Goertzen: Absolutely, and I hear my—the Minister of Advanced Education saying a father—that's incredibly important. And I said earlier in my comments that the issue of parental leave—and this was started by the federal government, where that leave could be split between the family. It could be split between the mother or the father in that particular situation. So I think that that's—*[interjection]*

* (16:50)

I continue to hear somebody being yelled at. I appreciate the advice that I'm getting from the Minister of Advanced Education.

So I think it's a very, very important point that when we look at the issue of leave—and this was brought by my friend from Borderland—is there, or should there—because I'm getting close to the end of my comments, I believe—is there another step that can be taken? Is there something further that can be done? And one of the things I think that can be looked at, yes, is a financial issue, and whether or not there should be financial support by the employer. But we need to work with the employers on this as well.

This really should be something that is brought to a table where there can be that discussion. This really is something that should be brought to a table where we can make a determination on what the impact is, not just for the family, how that work out for the business involved, what role does the government have in supporting that, because, ultimately, I think the government would do well, from a financial perspective, in the long term. But these are some things that we should have discussions about. The bill should look at—and if not in the immediate term, then after it's been passed and been implemented for a while—how can it be improved upon because ultimately, that's how all of these bills have—really happen.

I started my comments, as I draw near to the end of my comments, with Bonnie Mitchelson. And Bonnie Mitchelson, at a very, very early time in her political career as a relatively new Cabinet minister, as a relatively new minister of Family Services at that time, said, hey, this is a really good program to bring forward. Babies first I think developed into Families

First. And I suspect at that time it doesn't feel like it would be something strange or out of place today, but it probably was at that time. Now, I'd have to go back and review some of the Hansard and to see what some of the discussion was. I think it had broad bipartisan support. But, ultimately, that bipartisan support probably still came with some reservation or some hesitation and people going, well, is this really the place for government? Where is the place for government? We have that discussion with many people about how far government should be interceding or how far government should be coming into the role of families.

But, early on, where families need that support and they can't find it any other way, it is important that government is part of that. And so when Bonnie Mitchelson started that, it may have seemed like it was something that was strange or unusual, but it's grown, not just the program but all of our mindset and our discussion about what more can we do to support families. Whether it's leave for parental leave or whether it's leave for adoption leave, all of those things are very important as you continue to have the discussion here in the Legislature, because what seems unusual one day 20 years ago can seem very—20 years later, can seem very natural and very normal.

So I would continue—or continue to encourage this government and continue to encourage the opposition to look for other means to support adoptive families, surrogacies, families who are trying to fulfill their dreams of having children in their home, who are trying to support other families who maybe can't raise that particular child, who maybe have medical conditions, whether that's infertility or the mother's life might be at risk if they were to have a pregnancy.

All of these issues—and I know that there are more. Had I had another hour, I could've listed some of the other reasons why—

An Honourable Member: More.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I hear some folks offering leave, and I appreciate that. But all of these things need to be looked at, but not just today. Everything that we do in here is just a point in the stream of legislative history, and when we're done having this debate, there'll be another group of legislators who will come along and they'll have a different debate, but maybe on a similar topic, and they'll then advance things and look and go, okay, there's another thing that we can do to support families.

But at this particular moment, at this particular moment in our legislative time and our legislative

history, this is an important discussion to have. This is an important bill to debate as we continue to look for ways to support families, to support children and ultimately to make Manitoba a stronger province.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for being able to put a few words on the record.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I thank my colleague, the MLA for Steinbach, for the words that he spoke today.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 10 and the topic of attachment leave. This bill does deal with an important moment in the life of a family: the moment when a child enters a home and begins building a relationship with their parents. I am a proud mom of two children, now seven and five years old.

And from my first-hand experience, I know how important those first few months are to bond with the child. The cuddles during those newborn weeks, the first moment a baby or child tastes food for the first time, that first crawl, the first stand, the first walk, all those moments that are not only instrumental to the child's growth and well-being, but also truly to that moment that you are a proud parent. A proud mom, a proud dad is watching those little but important moments of that baby's life. And many of those key moments for the child and for the parent happens in those first few months.

So, at the end of the day, this bill is about families and recognizing that important bond that forms when that child enters a home, whether that child arrives through adoption or surrogacy, whether that child arrives through biological birth, all those moments are incredibly important for both the parent as well as that baby.

Those early weeks are important for children, the parents, but also extended family as well. Giving families the time to build that connection is a positive step for Manitoba. Those early days and weeks are at a time when the parent and the child begins to learn from one another. The reactions, the cries, the tears, both from the parents as well as the baby; all those are routines that are established, and it's incredibly important, speaking as a parent myself, in how that parent responds during those moments and that that parent is there to respond to those needs of that child. This really does establish the foundation for a lifelong

relationship, and it's in those early weeks and those first few months when that relationship really starts to take shape and establishes itself for the endless future.

So members of this House will recognize that welcoming a child into a family is one of the most significant moments in a person's life, and public policy should recognize that reality. Child development experts consistently emphasize that the earliest relationships in a child's life play a critical role in shaping the emotional well-being, their sense of security and their lifelong development. The principle behind that attachment leave is grounded in that understanding.

When parents do have that opportunity to spend dedicated time with a child during those early weeks, it helps build stability and a supportive family environment. For adopted families and families formed through surrogacy, those early bonding experiences are just as important. A parent is a parent at the end of the day.

The principle behind attachment leave is a good one because it recognizes that welcoming a child into a family is a major life transition. For many families, adoption in particular can involve a very long and complex journey. It can involve years of waiting, legal processes, emotional preparation and significant planning.

When that child finally comes home, it's an incredibly meaningful moment for the parent, for the child and for all of the family. Ensuring families have the opportunity to spend time together during that transition is something that all of us as members should support.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Speaker: Question before the House then is second reading of 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.

The hour being 5 o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Education System	
Bill 26–The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Eliminating Mandatory Overtime for Nurses)		Stone	647
Asagwara	639	Sala	647
Bill 28–The Health System Governance and Accountability Amendment Act (Nurse-to-Patient Ratios)		Education Property Taxes	
Asagwara	639	Cook	648
Bill 15–The Consumer Protection Amendment Act		Sala	648
Sandhu	639	Homelessness Among Seniors	
Bill 21–The Drinking Water Safety Amendment Act		Lamoureux	648
Moyes	640	Smith	649
Members' Statements		Seniors at Risk of Homelessness	
Waverley Heights Community Group		Lamoureux	649
Pankratz	640	Smith	649
Mason Family Farm		Member for Dawson Trail	
Johnson	641	Pankratz	650
National Pandemic Observance Day		Kinew	650
Compton	641	Education Property Tax Increase	
SOL Designs		Balcaen	650
Narth	641	Sala	650
Willard Reaves		Education System	
Lamoureux	642	Narth	650
Oral Questions		Sala	650
Safe Consumption Site		School Division Chronic Absenteeism Rate	
Khan	642	Wasyliw	651
Kinew	643	Schmidt	651
Safe Consumption Site		Petitions	
Bereza	645	Hospital Staffing in Eriksdale and Ashern	
Smith	646	Khan	652
Safe Consumption Site Location		New Neepawa Health Centre	
Bereza	646	Byram	652
Smith	646	Provincial Road 482	
Education Property Taxes		Wowchuk	653
Stone	646	Education Property Taxes	
Sala	646	Stone	653
		Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders	
		Schuler	654
		Provincial Trunk Highway 34	
		Robbins	654
		Provincial Road 482	
		Nesbitt	655

Provincial Road 210	
Narth	655
911 Services in Rural Manitoba	
Johnson	656
Carbon Tax and Rising Food Prices	
Hiebert	656
MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility	
Guenter	657
Bereza	658
Phoenix School	
Cook	658
MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility	
Goertzen	659
Balcaen	659
Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders	
Ewasko	660

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Second Readings

Bill 10—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy)	
Marcelino	661
Questions	
Guenter	661
Marcelino	661
Stone	661
Hiebert	662
Debate	
Guenter	664
Goertzen	667
Stone	673

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