



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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



Vol. LXXX No. 35 - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, March 26, 2026

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.
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
<i>Vacant</i>	The Pas-Kameesak	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 26, 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.

House Business

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Could you please canvass the House for leave to expedite the appointment of the Ethics Commissioner as follows: to allow the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs to meet this afternoon at 3:30, concurrent with this House sitting, and to interrupt the budget debate tomorrow at the beginning of orders of the day for the consideration of the appointment resolution without notice, with the sitting day to still count as a day of budget debate.

The Speaker: Is there leave to expedite the appointment of the Ethics Commissioner as described by the honourable Minister of Health—the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning?

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

MLA Schmidt: I would like to announce the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet in camera on Thursday, March 26, 2026, at 3:30 p.m. to consider the hiring process for the Ethics Commissioner and Information and Privacy Adjudicator.

The Speaker: It's been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet in camera on Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 3:30 p.m. to consider the hiring of the—for the Ethics Commissioner and Information and Privacy Adjudicator.

* * *

The Speaker: Now, routine proceedings.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 234—The Registered Landscape Architects Act

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): I move, seconded by the member for Lagimodière (Mr. Blashko), that Bill 234, The Registered Landscape Architects Act; Loi sur les architectes paysagistes, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Oxenham: Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce this important legislation, The Registered Landscape Architects Act. This bill recognizes the professionalism of landscape architects while ensuring accountability.

Through this legislation, the Manitoba Association of Landscape Architects will become the official regulatory body with a governing council that includes public representation, helping ensure transparency and trust in the profession.

It also introduces title protections so that only qualified registered members can use the designation registered landscape architect, helping maintain professional standards and protect the public. Finally, the bill creates a clear process for complaints and discipline, ensuring concerns can be addressed fairly and appropriately.

Honourable Speaker, this legislation brings Manitoba in line with other jurisdictions' strength and standards, and helps ensure that the landscapes and

public spaces Manitobans rely on are designed with expertise and care.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

Further introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: In accordance with section 28(1) of The Auditor General Act, I am tabling the following Auditor General's reports: Managing the Risks of Using Cloud Service Providers and Child Care Access and Inclusivity in Manitoba.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table for Manitoba Justice the 2024-2025 Annual Report of the Manitoba Court of Appeal.

The Speaker: Further tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I am honoured to rise today to recognize Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility.

Occurring annually on March 31, Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility is a day to recognize, celebrate, uplift and support two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse relatives across Manitoba.

It's also a day to demonstrate to Manitoba's two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse youth that they are seen, heard and cherished; that they are celebrated members of our community who are deserving of safe and inclusive spaces in Manitoba to hope, learn, grow and thrive, now and in the future.

For many years, Transgender Day of Visibility has been recognized internationally within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. But last year was the first time Manitoba officially recognized the day, thanks to legislation brought forward by my colleague, the MLA for Kirkfield Park.

Hearing so many members of Manitoba's 2SLGBTQIA+ community come together during the passage of this bill to share its impact on their lives, the lives of their loved ones and their communities was powerful. I want to recognize my colleague for

his important work in partnership with the community to make Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility a reality.

We have heard time and time again that visibility is life-saving. It helps combat ignorance, bias, discrimination and other structural harms.

* (13:40)

And this is why our government has consistently stood firm in support of two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse Manitobans, and we are unwavering against any form of discrimination or intimidation that puts the lives of gender-diverse people at real risk.

We continue to invest in community organizations that support two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse Manitobans like 2Spirit Manitoba, Sunshine House and Awesome Queer Kids with funding through the Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag strategy and the Canada-Manitoba partnership on the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

We also continue to advance legislation that supports two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse Manitobans, like amendments to the Manitoba Human Rights Code to include gender expression, amendments to The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, making it easier for those 18 and older to apply for a change of sex designation. These changes help ensure Manitobans are protected and can present themselves as they are, with minimal legislative barriers.

Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility is a recognition of the accomplishments of two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse Manitobans, even in the face of continued barriers. As we honour these communities today, we also recommit to working towards a Manitoba that recognizes every citizen for who they are and is safe and welcoming for all.

In a world that too often meets them with ignorance, transphobia and hate, two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse Manitobans continue to live authentically and joyfully. Our government is proud to see you and celebrate you, today and every day.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I'm honoured to rise today to recognize Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility, which takes place next Tuesday, March 31.

The need to feel seen, heard and accepted is inherent in all of us. For too long, that need has often been overlooked for two-spirit and transgender people.

The day reminds us that visibility, respect and understanding are vital to ensuring the full participation of gender-diverse Manitobans in our society.

Progressive Conservatives under this Leader of the Opposition believes that creating a stronger social and economic fabric is essential to the vitality of our great province.

Working beyond symbolic gesture, is—it was our Opposition Leader who helped support Canada's first 2SLGBTQ+ campus, supported Pride Winnipeg, supported Canada's oldest 2SLGBTQ+ film festival and much more, because PCs believe in the importance of visibility. We believe that the right to safety, affordability and the pursuit of opportunity belongs to all Manitobans, no matter who they are.

For that, I want to thank the Minister of Health and the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham) for ushering in this day here in our province of Manitoba.

Of course, there is always more work to do, and we must all work to continue working to end the discrimination, keep violent offenders off our streets, invest in our communities and make life more affordable.

All Manitobans to be—deserve to be treated with dignity and to have their existence acknowledged, their lives protected and their freedoms ensured. We will continue to work to ensure that all Manitobans has a place where we can all grow and thrive together.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Women's Health Clinic

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I'm very pleased to rise today to recognize the 45th anniversary of Women's Health Clinic in Winnipeg.

Women's Health Clinic opened its doors in 1981 with a vision of providing pro-choice, women-centred medical care, health education, counselling and advocacy. It grew out of the Pregnancy Information Service, a volunteer-led initiative at a time when birth control had only recently become legal and access to information was limited.

Originally located in West Broadway, within the Wolseley constituency, the clinic quickly outgrew its space and relocated downtown to the Union Station constituency.

In the 1980s, Women's Health Clinic provided decision-making support through counselling and education for unplanned pregnancies, opened the first Teen Drop-In Clinic, began supporting women living with HIV and AIDS and launched a peer support program for new mothers. In the 1990s, services expanded to include general counselling, body image and weight preoccupation education, as well as menopause and endometriosis supports.

In the 2000s, the clinic introduced midwifery services, opened a birth centre and an abortion clinic. Over the past 15 years, it has further expanded to include eating disorder treatment and supports for pregnancy and infant loss. The clinic has also worked to address barriers to care for two-spirit, trans and non-binary people, becoming more inclusive of all genders while advancing its commitment to decolonization and reconciliation.

For 45 years, Women's Health Clinic has been an inclusive intersectional feminist health centre, grounded in the belief that people are the experts of their own bodies and deserve compassionate care to make their own informed choices.

On behalf of the thousands of Manitobans who have benefited from your care, I thank everyone who has been a part of Women's Health Clinic—and I hope they'll rise—and I ask all members to join me in recognizing 45 years of extraordinary service.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Holly Banner, Kris Basco-Brar, Danielle Crossman, Ashley Ford, Carolyn Loepky, Sheila Mills, Carol Scurfield, Sarah Simpson-Yellowquill, Karli Smith, Jeannie White Bird.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Swan River.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Honourable Speaker—

The Speaker: Oh—sorry, excuse me.

The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

MLA Naylor: Honourable Speaker, I ask for leave to include my guests' names in Hansard.

The Speaker: You don't need leave for that, but they—*[interjection]* Oh, okay. Apparently you do need leave now.

So is there leave to include the list of names in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Olga Wowchuk

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Honourable Speaker, today I rise to recognize a very special person in my life, my mother, Olga Wowchuk, who is here with us today.

She is joined by her friend Reidun Perchuk, who recently celebrated her 101st birthday, and today marks the first time they've seen each other in over 60 years.

My mom's life is one of commitment to family and community. She is proud of her large family, with six children, 21 grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

She served as the first female councillor in Swan River from 1971 to 1986, guided by a simple goal: to make her community a better place. That commitment showed in everything she did. She travelled to Ottawa to advocate for keeping the RCMP in Swan River, believing that policing should remain rooted in local communities.

She was also involved in strengthening the economy through the work with the chamber of commerce, organizing a conference for the International Highway 83 Association, championing a tourism and trade corridor stretching from Texas to Churchill. The conference drew delegates from across the United States and prairie provinces, reflecting her ability to bring people together.

Her dedication to building connections also extended into personal acts of care where she opened her home to Indigenous students attending high school in Swan River, many of whom came to see her as a second mother.

She later moved to Brantford, Ontario, to care for her aunt and father, where she continued her spirit of service. One effort was when my mother, at the age of 86, organized a petition to keep her bus route running so she could go and play cards.

In 2024, she returned to Manitoba and made her home in Steinbach, where she continues to live independently at 97 years young.

Honourable Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in welcoming my mom, Olga; her grandson,

Derek; along with my sisters, Pat, Linda, Angie and Shirley, who is here in spirit; and my brother, Gary, and his wife, Charlene; as well as Reidun; her daughters, Britt and Karen; and her husband, Walter.

Thank you.

Karen Horta, Walter Horta, Lance Jacobson, Pat Lees, Britt Perchuk, Reidun Perchuk, Linda Pollock, Angie Stelnicki, Charlene Wowchuk, Derek Wowchuk, Gary Wowchuk, Olga Wowchuk.

* (13:50)

Sonal Purohit

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière): Honourable Speaker, I rise today, during pharmacist appreciation month, to recognize someone whose work has shaped both her community and her profession in lasting ways, Ms. Sonal Purohit.

Sonal serves as a pharmacist and business owner at Shoppers Drug Mart in Sage Creek. For many families, she is a familiar and trusted presence. People turn to her for prescriptions but also for guidance and reassurance in moments of need. She is a deeply trusted member of our community.

Her journey began as a university student working as a cashier, and in that role, she saw the impact a pharmacist can have on someone's life. Those early experiences stayed with her and shaped the path she chose to follow.

Her path was also shaped by her father, Bachu. After immigrating to Canada from East Africa, he built a career in pharmacy, serving patients with loyalty and care for over four decades. Sonal often speaks of him as an anchor in her life. Today, that same sense of care and responsibility is evident in how she serves her own patients.

Over more than 20 years, Sonal has grown into a leader within the profession. She has owned and operated pharmacy businesses across urban and northern communities. She has helped guide the direction of pharmacy practice in Manitoba through her role as councillor and vice-president with the College of Pharmacists of Manitoba. She has also been active in the community in a variety of roles as a clinical practitioner, as well as board, council and committee member for several organizations and associations.

For over a decade, she has trained future pharmacists at the University of Manitoba and supported pharmacy technician students at Robertson College.

Her work as a preceptor and educator continue to shape the next generation entering the field.

Sonal joins us in the gallery, along with guests who I'd like to have added to Hansard.

Honourable Speaker, Sonal Purohit represents what it means to lead with purpose and to serve with care. I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing her outstanding contributions.

Sonal Purohit, Bachu Purohit, Paul Levy, Helen Kym, Rekha Purohit.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Honourable Speaker, I'd like to ask for leave to have the last names of my mom's guests entered into Hansard [*phonetic*] directly following my statement.

The Speaker: Is there leave to have the complete names added into Hansard at the end of the member for Swan River's statement? [*Agreed*]

Leave has been granted.

Manitoba's Economic Future

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, today I rise to speak about something that should concern every single Manitoban: the future of our economy and what this government is leaving behind for the next generation.

This week's budget was a missed opportunity. At a time when families are struggling to afford groceries, fuel and housing, Manitobans were looking for true relief. Instead, they got more spending, more debt and no real plan for growth.

Our economy is already underperforming with some of the weakest growth in the entire country, and yet this government continues down the same path: higher costs, more red tape and policies that discourage investment. And now we see it clearly in agreements like the Manitoba jobs agreement, a deal that raises serious concerns about cost, competitiveness and long-term impact on job creation.

Every decision made in this Chamber has consequences. And right now, those consequences are being passed down to the next generation. Higher debt means higher taxes tomorrow. A weaker economy means fewer opportunities. And policies that drive away investment mean fewer good-paying jobs for our young people.

As a father, that matters to me. I think about my boys, growing up on the farm, learning the value of hard work and the importance of building something

for the future. They deserve a province where opportunity is growing, not shrinking; where hard work is rewarded, not taxed away; and where government understands that prosperity doesn't come from more spending, it comes from strong growth and a growing economy.

Manitobans deserve better. They deserve a government that is focused on growth, affordability and opportunity, not one that is making life harder for the very people it's supposed to serve.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Elaine Cowan

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to recognize someone very special from Waverley, Elaine Cowan.

And if you spend even a few minutes with Elaine, you can tell right away that she's someone with a great story, a sharp mind and a fantastic sense of humour. She has lived a full life. She keeps a close eye on what's happening in the world and she has that rare gift of making people feel both welcome and on their toes at the same time.

And Elaine is a proud member of Peguis First Nation, a senior, a mother of two daughters and a grandmother of two. She now lives at the Melody, an independent living centre, and last week she helped host a very important announcement there: the building of a new personal-care home in Bridgwater, as part of Budget 2026.

And that announcement matters deeply. It means more care, more dignity and more support for seniors and families in a growing community. And it felt right that Elaine was part of that moment, because caring for community and showing up for others has been a theme throughout her life.

Elaine worked as NDP caucus manager and alongside several Cabinet ministers, including the late Elijah Harper, who called her a charismatic, which may be one of my favourite political titles ever given, and from everything I know of her, one she earned honestly. Elaine knows how to bring people together, how to build support around a cause and how to get things done.

She also served on boards including Downtown BIZ, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and later built a career in commercial real estate consulting. She was married to the late Jay Cowan, former MLA for Churchill and Cabinet minister, so public service has long been woven into the fabric of her life.

But more than any title, what stands out about Elaine is the impression she leaves on people: warmth, intelligence, humour and heart.

Elaine is very modest so prefers to watch this statement online from home today, but I would ask all of my colleagues to give her a warm round of applause for her many contributions to life here in Manitoba.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Order, please.

Just before oral questions, there's some guests in the gallery.

I draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, from the Women's Health Clinic, Jeannie White Bird, Sarah Simpson-Yellowquill, Kris Basco-Brar, Ashley Ford, Carolyn Loekepoy [*phonetic*], Carol Scurfield, Danielle Crossman, Karli Smith, Holly Banner, Sheila Mills, who are guests of the honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (MLA Naylor).

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

The honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) did introduce his guests by their first names, but I have their last names here, so I'll introduce them again: Olga Wowchuk, Derek Wowchuk, Gary Wowchuk, Charlene Wowchuk, Linda Pollock, Angie Stelnicki, Pat Lees, Reidun Perchuk, Britt Perchuk, Walter Horta, Karen Horta and Lance Jacobson.

And we did welcome them all here earlier.

ORAL QUESTIONS

North End Sewage Treatment Plant Funding Inquiry in Budget 2026

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): This NDP budget is a disappointment, to say the least. Where is the help for struggling Manitoba families? A penny here, a penny there—meaningless to the average Manitoban family.

But clean water? Water safety in Winnipeg is of the utmost importance. This is meaningful to the average family; an investment not just to spark economic growth, but to protect families—something we, on this side of the House, prioritize.

The Premier says, and I quote: There are billions of dollars in the budget for the waste treatment plant. End quote.

So where is the mention of the funding to the City of Winnipeg for this North End water waste treatment plant? Can the Premier today point out what page in his NDP budget that clearly states the billions of dollars that he has promised the City of Winnipeg for the waste water treatment plant?

* (14:00)

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Well, the—we're carrying billions of dollars of debt to pay for this project. It's a project they never got done in government. We're going to get it built to help Winnipeg and the entire province of Manitoba.

Now, when it comes to helping you with the cost of living, we're taking the tax off of all food and drinks in the grocery store. We're doing that at the same time that we brought in the lowest deficit in all of Canada.

So, to review, we're building big infrastructure projects, we're helping you with the cost of living and we're balancing the bucks. If the PCs oppose all that, look out, minority communities, because campaigning against you is the only thing they'll have in the next election.

Everyone else in Manitoba: come on over, it's a big tent. We're making life cheaper. We're fixing health care.

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

Mr. Khan: I asked the Premier to point to a page number where these supposed billions of dollars of are; he won't even give us a page number.

The Premier says one thing, the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) says another, but the budget document says something totally different. The Premier says there's billions of dollars; nowhere to be found in the budget. The Minister of Finance says there's millions of dollars; can't find that in the budget. The mayor of Winnipeg says there's nothing.

The Premier told reporters yesterday, and I quote: Don't worry about the city. End quote.

Well, Mayor Scott Gillingham is worried. He's worried that this province is not stepping up to the plate to protect Winnipeggers and Manitoba.

Can the Premier please sit down with the Minister of Finance and generate a simple answer for the Mayor of Winnipeg: Is this project fully funded, yes or no? And on what page is it in his budget?

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker, I'll do the member one better. I'll sit down with the mayor of Winnipeg and we'll hash it out as we have every single year.

Now, you know why the PCs aren't clapping for that? Because no PC premier ever sat down with the mayor of the City of Winnipeg. They never sat down with any mayor or reeve anywhere. It was Brian versus Brian during their time in office. They were full of dysfunction.

In fact, actually, why don't I just pause here to update the House and let you know that later on today, we'll be unveiling the official portrait of former premier Brian Pallister. That's right. I checked out the guest list of all of the people attending; it's going to be a real Conservative love-in. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: Every single Tory in the province will be attending, except for Heather Stefanson.

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

Mr. Khan: A recent report by the City of Winnipeg called out the consequences of failing to act by this NDP government on North End water treatment plant, and I quote: Winnipeg is estimated to—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —reach its waste water treatment capacity by the end of 2032, effectively halting all population and economic employment growth. End quote. The report is clear, but the Premier, his Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and the budget are not.

In fact, the waste water treatment plant is only mentioned once in the Premier's budget, and I quote: We will develop a plan to fund phase three. End quote. A plan? Really? A plan? The mayor of Winnipeg is saying this is an urgent need for the province of Manitoba and economic growth. The mayor of Winnipeg is asking for answers today.

So will the Premier commit to funding the waste water treatment plant today, yes or no?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, we did, six years ago, in the 2019 election. And then we did again in the 2023 election. It's a tough day at the office for the member opposite when his whole thing is, you're not funding the North End treatment plant. And then question three is, it turns out you are funding the North End treatment plant. Please help me square this circle that I've walked myself into.

Well, here's the thing: when the PCs were in power, not a single litre of water was ever purified because of the lack of investment. Not even a decilitre, not even a picolitre—a tiny fraction—minuscule, microscopic fraction was never purified.

But don't worry, Manitobans and Winnipeggers, we will get it done by working with the City of Winnipeg. On the other hand, they've got the big Pallister portrait unveiling today, and Heather Stefanson is not invited. No wonder they could never work with—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

As much fun as it is to clap, I still need to be able to hear what's being said.

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

Small Restaurants and Grocers PST Exemption Request

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Restaurants tend to be small businesses. Grocery stores, on the other hand, tend to be large chains with deep pockets. Who did the Premier choose to prop up with his minuscule PST exemption? Multinational billion-dollar chains. Who did he ignore? Small businesses in Manitoba.

At the end of 2025, 41 per cent of Manitoba restaurants reported losing money or barely breaking even. Far too often we see these closure notices from community pillars here in the province of Manitoba. There is an easy solution for the Premier to help small businesses. He could've extended the PST holiday on pop and snacks to restaurants of Manitoba. The Premier is choosing to ignore Manitoba small businesses.

Will the Premier commit today to working with Manitoba Restaurant & Foodservices Association to create a level playing field and extend the PST exemption to small businesses and restaurants here in Manitoba?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Honourable Speaker, we're making your life more affordable so that there's a rotisserie chicken in every pot right across this great province. We're doing that by taking the PST off of groceries. It's going to help you anytime you buy any food or drink at the grocery store.

Now, again, it's a tough day at the office for the member opposite as he stands up and asks: These things that we never did to help Manitobans, that the

NDP is now doing to save money, could you please improve the way that you're doing slightly?

Well, here's the thing. We're going to keep listening. We're going to keep listening to Manitobans. We're going to keep listening to 'restauranteurs'. We're going to keep listening to people right across this province who want help. And here's the most important thing. We've gotten a lot done. There's still a lot more to do, but if we ever go back to them, there's a heck of a lot to lose.

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

Mr. Khan: Yet again, another no answer from the Premier; he's choosing to continue to ignore small businesses—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —and grocers. Only the big box stores and major grocery chains will benefit from the NDP government PST exemption.

The owner of a small local grocery store in Winnipeg's West End has something different to say, and I quote: The people that we serve in community are going to pay more, and that's not fair. We're going to lose customers because those customers are going to be placed—going to places where the PST will be taken off. So that is a huge disadvantage to us. End quote. That is a small grocery business owner in Winnipeg West End.

The Premier has a chance today to extend his PST exemption to small grocery stores.

Will he take that opportunity and do that today?

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker, we're helping you and every single Manitoban by taking the provincial tax off of all food and drink at the grocery store.

Now, the PCs had a chance. Over seven years in office, and they never did that. They wanted to tax you on important essentials each and every day when you go to the grocery store.

We've also stepped up and helped the restaurants. We've brought in security programs. We've brought in downtown foot patrols. We've brought in a safer Manitoba. They had the opportunity to do all that but they never funded security. In fact, they defunded and cut police. We lost 55 officers when they were in government. All they have today is throwing stones and criticisms because after two terms in government, they got absolutely zilch done.

On this side of the House, the only zeroes you're seeing are on your tax bill when you go to the local Co-op.

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

Mr. Khan: Once again, the Premier chooses to support multinational big billion-dollar chains instead of small local restaurants and small grocery stores.

Small business are the economic driver of Manitoba and of Canada. The Premier should know this, but instead he's choosing to prop up billion-dollar grocery chains. A local entrepreneur—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —is not getting any help from this Premier.

Local restaurants are the places where they employ our kids, our neighbours, our friends and employ full-time staff growing our economy. Local restaurants and small grocery stores are simply asking for a level playing field under this NDP government where they need to stop picking winners and losers.

So will the Premier today do the right thing and support small local restaurants and small local grocery chains with the same PST exemption he's giving to his multinational billion-dollar grocery chains?

* (14:10)

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker, we're helping you and every Manitoban by taking all of the tax off every single item at the grocery store: all food and drinks.

Now, we know that it's really important for us to continue to help the health of Manitobans along the way, which is why I'm so happy that, earlier today, the Minister of Health, as well as the MLAs for River Heights and Tuxedo, were at the Simkin Centre personal-care home to say that we're investing \$5 million to make personal-care-home food better right across the entire province of Manitoba.

And when I get the chance to shake the hands of the seniors and to hear about the happiness that they have when they're going to have more fresh and healthy food, that's all the reward that I need. So I'll say to my colleagues, you know what, I don't need a sympathy standing ovation. Thank you very much.

Manitoba's Economy Business Investment Concerns

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, once again, I'll bring this back to the local voices and I'll remind members of this House what

I read yesterday: three quarters of businesses report that economic uncertainty is affecting hiring, financial planning and investment decisions, and rising costs remain the biggest barrier to growth. That is the reality facing Manitoba businesses today.

And after two years of this government, business optimism is now at its lowest level in years, and that's according to the Manitoba Chambers. So how can this government pat themselves on the back while businesses across Manitoba and across my region of the province are losing confidence in our economy?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation): Let's go directly to the document the member opposite tabled yesterday specific to the Manitoba Chamber. The document said the Manitoba Chamber of 'commer' welcomes several measures in Budget 2026 that support Manitoba's long-term economic growth, including investments in child care, the creation of a provincial Economic Development Agency and the introduction of trade market diversification plan. End quote.

That is directly from the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce who supports initiatives in our budget. We'll keep growing the economy by listening to small businesses, listening to the business community and investing in their success so that more opportunity for Manitobans to work in good jobs right across our province.

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

Mr. Narth: Honourable Speaker, what I hear from that is more levels of bureaucracy. Well, that's great for the NDP, but we don't have to go far to see the consequences. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Narth: In Sprague, Manitoba, local employer Deadwood Logging was forced to move operations to Ontario after months of inaction on the Crown timber dues. And in Blumenort, Natural Proteins faced unnecessary delays and red tape trying to move forward with a value-added processing facility that should have been a big win for Manitoba.

These are real businesses, real opportunities and real jobs lost here in Manitoba. How many more examples does this government need before they admit that their policies are driving investment out of Manitoba?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, it's interesting to hear the member opposite characterize the work that

Chuck Davidson does at the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce as red tape and as—oh, as bureaucracy. So I think that's very interesting line of questioning from member opposite.

But I'll redirect the focus back on growing the economy for Manitobans, and we're doing a stellar job with second lowest unemployment rate in the country, creating over 30,000 new jobs here in the province. And on top of that, Honourable Speaker, we're supporting economic development right across the province, including our investment of \$150,000 over three years to support the GROW Brandon initiative.

That's real economic development projects for every region of the province.

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

Mr. Narth: And Honourable Speaker, what does this budget and what the minister just had to say do to fix the problems we've addressed? Nothing. No payroll tax relief, no meaningful reduction in red tape, no incentives to invest, expand or to hire. Instead, businesses are left with rising costs, uncertainty and a government that refuses to listen.

When businesses start leaving, it's not by accident. It's because of the decisions that are made right here in this House. Right now, the message to business is clear: if you want to grow, you're better off doing it somewhere else.

When will this government finally take responsibility, change course and make sure Manitoba is a place where business wants to invest once again?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, let me be clear with the business community: we created a \$50-million growth fund to encourage investment right here. We took the PST off of manufacturing equipment to encourage investment right here. We changed our Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit to incentivize innovation right here in Manitoba.

We are doubling our export support program to ensure that exporters here can go to reach global markets. Don't listen to—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Moses: —the negativity of members opposite who would rather see the economy cradle because they love Donald Trump and his tariff plan.

Instead, we're building an economy that works for all Manitobans, and we'll do it every day.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

As I said earlier, as much fun as it is to clap, we're here to hear questions and answers.

North End Sewage Treatment Plant Funding Inquiry in Budget 2026

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Honourable Speaker, AMM has their concerns with this budget, with limited funding to municipalities, a lack of meaningful progress on removing PST from municipal projects and the cutting of the Water Services Board funding. History has already shown that this NDP government cannot follow through on its commitments. They promise the world, they under-deliver; and nowhere is that more glaring than in their dealings with AMM.

So I ask the minister: How much money, specifically, in this budget for the north when—North End Water Pollution Control Centre, and on which page of the Estimates of Expenditures should I direct Mayor Gillingham to find it?

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): Mayor Gillingham, pick up the phone and call me. We can talk through this. Because we know, doing the big things, it takes a group of people: it takes municipal government; takes provincial government; takes federal government. Doesn't have people fighting together to make these things happen.

Obviously, we've been there for NEWPCC phases one and two, close to \$300 million already committed. We're not going to leave people hanging. We're the only party in the history of this province that have ever built anything. And people and communities can rely on us to build. And that's what we are about. We're about the people; we're not about ourselves.

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

Mr. King: Honourable Speaker, our PC government were proud to be partners with the City on phases one and two. Again, the City of Winnipeg has clearly stated it is seeking a one third cost-sharing agreement between all three levels of government for phase three of the North End Water Pollution Control Centre project. That would mean a roughly—a commitment of \$500 million from the Province.

Can the Minister confirm today that there was a full \$500 million in this budget for the NEWPCC,

not on one line mention of the project, but in actual verifiable numbers?

Mr. Simard: So they think you can just snap a finger and you can build the biggest infrastructure project in Manitoba's history? Listen, you have to—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Simard:—sit down and you have to talk to people. And we talk about decorum and about getting things done. How about we work together to be able to make sure things happen? That's what Mayor Gillingham and I have; that's what Mayor Fawcett and I have; that's what Mayor Siemens and I have. We will continue to work with partners.

This is a clear record of us working with municipalities to get big things done. They know this because it's in all of their communities. I can go over the lists, over and over and over again, of the fire trucks and arenas that are being built in rural communities and in Winnipeg because of the things that we did, not the things that they did.

* (14:20)

They took things—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. King: Honourable Speaker, it's a short list of winners and a long list of losers on that list. If this province walks away from its responsibility, just as it already done with municipalities and school divisions, Winnipeg ratepayers will be left holding the bag. That would mean sewer rates increases of up to \$1,000 for an indefinite period of time.

Will the minister commit today to fully funding the Province's share of this project, or is he prepared to force Winnipeg families to pay the price for his government's failure to deliver?

Mr. Simard: We'll work with municipalities to get the big things done. And, you know, we have winners and losers, and they're a big fan of ours, so I'll let them get informed. Get Informed is the Stonewall Teulon Tribune. A great quote in there: Seeing some provincial funding roll in this constituency has been exciting, especially as an opposition MLA.

I'm wondering who said that? That's right, it's our biggest fan, the MLA for Lakeside.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Manitoba Jobs Agreement Construction Company Fee

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): We've been hearing loud and clear for months from Manitoba's construction industry that the job-killing Manitoba jobs agreement is a bad deal for Manitoba workers. You think this NDP government has been listening to them? No, not one bit. In their—and, in fact, in their budget speech earlier this week, the government doubled down, with the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) saying that every government project will now be subject to the MJA.

I'm curious and Manitoba taxpayers deserve to know, since they will ultimately be footing the bill: Will construction companies be subject to any new slush fund fees on top of the 85-cent per hour per worker NDP surcharge?

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): I want to thank the member for that question.

Honourable Speaker, anybody can bid on these contracts. They're open to unionized jobs and ununionized jobs. Every single person who will be working on these jobs will be better off because of the MJA.

We will continue to listen to Manitobans and Manitoba workers.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Mr. Guenter: It's frustrating coming in here and every day—and getting these political talking points from the minister. He isn't listening. The NDP government isn't listening. That's not what the construction industry leaders in Manitoba are saying.

The Manitoba jobs agreement isn't about helping families or strengthening our communities. It's about rewarding political allies at the expense of the vast majority of Manitoba's construction workers and at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers. It's a program designed not only to shut out 88 per cent of Manitoba workers, but specifically to funnel slush fund money to their political coffers.

How can they claim to be helping workers when they're so busy helping themselves?

MLA Sandhu: I want to thank the member for that question again.

I have been telling the member for a long, long time, every single person who is working on these contracts, on these jobs, will be better off. There's no divide between 88 per cent or 12 per cent, Honourable Speaker. Every single person have a—fair wages, good benefit and safe work site.

We will continue to listen to Manitobans and Manitoba workers.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

School Construction Contracts Percentage Awarded to Unionized Contractors

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): This is for the minister. Of the six contracts recently awarded to build four schools, two were construction management contracts involving no construction work; two were design-assist contracts, no construction work; two were actual construction tenders, which both were awarded to unionized contractors.

So, again, can this minister explain: Why is his NDP government giving 100 per cent of the work to only 12 per cent of Manitobans?

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): You know what, member, I'll haven't—I was telling the member for a long time, every single question he have asked, one thing for sure, they are good at one thing only, Honourable Speaker. They are good at creating jobs in Saskatchewan and in Alberta.

We will have a—we will—not going to listen to them. We will make sure we put Manitoba workers every single time, Honourable Speaker. They have—they are not listening to Manitoba workers. There were strikes at MPI and I will—not going to listen to that member or PC caucus, anyway.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Children with Complex Needs Respite-Care Hours—Reduction Concerns

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): We've heard from a Manitoba physician and a single mother whose child has cerebral palsy and severe epilepsy. And this parent knows that respite work is not a break; it is survival. Her child and many others in Manitoba need constant care to manage the complex needs of their family. Respite care is the only way to provide this care while still being able to work in our already understaffed health-care system.

Now many families are being told that their respite hours may be reduced or eliminated altogether as of April 1.

How can this NDP government justify reducing and cutting respite care for families who depend on it just to get by?

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Acting Minister of Families): I would like to let the member opposite know that the Minister of Families' (MLA Fontaine) team met with this physician to address her concerns, and there had been no cuts to respite services. It was a miscommunication with her Children's disABILITY Services worker.

And our government recognizes that we understand the importance of respite workers, and we're going to continue to fund this very vital service. Last year, our government increased funding to Children's disABILITY Services by \$6.2 million. And within—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: Many families are in panic mode, and that's what's happening to families. I've heard from other members in my constituency where respite-care services are being simply reduced. And they are essential for parents who are part of our workforce here in Manitoba.

Can the minister explain why families are receiving reduced notices that their respite care is being cut?

MLA Kennedy: What I will say to the members opposite is, under the former PC government, I can testify that for seven and a half years—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Kennedy: —the Children's disABILITY Services program was underfunded. We—*[interjection]*

Absolutely. There were cuts to services, there were cuts to workers who worked within the program. Respite services were non-existent.

Our government has added an additional \$5 million to support children with autism. We know how important this is, and our government will continue to support families and ensure these services are well funded and robust.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Ms. Byram: Honourable Speaker, these families—again, this NDP government is picking winners and

losers, because not all families are seeing this. It is—some families are having to pay double the cost per hour to provide respite services to their child. Parents are paying nearly double just to maintain crucial care.

The parent who shared the story, this physician who is working in Manitoba's ER rooms and urgent-care system, isn't alone in this. There's other single parents paying the price.

In the middle of an affordability crisis, why is this government off-loading care costs to families who are already under extreme financial and emotional strain?

MLA Kennedy: Honourable Speaker, the PC government have no leg to stand on when it comes to supports and services for children who live with additional needs. The PCs cut supports for Manitoba families—*[interjection]*

* (14:30)

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Kennedy: —who needed support the most. I was there. I was the one delivering the news to families about this.

Under the former government, there was no increase to funding to critical organizations supporting Manitobans with diverse needs.

Our government is investing in services for children and youth. We have extended the Children's disABILITY Services program for children who live on reserve. Under the PC government, they were second-class citizens. Absolutely shameful. We expanded disability services and FASD programs for families in Winnipeg, in Morden—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Free Public Transit Children and Youth

MLA Shannon Corbett (Transcona): Every day, thousands of students across Manitoba need to use public transit to get to school in the morning and back home at the end of the day. But for many, bus fare has been a barrier that makes it harder to get to school. Our government believes that kids belong in the classroom where they can get the education they need to succeed.

Can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning please tell the House how our government is removing barriers and helping kids get to school?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Thank you to my esteemed colleague for that excellent question.

Our government is making public transit free for children and youth. This historic investment will help students get to class and save families hundreds of dollars each year. It's just one of the ways Budget 2026 lowers your costs and invests in the next generation.

We look forward to working with the City of Winnipeg and all municipalities to roll out this incredible new program that will help kids across the province get the education they need to succeed and to become Manitoba's net zero leaders of tomorrow.

Funding and Projects for Brandon, Manitoba Underinvestment Concerns—Budget 2026

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Along with so many residents of Westman, I was deeply disappointed this budget had little for our communities except for some recycled announcements, but nothing new.

This Premier talks a big game on Brandon, but guess what's missing from the budget? Any mention of Brandon. Our municipal leaders noticed it pretty quickly as well, including Mayor Fawcett, who said he would have probably liked to have seen a few more things for Brandon in the budget.

With all of their big talk about Westman, why was the budget so completely Brandon-blind?

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): The only one blind about what's going on in Westman is the MLA for Brandon West. I want to take people through the south end of Brandon where we just—we're expanding a new school. We carry on west where we're designing another one. We go further west; we're building another one. We'll go down 18th Street past the Keystone Centre, where we doubled their funding every year. One of the largest increases in school funding went to Brandon: BU, ACC, Park Community Centre; \$22 million for water and waste.

The editorial from the Brandon Sun says: province clearly paying attention to our needs. The Kinew government has a willing—been a willing partner, one that has been steadily building a track record.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Balcaen: Recycled and reinvented; that's all that's happening here. My constituents are facing the same affordability concerns as other Manitobans. They face the same concerns over property crime and the same stagnant NDP economy, the same concerns over health-care delivery. But this government is Brandon-blind and Westman-weak. Brandonites are sick and tired of hearing the same couple of projects re-announced again and again and again, sick of being completely ignored.

Was this glaring hole in the budget an oversight, or was the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) intentionally ignoring the second largest city in Manitoba?

Mr. Simard: When we go in the next election, I'll proudly stand by our achievements in the City of Brandon: critical response units, Chelsea's place, Granny's House.

The investments that we've been making in that city are beyond belief, to be honest. And we continue to show up. We continue to meet people where they are at. We continue to put money on the table for that city.

Municipal operating funding, the policing grant—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Simard: —the ability for all of the Westman region to be able expand. Whether it's in Boissevain with the lagoon, whether it's in Virden for the fire station, Deloraine for the airport, Souris for the golf club. I can go on and on about the—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Balcaen: Half of Manitobans are \$200 or less away from being able to pay their bills and keep their lights on. That's going to get harder with the NDP set to jack up hydro rates year after year after year again. And there's no affordability measures in this budget for my constituents. Pennies back on grocery bills don't make a difference when a bag of apples costs \$7.

Why is there not a single mention of industry or job creation in Brandon or Westman? And why are the NDP so Brandon-blind and Westman-weak?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Honourable Speaker, we're building a \$3-billion combustion turbine facility in Brandon.

To all the people in Brandon who want help with the cost of living, we're taking the provincial sales tax off of every single food and drink item in the grocery stores in Brandon, all across Westman, right across Manitoba.

Now, in this place, there is room for healthy debate, but I do want to call a stop to using this term that the member is throwing around. I've asked our member not to use this term. It was in the paper. I will ask him not to use the term.

There are many Manitobans who are visually impaired, who cannot see. We have to respect those people when we're in here for debate. We shouldn't be using any terminology in here that is ableist or discriminatory to people in Manitoba who can't see or who are vision impaired.

Management of Manitoba Hydro Impact on Rates and Company Debt

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): This NDP government has completely mismanaged Manitoba Hydro. First they gave themselves the ability to set rates at the Cabinet table up to 4 per cent, then they announced an irresponsible rate 'reeze'—freeze, driving Manitoba Hydro further into debt. Now Manitoba families are facing annual increases that could lead up to a 70 per cent increase in the next few years.

Why has this minister abandoned his promise to keep hydro rates low while he's putting Manitoba Hydro further and further into debt?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, we're building out Manitoba Hydro while we keep your rates affordable and we keep energy reliable.

For seven and a half years, the members opposite didn't build a single kilowatt hour of energy—not one. They showed no vision of any kind when it came to moving energy forward in Manitoba. They didn't have a plan. They didn't have any idea how to manage that file.

And while they did all that, they—the only focus they brought forward was raising rates on Manitobans. They raised rates faster than they're being raised under this government and they had absolutely nothing to show for it.

We're building Hydro while we keep your rates affordable. We're going to bring reliable energy to Manitobans for years to come.

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

Mrs. Stone: This minister and the NDP are treating Manitoba Hydro like their own personal political piggy bank, placing high hopes on revenue increases to help their mismanaged spending and deficit. This NDP projected an \$800-million deficit last year; they exploded it to a \$1.6-billion deficit. This year, they're projecting a \$500-million deficit with just high hopes that Manitoba Hydro is going to make money.

Hydro is not—[*interjection*]

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: —a political tool for this NDP government. The Selinger NDP mismanaged Hydro. This NDP government's mismanaging Hydro.

When they—will they admit that their mismanagement of Manitoba Hydro is driving Hydro further into debt and placing it on the backs of Manitobans?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, again, the only thing that the members opposite did for seven and a half years when it came to Hydro was to find new, creative ways of jacking up hydro rates—[*interjection*]

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Sala: —on Manitobans. They kneecapped the role of the Public Utilities Board. They did away with their role in rate setting, and they decided that it was better to set rates for Manitobans at their Cabinet table.

That's wrong. And we know what that resulted in, again: big hydro rate increases with nothing to show for it. No vision, no idea at all about how to oversee Hydro and make sure that they were doing what we need them to do, which is to provide reliable energy, to do it affordably.

This team is moving Manitoba Hydro forward. We're going to make sure we have the energy we need to power our homes and our businesses, nothing like the disaster they left for us to clean up when it comes to Manitoba Hydro.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

* (14:40)

PETITIONS

Provincial Trunk Highway 34

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

(2) PTH 34 runs north-south in the 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 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.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The deterioration of PTH 34 has raised 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—current design codes, the RTAC standard, located on 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 standards and to resurface the road once the new bridge is completed.

This petition is signed by Gerald Sawatsky, Rick Rivers and many, many other fine Manitobans.

MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Thanks to the investment made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction 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.

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)—[interjection]

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

Can we please keep the conversation a bit low?

Thank you.

Mr. Balcaen: (5) Located around Portage la Prairie are the Dakota Tipi, Dakota Plains, Sandy Bay and Long Plain First Nations reserves. Indigenous peoples in Canada are disproportionately—or, 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.

(7) 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 remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

(7) The average wait time 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 those 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 was signed by Darren Donley, Melissa Medwid, Ken Callanger [*phonetic*] and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Any further petitions? No more petitions?

We will now resume debate—

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS
BUDGET DEBATE
(Second Day of Debate)

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): We will now resume debate on the motion moved by the honourable Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) to approve, in general, the budgetary policy of the government, standing in the name of Leader of the Official Opposition.

The Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): This NDP budget is a missed opportunity. That is the most honest way to describe what was put forward by this NDP government. Because at a time when Manitoba families are under real pressure, when the cost of living continues to rise, when economic growth is stagnant, when people are working harder just to stand still, this NDP government had a chance to act, a chance to provide real relief, a chance to set a new direction, and they didn't.

* (14:50)

Instead, what we see in this budget offers very little for Manitoba families in any way of help, very little for families who are struggling to make ends meet, very little for workers who are trying to get ahead, very little for a province that needs significant economic growth.

Manitoba families deserve affordability. They're not asking for much, Honourable Speaker. They're asking for a little breathing room. They're asking for a little stability, and this budget does not deliver that. There is no relief from the pressures of economic

stagnation and increased taxation under this NDP government. If this government was serious about affordability, they would start with something simple—something simple like raising your basic personal exemption for income tax. They would allow Manitobans to keep more of their hard-earned money on every single paycheque—not a rebate, not a credit—real savings on day one on their paycheques, in their bank accounts.

This NDP government could have chose to do that and they didn't. That's how you help real Manitoba families with real solutions. That's how you grow an economy.

And our proposal is clear, Honourable Speaker, and Manitobans have heard the message loud and clear that under a PC resolution in the government, there will be no provincial income tax on your first \$30,000 that you earn. That is real savings for real families—up to \$1,500 for individuals, up to \$3,000 for families. That's money people can use for groceries, rent, for their kids. That's not pennies; that is hundreds and thousands of dollars for Manitoba families. That's immediate relief when families need it most, and that is more that will help Manitoba families than anything proposed in this NDP budget.

It's also more than that, Honourable Speaker; it's an economic growth for the province of Manitoba, sustainable growth under our proposal. Because when people have more money, they spend more money, in their communities, at local businesses. They create jobs. That's how you build an economy. You support Manitobans. You support their families. That is how you move a province forward with real significant affordability measures, not pennies.

But instead of focusing on growth, this government—this NDP government—finds itself focused on studies instead of action. A grocery study—seriously? A grocery study. We have talked about this ad nauseum, and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) still stands up and says he needs a study to understand where grocery prices have gone up.

They have gone up everywhere. Every Manitoban feels it, and saving a Manitoba pennies at the checkout does not make real sustainable changes or affordability measures, Honourable Speaker.

At a time when people know what the problem is—groceries are too expensive—the Premier chooses a study over action. Families don't need a study; they need relief. They need leadership. You either have a solution or you don't, Honourable Speaker. A solution

is not a fancy, flashy announcement; a solution is showing results for Manitobans, results for everyone. That is what leadership is: big, bold solutions that will result in actions for Manitobans, and this government doesn't have any actions or solutions.

If we want to grow our province, we need to make it easier for businesses to succeed in Manitoba. We as a government need to create an environment for businesses to flourish, not an environment where businesses don't want to invest, not an environment like we're seeing under this NDP government where they're fleeing the province. An environment for businesses to grow, that's how we grow the economy. We need to support industries that will drive our future, because if we're serious about growing our province, we cannot rely on small ideas or short-term thinking that might get you a vote here and there. We need big, bold, long-term solutions.

We need a plan that builds economic strength. That means growing our resource sector. Manitoba has the resources. We have the workforce. We have the opportunities. But projects are too slow under this NDP government. They're too complicated to get going, and they are too uncertain under this NDP. Investments have chosen to go elsewhere when government hesitates like this NDP government is doing.

We need to move with clarity, reduce barriers and actually get projects built today. Responsible, efficient and, in a way, create jobs here, right at home. That means securing major project funding from the federal government, real funding, not a pipe dream like this Premier (Mr. Kinew) is trying to sell Manitobans, not a \$10-million placeholder to go and then to go ask private sector to do the heavy lifting.

Why would private sector invest in a province that makes it so hard for businesses to succeed, that has so much red tape and so much bureaucracy under this NDP government? Nobody's going to want to invest in this province. This NDP government and Premier must act today. Other provinces are securing billions of dollars for major projects that transform their economies. Manitoba—dead last in Canada under this NDP government.

Manitoba should be at the table. I'll rephrase that: Manitoba must be at the table competing, negotiating, fighting and winning for what's best for Manitoba, because when those projects land elsewhere, we just don't lose investments; we lose opportunity for an entire generation.

And, sadly, under this NDP government, we are seeing just that. We are seeing our kids, our neighbours, our grandkids leave this province under this NDP government because there is no future here for them under this NDP government. They have destroyed the economic growth to make this province a prosperous, wonderful province.

That means that somebody needs to step up. We need to be ready to take advantage of the opportunities for our province, opportunities not only in the resource sector but also in defence and aerospace. Canada is entering a period of significant investment in defence. Manitoba already has one of the strongest aerospace sectors in the country. We have advanced manufacturing, world-class testing facilities and a skilled workforce. But those advantages mean nothing if we are not actively positioning ourselves to win those new projects. And under this NDP government, they are not acting at all.

Other provinces are moving aggressively. They are making the case for why to invest in their provinces. They're building partnerships. They're aligning training, infrastructure and industry. Premiers from other provinces are travelling to Malaysia, India, China, UK and securing billions of dollars in trade deals. And Manitoba has nothing to offer under this NDP government in the last two and a half years.

Where is Manitoba? Nowhere to be found. This is not just about industry; it's about jobs; it's about wages; it's about keeping young people here and it's about building a province that can stand on its own, a province that we can be proud of and for the future generations to succeed. That is what economic growth looks like and that is what's missing from this budget.

This government talks about being a have province. Well, talk is cheap. A have province needs have action. Right now, under this NDP government, we are a have-not province. But the Premier says in 10 or 15, 20 years, we might be a have province.

That's not good enough for us on this side of the House and that sure isn't good enough for Manitobans listening to that message. We can be a have province today if we have big, bold, strong, confident leadership, leadership that has a vision to turn this province around and point it in the right direction. We are further away from becoming a have province under this NDP government than we have ever been. One third of this government's revenue comes from federal transfers. One third of this entire government's revenue is coming from the federal government. That's not

independence; that is reliance. And you do not build a strong, self-sufficient province that way.

* (15:00)

Honourable Speaker, there is another reality we need to face. You can't spend your way out of a balanced budget. And no matter what this NDP government wants to do about saying their deficit and GDP ratio, they have still not yet balanced the budget. Three years in a row, they have missed their target by hundreds of millions of dollars. And this year will be no separate—no different. You can't spend your way to a balanced budget and this budget is not going to balance itself.

No matter how many times this government suggests otherwise, they have not done that. We have not seen a balanced approach. Spend now, according to the NDP, worry about it later. That's how it's always been in this province and that's how it's continuing to go under this NDP government. In just two and a half years, they have driven the debt into \$5 billion. NDP math logic: spend now, worry about it later. We're worried about it now.

I'm worried about my son, my family, my neighbours, our community, our province. NDP math isn't going to fly, Honourable Speaker. Saving pennies now on a pop can, on a bag of chips, on a rotisserie chicken, as the Premier (Mr. Kinew) likes to talk about, isn't going to cut it. Manitobans deserve, Manitobans demand and Manitobans will get better under a different government.

While families are struggling, while the economy needs growth, we see spending choices under this NDP government in the budget that simply do not reflect the needs and priorities of Manitobans right now. I guess I will give the Premier some credit, though. That is, families will save two cents on a litre of milk. Congratulations, Premier; you have saved Manitobans two cents on one litre of milk.

It is such a disappointment to see the Premier with a smile, walking around a grocery store, championing two pennies. As if that is going to make a difference in a Manitoba's family's budget. It's actually shameful. It's actually disrespectful. It's actually embarrassing that he thinks 2 cents.

I will give him more credit: one and a half cents on a litre of gas, saving you a combined total of 50 cents when you fill up your fuel tank. The Premier has said numerous times that that 1-and-a-half-cent savings was the greatest thing a government has ever done in the history of Manitoba. One and a half cents—

when the floodway was built? When Manitoba was the first province to give women voting rights? This Premier stands up and arrogantly says 1-and-a-half-cent savings is the greatest thing any government in Manitoba has ever done.

It tells you about their priorities, about where they are thinking, and it's not for all of Manitoba. Not all Manitobans have cars; they're not saving that 1 and a half cents. Not all Manitobans buy one litre of milk; they're not saving 2 cents. This Premier is not making the big, bold decisions we need to move our province forward.

At a time when families are struggling to pay their bills, to buy groceries, their Premier talks about a PST savings for groceries. Well, news flash—and Manitobans know all this: almost 90 per cent of groceries are already PST exempt. The healthy ones: apples, oranges, bananas, bread, milk, cheese, eggs, chicken breasts, steak, fish, all of these products are already PST exempt. So the Premier wants to exempt you on what? A can of Coke from PST: 7 cents; a bag of chips for \$3.21; or a rotisserie chicken, saving you 63 cents.

These pennies are not adding up to affordability measures for Manitobans, and Manitobans are seeing that. They are seeing this NDP for what it truly is: spend now, buy votes, do whatever you have to do, worry about it later because it's not going to be their problem; it'll be the PCs' problem to clean up after they are kicked out of government, Honourable Speaker.

On this side of the House, we support lowering costs, we support reducing taxes, but this budget does nothing to move the needle for Manitoba families, at least nothing in a meaningful way, Honourable Speaker. And then we see the broader pattern. Again, misplaced priorities. Now I will say, this is a good announcement. Transit for kids—good idea. We support that idea. It's good to give kids free transit to get where they need to go.

But what about the families? What about the families that are struggling to pay the bills, keep the lights on for their kids, put healthy food on the table or maybe pay for their kid to have an extracurricular activity? A bus pass won't do that, Honourable Speaker. A child won't be able to get on a bus pass if they have none of those other items I've talked about.

So where are the priorities of this NDP government? Why not target support that actually makes a difference? Like I've mentioned, our proposal to increase the basic personal tax exemption to \$30,000 will make a real difference in Manitoba families.

It will bring an average—or up to, sorry, \$3,000. And that's immediately; on every paycheque, you will see an immediate difference. Not 2 cents at the grocery store, not a bus pass, but real, tangible affordability measures for you today. But this NDP government refuses to support that. Why? Because their ideology gets in the way. It's not their idea, so they can't support it, even though it's a good idea.

Let's look at daycare: from a toonie a day to zero—good. Important. Zero-dollar daycare to pay for that. Sounds good. But what about that \$3 million they're allotting for that? What about ensuring that \$10-a-day daycare is available for every single family in Manitoba, regardless of the provider they choose?

That's fairness. That is fairness. That's accessibility. That is real support. That is not picking winners and losers. That is empowering Manitobans to make the best decisions for their families. That is how you target support in the right way for everyone, equally, Honourable Speaker.

Policing and public safety is another area where this budget falls extremely short. Manitobans know, walking down the streets, driving anywhere now, and not only in urban centres and throughout all of Manitoba, rural Manitoba, that crime and safety is out of control under this NDP government. This Premier (Mr. Kinew) promised that he will have bail reform in 100 days. We are two and a half years into their mandate and he still has not done that. Under this Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), we have more crime, more repeat violent offenders out than we've ever had before. Families know that. They feel that. You see that. You're worried every time your child goes out that something might happen to them, because it's not a priority for this NDP government. They haven't prioritized it in this budget. The budget reflects the priorities of this government.

We know affordability is not there. We know they're picking winners and losers, and when it comes to policing and public safety, it's another fallen opportunity for this NDP government. In this budget, they proposed—sure—12 additional police officers—12 additional police officers for the entire province? Let that sink in for one second. At a time when rural crime is rising, when communities feel less safe, 12 police officers?

Manitobans, you're smarter than that. You deserve better than that. You deserve better than 2 cents off one litre of milk. You deserve better than only 12 policing officers to think that is going to solve the

problems in this province. This Premier promised bail reform in 100 days—another broken promise.

* (15:10)

At the same time, this government is spending more than twice on drug consumption than it is on increased policing. Think about the priorities of this NDP government: they are spending two times the amount of money on a drug consumption site than they are on increased policing.

Where is the problem here? It's the priorities of this NDP government are—that are the problem. Manitobans, you deserve better. We will give you better—more than twice. I actually had to read that four or five times when I saw that in the budget. That extra money could have gone to fund dozens of more police officers, keeping your community safe, your family safe, keeping our downtown safe—a place where once, when I first moved here in 2006 to play for the Blue Bombers, we used to love going downtown. Loved going to Portage and Main. Loved walking around the Exchange District. Loved seeing what was happening and walking in and out of restaurants and seeing, you know, concerts and venues.

Now, it's deserted. The NDP government had an opportunity to turn that around and they chose to ignore it. They chose to actually put two times the money in a drug consumption site that they want to open downtown. If you want to talk about priorities, let's stay on this. Not only did they put two times the funding into drug consumption sites, they have put five times the money into a drug consumption site than they have put into recovery—five times the money, the resources, the effort, the promises by this NDP government that they're going to open a drug consumption site.

On our side of the House, we have said from day one, drug consumption sites is not compassion. That's not the way to go. Recovery is what we must do for Manitobans and we will stay on the path of compassion, of empathy and recovery for all Manitobans. If the NDP government really wanted to help people, Honourable Speaker, they would support recovery. Anybody that has gone through a scene has been affected and all of us have, myself included, with friends. Recovery is the compassionate, empathetic, loving thing to do; not more consumption.

Every other province has turned down and stopped drug consumption sites, but this NDP government still says they want to do it because their priorities are out of whack. Their priorities don't align with your priorities, with Manitoba's priorities. We need fewer

addicts on the street, not more opportunities for drugs to be consumed, not more opportunities for drug dealers and crime to flourish in this province. Fewer addicts, fewer drug users, fewer drug dealers, fewer crime, safer communities—it's logical. You all know that. We all know that. It's this NDP government that refuses to acknowledge that. That is compassion. That is love. That is responsibility.

When you see mental health as a critical issue—sorry, Honourable Speaker—we see mental health as a critical issue in this House all the time. Again, we all have loved ones who are affected by this. Mental health is in crisis in this province. It's an issue growing in every single corner of our province, a crisis for families.

And what do families get in this NDP budget? A mental health zone staffed by social workers. Social workers, yes, do very important work, but they are not mental health professionals. Why are we—why is this government putting social workers in the way of potential harm? We have mental health professionals. We can train more mental health professionals. We can attract more mental health professionals to help in this crisis.

Picture your family in that situation: you have a loved one who's addicted to drugs and you have a government who wants to give them more, wants to create a space for them to consume. On our side, we want to create a space for them to recover, to walk in and feel loved and welcomed and supported. We have a government who believes that mental health crisis, Manitobans suffering that, can be dealt with social workers.

We believe you'd need a special mental health worker for that, professionals. Again, priorities are completely lost under this NDP government. We must expand access to mental health care. We must support people in crisis with the right care, not a band-aid solution.

Someone who's been detained under this NDP government will go in their detention centre for 72 hours. Think about that one. This government created a detention centre for someone on meth psychosis or high on drugs. For 72 hours, they're going to lock them up in solitary confinement and after that 72 hours is done, they're going to let them out on the street. No support, no access to care, nothing other than putting them in an environment where they are going to potentially reoffend.

Actually, not potentially reoffend. In that environment of no support, they are going to reoffend, creating public safety issues, creating mental health crises, creating a cycle of vicious, repetitive, abusive behaviour

for themselves. We think that's wrong. If you think that's wrong, you know where your priorities are aligned: not with this NDP government.

Honourable Speaker, the budget reflects a government that is not focused on outcomes; we can see that. In two and a half years, this Province has grown \$5 billion in debt and not grown the economy one bit. In two and a half years, we are the worst economy in Canada. In two and a half years, we have a Finance Minister with a F rating and a F when it comes to accountability and transparency. We have a Health Minister who also has an F. We have three hospitals in Manitoba for the first time in history that have been greylisted by the nurses for unsafe working conditions.

Two and a half years we have not moved forward; we have moved backwards. This NDP government has caused generational damage to this province with our stalled economy, with investments leaving, with youth unemployment. They can say whatever they want in the Chamber, but they won't say it outside the House because they know what the facts are. The facts are, Manitoba is worse off in every sector under this NDP government than they've ever been under any government before.

Honourable Speaker, this budget reflects a government that's not focused on outcomes. This is a government which is not focused on growth. This is a government that is not focused on delivering real relief, and this is a government focused on self-congratulations over real impact. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) would rather stand up here and smile and laugh and pat himself on the back than get out there and do the real work for Manitobans. He'd rather walk through a grocery store, pick up a litre of milk and smile for the camera than he will actually be trying to get affordability measures in line for you.

This is a Premier who has his focus on Mark Carney's job and the war in the Middle East and what's happening south of the border than he does right here in Manitoba. The Premier needs to focus on Manitobans; Manitobans deserve better. This budget is not a reflection of the priorities of Manitobans. They deserve a government that understands what they are going through, that expects more of itself. This budget was a chance to move Manitoba forward, to deliver real change, to help families, to grow the economy. It was a chance to lead, to be bold and exciting and courageous, and it was completely missed by this NDP government.

I'm going to finish by a real quote that actually paints the difference between the NDP and our side. This is the Premier a few days ago, on his interview

with Power Play. And he said, and I quote: We might not be able to do everything all at once, but saving you a little bit of money when you go to the gas station helps. End quote.

Yes, it helps a little bit: 50 cents helps a little bit; 2 cents on a litre of milk help a little bit; 7 cents on a can of pop help a little bit. But are we actually making life better in Manitoba? Are we actually moving that needle?

* (15:20)

There's a little bit of a help for those people paying mortgages or rents. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) offered a \$100 increase in your tax credits, but at the same time he's going to take over \$200 out of your pockets.

And, actually, I stand corrected: The Premier is going to offer you \$100 back next year on your education property taxes rebate, but he's going to take over \$250 out of your pocket at the same time: \$250 out, \$100 and—in is still a net loss of \$150. Manitobans can see through that logic. They can see where their priorities are under this NDP government.

The Premier says, you can do a little bit; there's a little bit of help for those people. The cost of living is such a big issue, and he can't get his hands around everything. Unquote, Honourable Speaker. This is a government who tried, who promised that they would get their hands around everything completely, but they have completely missed the point. They have completely missed the priorities for Manitobans. They have completely let everyone down.

Premier says they can do a little bit and they can't get their hands around everything. We on this side of the House say government can and must do everything to help Manitobans. The Premier himself admits he can't do it all, that his actions actually show he can't do it all. His priorities show he can't do it and he doesn't want to do it. This budget is proof that he won't do the right thing when the right thing is knocking on its door. This budget proves this NDP government cannot and will not and must not go forward with the priorities that Manitobans have.

Affordability starts with Manitoban families. Safety starts by doing the right thing. Economy starts by understanding you have to grow the economy and create an environment. Accountability starts by saying you have to hold people accountable for their actions. Compassion and empathy starts with helping someone who is addicted to drugs, not supplying their drugs.

The Premier has proven time and time again he's not ready to do the right thing. That is why a Progressive Conservative government would and will make a huge difference for Manitoba families. We wouldn't try to do a little bit, Honourable Speaker; we will get it done.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: If I could just have a moment. There's some guests in the gallery that are going to be leaving shortly, so I want to take the opportunity to introduce them.

We have seated in the public gallery, from the University of Manitoba Access Program, 40 students under the direction of Carol Johnston. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen).

And we welcome you here today.

* * *

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member from Midland,

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after "House" and substituting:

therefore regrets that this budget fails to adequately address the current cost-of-living crisis by:

- (a) failing to take action to mitigate the escalating cost pressures on Manitobans, while simultaneously generating hundreds of millions of dollars in new tax revenues from families already facing financial hardship; and
- (b) cancelling the indexation of the basic personal amount and personal income tax brackets, thereby denying the ability of Manitobans to keep more money from their paycheques and earn more before paying income tax; and
- (c) failing to uphold its commitment not to raise taxes, as evidenced by increases to school taxes, education property taxes and the termination of income tax indexation; and
- (d) allowing education property taxes to skyrocket to 19.5 per cent since last year without presenting a plan to meet the growing needs of the educational system or offer meaningful long-term relief for homeowners; and

- (e) abandoning 4,600 students and 500 staff by refusing to provide the necessary funding to support the transition of learners displaced by the defunding of the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology; and
- (f) failing to support agriculture producers, who are essential to addressing rising food prices and driving economic growth; and
- (g) failing to provide effective stewardship of Manitoba's public utilities, thereby contributing to annual increases in hydro rates and MPI premiums; and
- (h) failing to bring forward or execute an economic plan designed to stimulate economic growth and lessen the burdens imposed on Manitoba families and businesses by trade wars and increasing fuel prices; and
- (i) failing to take necessary measures to restore public safety in communities across Manitoba, as this budget contains no plan to address the rising property crime or to advance reforms to the bail system aiming at keeping violent offenders and repeat criminals in custody; and
- (j) adopting a tax policy that places additional burdens on physicians and other critical skilled professionals, diminishing Manitoba's competitiveness in recruiting and retaining the expertise necessary for a strong health-care system and economy; and
- (k) failing to enact and enforce necessary measures to address repeat violent offenders and armed drug traffickers who continue to endanger and victimize hard-working Manitobans; and
- (i)-(l) refusing to take decisive action in response to grave safety concerns raised by staff and patients at health-care facilities, including multiple sexual assaults, resulting in three hospitals being greylisted by nurses for the first time in the province's history; and
- (m) failing to take meaningful action to resolve the growing diagnostic and surgical case-loads, thereby forcing Manitoba families to endure unprecedented delays in accessing essential care; and
- (n) neglecting the mental health needs of Manitobans by failing to expand access to primary mental health services and failing to establish a single Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinic to support those struggling with addictions; and
- (o) failing to present a balanced budget in its first term and failing to present a credible plan to balance the Public Accounts or reduce the Province of Manitoba's deficit and debt; and
- (p) refusing to acknowledge or act on the reality that half of Manitoba families are within \$200 a month of being unable to pay their bills; and
- (q) failing to take meaningful action to address inflation and the escalation costs of groceries, fuel and housing; and
- (r) implementing the job-killing Manitoba jobs agreement, which arbitrarily selects winners and losers and overrides the choice of 88 per cent of Manitoba construction workers who have chosen to not be associated with a union, thereby giving up the price—thereby driving up the price of schools, hospitals and other infrastructure.

As a consequence of these and many other failings, the provincial government has thereby lost the trust and confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

* (15:30)

The Speaker: There was a couple of mistakes in the reading of that, so is there leave to have it—is there leave to have it submitted as printed as opposed to as spoken? [*Agreed*]

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after "House" and substituting:

therefore regrets that this budget fails to adequately address the current cost-of-living crisis by:

- a) *failing to take action to mitigate the escalating cost pressures on Manitobans, while simultaneously generating hundreds of millions of dollars in new tax revenues from families already facing financial hardship; and*
- b) *cancelling the indexation of the Basic Personal Amount and personal income tax brackets, thereby denying the ability of Manitobans to keep more money from their paycheques and earn more before paying income tax; and*

- c) *failing to uphold its commitment not to raise taxes, as evidenced by increases to school taxes, education property taxes, and the termination of income tax indexation; and*
- d) *allowing education property taxes to skyrocket to 19.5% since last year without presenting a plan to meet the growing needs of the education system or offer meaningful long-term relief for homeowners; and*
- e) *abandoning 4,600 students and 500 staff by refusing to provide the necessary funding to support the transition of learners displaced by the defunding of the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology; and*
- f) *failing to support agriculture producers, who are essential to addressing rising food prices and driving economic growth; and*
- g) *failing to provide effective stewardship of Manitoba's public utilities, thereby contributing to annual increases in Hydro rates and MPI premiums; and*
- h) *failing to bring forward or execute an economic plan designed to stimulate economic growth and lessen the burdens imposed on Manitoba families and businesses by trade wars and increasing fuel prices; and*
- i) *failing to take necessary measures to restore public safety in communities across Manitoba, as this budget contains no plan to address rising property crime or to advance reforms to the bail system aimed at keeping violent offenders and repeat criminals in custody; and*
- j) *adopting a tax policy that places additional burdens on physicians and other critical skilled professionals, diminishing Manitoba's competitiveness in recruiting and retaining the expertise necessary for a strong health-care system and economy; and*
- k) *failing to enact and enforce necessary measures to address repeat violent offenders and armed drug traffickers who continue to endanger and victimize hardworking Manitobans; and*
- l) *refusing to take decisive action in response to grave safety concerns raised by staff and patients at health-care facilities, including multiple sexual assaults, resulting in three hospitals being grey-listed by nurses for the first time in the province's history; and*
- m) *failing to take meaningful action to resolve the growing diagnostic and surgical caseloads, thereby forcing Manitoba families to endure unprecedented delays in accessing essential care; and*
- n) *neglecting the mental-health needs of Manitobans by failing to expand access to primary mental-health services and failing to establish a single Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinic to support those struggling with addictions; and*
- o) *failing to present a balanced budget in its first term and failing to present a credible plan to balance the Public Accounts or reduce the Province of Manitoba's deficit and debt; and*
- p) *refusing to acknowledge or act on the reality that half of Manitoba families are within \$200 a month of being unable to pay their bills; and*
- q) *failing to take meaningful action to address inflation and the escalating costs of groceries, fuel, and housing; and*
- r) *implementing the job-killing "Manitoba Jobs Agreement", which arbitrarily selects winners and losers and overrides the choice of the 88% of Manitoba construction workers who have chosen to not be associated with a union, thereby driving up the price of schools, hospitals and other infrastructure.*
- As a consequence, of these and many other failings, the Provincial Government has thereby lost the trust and confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.*
- The Speaker:** So it has been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), seconded by the honourable member for Midland (Mrs. Stone),
- THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "House" and substituting:
- therefore regrets that this budget fails to adequately address the current cost-of-living crisis—*[interjection]* Dispense?
- Some Honourable Members:** No.
- The Speaker:** I hear a no.
- regrets that this budget fails to adequately address the current cost-of-living crisis by:
- (a) *failing to take action to mitigate the escalating cost pressures on Manitobans, while simultaneously generating hundreds of millions of dollars in new tax revenues from families already facing financial hardship; and—*[interjection]**

Order, please. The Speaker is standing and speaking. If you could all please take your chairs and remain quiet while the Speaker is standing and speaking. Thank you.

- (b) cancelling the indexation of the basic personal amount and personal income tax brackets, thereby denying the ability of Manitobans to keep more money from their paycheques and earn more before paying income tax; and
- (c) failing to uphold its commitment not to raise taxes, as evidenced by increases to school taxes, education property taxes and the termination of income tax indexation; and
- (d) allowing education property taxes to skyrocket to 19.5 per cent since last year without presenting a plan to meet the growing needs of the education system or offer meaningful long-term relief for homeowners; and
- (e) abandoning 4,600 students and 500 staff by refusing to provide the necessary funding to support the transition of learners displaced by the defunding of the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology; and
- (f) failing to support agriculture producers, who are essential to addressing rising food prices and driving economic growth; and
- (g) failing to provide effective stewardship of Manitoba's public utilities, thereby contributing to annual increases in hydro rates and MPI premiums; and
- (h) failing to bring forward or execute an economic plan designed to stimulate economic growth and lessen the burdens imposed on Manitoba families and businesses by trade wars and increasing fuel prices; and
- (i) failing to take necessary measures to restore the public safety in communities across Manitoba, as this budget contains no plan to address rising property crime or to advance reforms to the bail system aimed at keeping violent offenders and repeat criminals in custody; and
- (j) adopting a tax policy that places additional burdens on physicians and other critical skilled professionals, diminishing Manitoba's competitiveness in recruiting and retaining the expertise necessary for a strong health-care system and economy; and
- (k) failing to enact and enforce necessary measures to address repeat violent offenders and armed drug traffickers who continue to endanger and victimize hard-working Manitobans; and
- (l) refusing to take decisive action in response to grave safety concerns raised by staff and patients at health-care facilities, including multiple sexual assaults, resulting in three hospitals being greylisted by nurses for the first time in the province's history; and
- (m) failing to take meaningful action to resolve the growing diagnostic and surgical case-loads, thereby forcing Manitoba families to endure unprecedented delays in accessing essential care; and
- (n) neglecting the mental health needs of Manitobans by failing to expand access to primary mental health services and failing to establish a single Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinic to support those struggling with addictions; and
- (o) failing to present a balanced budget in the first term and failing to present a credible plan to balance the Public Accounts or reduce the Province of Manitoba's deficit and debt; and
- (p) refusing to acknowledge or act on the reality that half of Manitoba families are within \$200 a month of being unable to pay their bills; and
- (q) failing to take meaningful action to address inflation and the escalating costs of groceries, fuel and housing; and
- (r) implementing the job-killing Manitoba jobs agreement, which arbitrarily selects winners and losers and overrides the choice of the 88 per cent of Manitoba construction workers who have chosen to not be associated with a union, thereby driving up the price of schools, hospitals and other infrastructure.

As a consequence of these and many other failings, the provincial government has thereby—[interjection] Order, please—thereby driving up the prices of schools, hospitals and other infrastructure.

As a consequence of these and many other failings, the provincial government has thereby lost the trust and confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.

The amendment is in order. The floor is open for debate.

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Budget 2026 as the member for Fort Richmond.

It is a privilege to stand in this House and represent a community that reflects the strength and diversity of Manitoba. Every day, I have the opportunity to hear from parents, students, seniors and small-business owners about what matters most to them. Those conversations are grounded in everyday realities. People are thinking about whether they can access health care when they need it, whether they can keep up with the cost of living and whether there are real opportunities for themselves and their children to succeed here in Manitoba.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Honourable Speaker, this budget responds to those priorities in a practical and meaningful way. Health care is deeply personal. It affects every Manitoban at some point in their lives. This budget continues the important work of strengthening our health-care system so that people can feel confident and supported when they need care the most.

Since 2023, more than 4,000 net-new health-care workers have joined the system, including 317 doctors. These are individuals who show up every day to care for patients and support families across our province. We recognize the dedication of our health-care workers. Supporting them through recruitment, retention and safety measures remains essential to building a strong and reliable system.

At the Victoria hospital, we are permanently adding 18 institutional safety officers, strengthening protections for both patients and front-line workers. We're also investing over \$5.3 million this year, on top of \$1.6 million in previous years, for critical safety and security upgrades, including right at the Victoria hospital.

Through Budget 2026, we are building on our previous investments and making an historic investment of \$31.9 million to build a new emergency room at the Victoria hospital. This is not just a promise on paper, either. Construction is already under way.

* (15:40)

That means families in the south end will soon have access to the care they need when they need it, right in their own community. And with a new extended hours clinic at Victoria hospital, families

will have more options to get care sooner, helping reduce pressure on emergency rooms.

Honourable Speaker, just in the Victoria hospital alone, our government is rebuilding health care creatively and thoroughly. We are investing \$5.2 million to build the new Manitoba menopause clinic in south Winnipeg, ensuring women of all ages receive expert, high-quality care in a dedicated, welcoming space.

For Fort Richmond, for south Winnipeg and for every family who relies on Victoria hospital, this budget is delivering real progress and I am proud to stand behind it.

Honourable Speaker, affordability is one of the most important issues facing Manitobans every day. In my constituency, according to the City of Winnipeg statistics, along the south Pembina Highway corridor—particularly south of Abinojii Mikanah, covering neighbourhoods such as Fort Richmond and Waverley Heights—is identified as having the second largest concentration of high poverty in Winnipeg.

The population in this area experiencing poverty includes a high percentage of Indigenous residents, children of ages zero to 14, seniors, recent immigrants and refugees and lone-parent families. That is why measures like removing the PST from food and prenatal vitamins are so important. For families in Fort Richmond, this means real savings on everyday essentials, something that can make a meaningful difference week to week.

We're also increasing affordability tax credits for homeowners and renters, helping Manitobans keep more of their income to manage daily expenses. For families, making transit free for children and youth will help reduce monthly costs and support access to schools and activities, something that many young families in Fort Richmond will benefit from directly.

Honourable Speaker, education is one of the strongest foundations we can build for the future of our province. Across Manitoba and in communities like Fort Richmond, families rely on a strong education system to support their children's growth and success. This budget strengthens that system with an \$80-million increase in school funding, ensuring that schools have the resources they need to support students.

We're also building two new schools in Waverley and expanding capacity to meet the needs of growing communities. These investments, which will not only benefit Waverley but also Fort Richmond families, ensure that students have access to safe and supportive learning environments.

Honourable Speaker, I regularly speak with school leaders in my community and they constantly—and they consistently share how important school nutrition programs are. Providing meals and snacks is not just about food; it helps students stay focused, engaged and ready to learn. It also provides meaningful support to families.

Honourable Speaker, strong communities are built on good jobs and a growing economy. This budget supports economic growth through practical investments that create opportunities across Manitoba.

Fort Richmond on Pembina Highway is a major commercial strip in Winnipeg, featuring a high density of businesses serving local residents and students near the University of Manitoba. Businesses include retailers like Sobeys, Shoppers Drug Mart and Superstore, along with many restaurants, financial services and retail shops.

I had the privilege of recognizing a new Home Hardware opening in the community, which reflects confidence in our local economy and the commitment to serving residents. Businesses like this are more than just the places of work; they are part of the fabric of the community, creating jobs and strengthening neighbourhood connections.

This February, the Manitoba government significantly expanded its agri-food trade ties with the Asia-Pacific region. By partnering with Hong Kong as the world-class trade hub, we are connecting local producers and processors with a vast network of buyers, distributors and investors, opening new doors for Manitoba products in some of the world's fastest growing markets.

These efforts create opportunities for workers, entrepreneurs and newcomers who are choosing to build their lives here. As a member of the Treasury Board, working alongside the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), who delivered the budget with the lowest deficit-to-GDP ratio in Canada, I work to ensure that public investments are reviewed carefully and aligned with long-term fiscal sustainability.

Honourable Speaker, 2026 is about people. It is about students working toward a brighter future. It is about a family managing the cost of everyday life. It is about a senior receiving care and support with dignity. And it is about workers and businesses contributing to strong communities.

As the member for Fort Richmond, I see these stories every day. They reflect the hopes and aspirations of people not only in my constituency, but across Manitoba. This budget reflects a commitment to support those

aspirations through practical action and meaningful investment.

This year is also about building not just the infrastructure, but the confidence and opportunities our community deserves. To serve you best, I've been focusing on my own strengths at the gym, because a stronger leader is a more resilient and effective advocate for the people. My personal commitment to health is my commitment to you. I am building the stamina needed to champion for our shared future every single day.

In this legislative session, my focus remains clear: advancing policies that prioritize our community and support local families. I look forward to continue our work together toward a 'prospess'—prosperous and confident Manitoba for everyone.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Member for—

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): I would like to draw members' attention to the loge to my left, where we have Grant Jackson, the former MLA for Spruce Woods and the current Member of Parliament for Brandon-Souris.

On behalf of all members, I welcome you here today.

* * *

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable deputy Speaker, I rise today to reflect on an incredibly disappointing budget that this NDP government brought forward. This budget completely missed the mark to reflect the challenges that Manitobans and Manitoba families are facing today.

On this side of the House, we're shocked, we're surprised and we're deeply disappointed with this NDP government. Manitobans are deeply disappointed with this NDP government. Affordability and cost of living is the No. 1 issue that Manitobans are facing. Yet we saw nothing within this budget to reflect those true realities.

Manitoba families are struggling to put healthy food on the table for their families. Manitobans are struggling to afford their property tax bills that have skyrocketed thanks to decisions, deliberate decisions, that this NDP government made. Fuel prices are the highest that I have seen, and we've seen, in recent

memory. And this NDP government has responded with pennies—a little bit of help.

* (15:50)

Honourable Speaker, it is very safe to say that Manitobans need a lot of help right now. Manitoba is facing some very significant challenges, whether that's affordability and cost of living, whether that's trade wars that are impacting our small- and medium-sized businesses—and also Manitobans across the province—and also geopolitical challenges that continue to have an impact on Manitoba families today.

Since forming government, and it's been two and a half years, going on three years, and Manitobans have received nothing—little support, little measures to help them in their day-to-day lives. The blame game is over from this NDP government on times before. The buck stops with them now, and Manitobans aren't getting much in terms of bucks.

They have consistently shown that they continue to spend, spend, spend, tax, tax, tax and mismanage Manitoba's finances. They have failed to grow the economy. Manitoba has the lowest economic growth in the entire country at just 1.1 per cent. This is embarrassing when we look to our neighbours to the west who are attracting investment, who are building up businesses, building up their economies, creating jobs.

Investment is fleeing Manitoba because Manitoba has become an unaffordable place to live thanks to this NDP's high taxes, and this province has become an increasingly closed-for-business sign on Manitoba when it comes to investment. What company, what business, what family would want to invest in this province under this NDP government high-spend, high-tax regime?

Manitobans are struggling. They are living paycheque to paycheque with little to nothing left at the end of the month, yet this NDP decides to tax more and more with Manitobans' hard-earned income. We saw this last year when this NDP removed indexation from income taxes; a sneaky, hidden tax hike that hurts working Manitoba families.

So what does this mean? This means that this NDP has pushed more Manitobans into higher tax brackets. Any sort of wage increases that Manitobans might receive will not be felt as a result of removing and cancelling indexation, which helps support those families when inflation rises. That was a bad decision by this NDP government.

They again show that they did not learn their lesson, as there is nothing to bring back indexation in this

year's budget. They did nothing to increase basic personal exemption for Manitobans. A basic personal exemption allows Manitobans to keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets.

The previous PC government nearly doubled the basic personal amount from \$9,000 to almost \$16,000, and our PC team is going to do it again. What this means is Manitobans will have more money in their pockets. We believe Manitobans know best how to spend their hard-earned dollars.

Every Manitoba family is different. Every household budget is different. We want to put \$1,500 back into the pocket of that single mom earning \$40,000 and struggling to afford food at the grocery store. We want to put \$3,000 back to that household that's earning \$60,000 and trying to make the difficult decision as to whether to afford their property tax bill or put their kids into sports.

That is real money on their—back on their paycheque at the end of the day. Manitobans know best how to spend their hard-earned tax dollars.

The NDP? They believe they know how Manitobans should spend their money. We want to give you the right to have your money back so that you can spend it the way that you want. That is how we move our province forward. If Manitobans have more money in their pockets at the end of the day, that's more money going into an economy that desperately needs to grow. That's what our proposal does; that's real, tangible tax relief for Manitoba families that are struggling today.

Manitobans, according to a Meyers Norris Penny report, are reporting that they are within \$200 of insolvency. Over 50 per cent of Manitobans are reporting this: they're within \$200 of not being able to pay off their debts.

And how did this Premier (Mr. Kinew) respond to that crisis? He sprinkled pennies. Manitobans: Sure, pennies help, but you know what would help more? Three thousand dollars back into the pocket of a Manitoba family.

This is the NDP's third budget, and cost of living is the No. 1 issue facing Manitobans. This NDP did not respond to this crisis with long-term or meaningful tax relief; tax relief that Manitoba families desperately need right now. What we are seeing, once again, is this NDP government defer and delay the very real challenges that are facing Manitobans. And this budget is a government that is ignoring the most pressing challenges that Manitobans are facing at the end of the day when they look at their household budgets.

There is no serious plan by this Premier and this NDP government to truly address the affordability crisis that is facing Manitobans. There is no plan to reduce health-care wait times. Health-care wait times and emergency route-wait times have skyrocketed under this NDP government.

Instead, what we're seeing is more recycled promises with a Health Minister and an NDP government who clearly do not know how to tackle the systemic problems that we are seeing within our health-care system. We have heard nothing from the Minister of Health on how to tackle patient flow, how to move patients from the emergency wait room through triage into a bed, into a personal-care home or being at home with appropriate home care. They haven't even spoken about patient flow.

Well, as we know, if an ICU is tied up, if beds and internal medicine are tied up, then that just pushes the problem back down onto emergency rooms. But yet, that's not what they're tackling. Those are the systemic problems within the health-care system that this NDP government is choosing to ignore.

Let's look at the facts on our economic reality today. Manitoba has the lowest economic GDP growth in the entire country, just a shameful, embarrassing 1.1 per cent. Manitoba's labour market is showing signs of strain. Yet, how does this NDP respond? They respond by introducing a job-killing Manitoba jobs agreement that shuts out 88 per cent of construction workers in this province.

With the unemployment rate recently rising to 6.3 per cent, and youth unemployment climbing to over 14 per cent, well above recent levels and a clear signal that Manitobans and Manitoba's youth are struggling to find stable work under this NDP government.

Affordability pressures at the same time continue to climb with Manitoba recording the second highest inflation in the country, the highest foodflation rates in the country. The numbers already confirm what Manitobans are feeling every single day, honourable deputy Speaker. They're facing higher costs, fewer opportunities and increasing financial pressure compared to the rest of the country.

And these are not just statistics; these are warning signs. And they have been warning signs for an NDP government that chooses to ignore what those realities are, and a perfect example is what we saw on Tuesday. Last year, school divisions hiked taxes and education property taxes to historic, unprecedented

and unsustainable levels. We saw the bills and we know members opposite saw the property tax bills that were coming into our office. We showed them—we brought them forward to the House and the Chambers. We saw the members being CC'd on them. Their constituents were asking them for help to solve this problem that is going to continue in the future.

So last year, okay, it was poor planning. It was sloppy decisions. They came in, they cancelled some guardrails, they took away the 50 per cent education property tax credit that the former PCs had implemented. They removed the 2 per cent cap on school divisions. They said, oh, we're not going to fund school divisions to the rate of inflation, as numbers are proving from school divisions themselves. So they took away all those guardrails.

* (16:00)

And then what resulted? Highest property tax bills in history. Property taxes have increased by almost 20 per cent since just last year. School divisions have seen increases of 43 per cent in school taxes since just—this NDP government came into office two and a half years ago.

So what did they do? They've had a year and a half to figure out that they made a mistake last year by removing those guardrails. But what did they do this week? They doubled down on them. They increased by just \$100 on the affordability credit, which doesn't even cover the increases that Manitoba families are seeing today, let alone next year when this credit even takes place, this extra \$100.

And then what also happens next year? A general assessment. Property values continue to rise. Homes are being assessed at higher values. Home values are actually ahead of an assessment value. We can foresee these challenges continuing into the future. We raised this last year when the NDP government took away these guardrails. They still didn't fix the problem. They had a year and a half to realize their mistake and to protect homeowners from skyrocketing school division taxes. But they didn't. They doubled down on it.

So we're going to see the same thing happen year after year after year as Manitoba's education system needs more support and this Minister of Education fails to provide it and school divisions keep jacking up their taxes and Manitoba homeowners can't afford it.

This is the lesson they shouldn't—they should have learned by now, honourable deputy Speaker, but they didn't learn their lesson. They doubled down on it. And Manitobans are, unfortunately, paying the price.

Manitoba's economy is faltering under this NDP government: just 1.1 per cent economic GDP growth. While other provinces across the country are attracting major investments, Manitoba is competing with other jurisdictions in Canada. We're competing for workers. We're competing for highly skilled professionals. And we're competing for dollars being invested here in this province, which increases not just revenue for this government and for Manitoba, but also increases jobs that Manitobans desperately need right now. But yet, there was nothing in this week's budget to support Manitoba businesses.

They had an opportunity to bring forward meaningful supports for businesses. Businesses have been under extreme difficulties the past year and a half; trade wars from two fronts, China and the US. That's not letting up anytime soon. The uncertainty that businesses are facing day to day. And our businesses in Manitoba are incredibly resilient but the fact that this NDP government ignored them during some of the most challenging times that small and medium businesses are facing today is deeply disappointing.

This NDP government's fiscal mismanagement is pushing more and more Manitobans toward food banks and temporary shelters. This government, in its last three budgets, have shown that they are not listening to Manitobans. This NDP government has shown that they are okay with pushing increasing debt onto the backs of future generations: \$4.4 billion of increased debt under this NDP government since they came into office. Last year, the NDP projected an \$800-million deficit and then exploded it to \$1.6 billion, and then they had to add on a \$200-million unbudgeted special warrant on top of that because they failed to budget without any accountability on that special warrant. Now they projected a \$500-million deficit, but only if Manitoba Hydro makes money.

But what happened last year? Manitoba goes through drought and it goes through floods. So why is this NDP government still banking on the weatherman to ensure that it can balance its budget and Manitoba Hydro can afford its—to pay its bills?

This is not sustainable. This is clearly an NDP government that has poorly budgeted and poorly planned under today's fiscal realities. Last year, they banked on rosy projections and missed it by a long shot. This year, they're doing much of the same, and this budget clearly reflects that.

Since this NDP came into office, back-to-back deficits, missing their deficit projections every single quarter, not by a little bit, but by a lot. And that's all placing

increasing burden on Manitobans, Manitoba families and future generations.

What we saw this week was an NDP government who is not listening to the real struggles of Manitoba families. Increasing income taxes, increasing school division and education property taxes, increasing grocery prices, healthy food that Manitobans cannot afford to put on their table.

And this Premier (Mr. Kinew) decides he needs to spend Manitoba tax dollars on a grocery study to figure out what's happening, yet he refuses to call on the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax on the very food that's pushing up those costs. That carbon tax is going up again on April 1. It's going up to \$170 by 2030, and this Premier refuses to stand up and call on the federal government to cancel that industrial-based carbon tax that's hurting grocery prices and Manitoba families at the end of the day. That is what we'll provide: meaningful relief to Manitobans at the grocery store.

This Premier refuses to stand up for struggling Manitobans. They are refusing to support our proposal to increase the basic personal amount to \$30,000, saving Manitoba families money and their hard-earned dollars back into their pocket. It's shameful on this NDP government.

So, deputy honourable Speaker, what we've seen this week is a true disappointment from a government after almost three years in office that clearly is not listening to the real challenges facing Manitoba families. And unfortunately, for Manitoba families, they are going to be paying the price for this government's mismanagement and inability to plan for the future.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): I am so pleased to be able to rise in the Chamber and speak about what has been a really exciting week with Budget 2026.

And I also want to just take a second to welcome the former member for Spruce Woods back into the Chamber today. You know, he received a raucous applause; I would say, potentially, even a little bit more applause than the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon. I joke. I kid. The two of us, we have a good relationship. I welcome you back into the Chamber here today.

So we're talking about Budget 2026 and the good things that we're bringing forward for Manitobans that we've heard from them. We've done so much consultation and work to make sure that we are getting good

jobs, right, better health care. You know, this is—it's an important piece of legislation that we're bringing forward.

And I do want to just touch on one thing that I've heard over and over again from the opposition here over the last week since we introduced this, and it unfortunately reveals a little bit of detachment from the average Manitoban and what it's like to actually live an average life here. You know, they continuously talk about this idea that saving a few dollars on a grocery item is not worthwhile, that there's no real worth there.

* (16:10)

And, you know, the problem that I have with that—and I've talked to some of my colleagues here after we rolled out the PST being cut from groceries, and I remember being that 18-, 19-, 20-year-old striking out on my own. You know, I'm a young guy, I'm trying to save some money, and you'd show up at the grocery store with a list, and you'd go through. You had a very tight budget, right? And that was someone that came from privilege, right? And you would—at 50 bucks, that would be your cut-off. And so I can't imagine if I could have the PST off, you'd get maybe an extra couple of cans of food, couple extra cans that will go an extra day or two, right? To get you that food that you need for yourself.

And then, so now, with this PST off for Manitobans, it means that families across Manitoban—Manitoba who are really struggling are going to be able to get that extra bit of help. And so we know, on this side of the aisle, that Manitobans need every bit of relief that they can get after seven and a half years of giving funds to folks who make a ton more than the average Manitoban.

In fact, I mean I—if I recall, the Leader of the Opposition received half a million dollars—half a million dollars—for his business. And so when we talk about an attachment to the average Manitoban, right, how can we trust that they understand what that's like if they're tossing around hundreds of thousands of dollars to their colleagues to make sure that they'll run for that party later on? But I digress. You know, the main point there was that we're bringing forward real cost savings for Manitobans across the board.

But I want to jump back to health care because, when I got into this world, into this work, the whole reason I did it was to try to make a difference in health care, to try to make things a little bit better for the

average Manitoban when they needed that help, when it came to their health.

So since we've come in, and I will say, I'll just tell a very quick story. I remember during COVID, it was a tough time working front lines. There were cuts to the health-care system from the former government, many of whom are sitting over there and still advising this Leader of the Opposition. There were cuts to health-care workers. We lost nurses, we lost beds. And since we have come into government, we have been able to add a net new. And that's an important distinction because I also remember hearing announcements from members opposite, where they say, oh, look, we hired 50 new nurses. Well, guess what? They also cut 100 positions. And that math doesn't add up. It's classic PC math, right?

So what we have been able to do for Manitobans is add another 4,054 net-new health-care workers—net new—to the system. And that includes 317 net-new doctors, and that's across Manitoba, right? We've seen 384 fully staffed hospital beds. I know we've heard a lot of agreement from members opposite. They're very excited about this budget, and I keep hearing it from them. We even heard the Leader of the Opposition say how much he liked free transit for youth. He liked all of the savings that you're going to get at the grocery store. And I appreciate his thoughts on the good work that's being done, right?

We're now at the best in Canada for access to primary care, which is absolutely amazing. If you need a same-day or next-day appointment, you can go on medinav.ca, you can get booked in, you can get into one of our primary-care clinics and see a fantastic family physician to make sure that your family is taken care of. And that is just a little bit of the good work that's being done as part of this Budget 2026.

You know, I also mentioned a little while back—and many of the members opposite are living in rural communities, and we represent all of Manitoba here, right? And so 90 of the 317 net-new doctors are actually practising in rural and northern Manitoba, which just strengthens care in those communities that were really underserved for many, many years.

You know, we heard the Minister of Municipal Relations mention earlier today and yesterday that he goes out across Manitoba, and will hear from them saying, oh wow, I've seen you more than I've seen my MLA over the last four, five, six years, right? And so we're just happy to be able to make those connections and to be able to serve Manitobans where they are.

We're also—this is very exciting to me as a person who worked in health care—we're creating new specialized patient zones that are going to be attached to ERs, and those are, ultimately, spaces where patients with specific needs can be seen by the right provider right away, right?

And we often talk about the right care in the right place at the right time in community health care, and this is doing exactly that work. And it is incredibly exciting. It's going to make a big difference with our ER wait times that I know are such an important issue for Manitobans across the board. You know, and they'll make sure that people in the ER are seen in a timely manner and will get their needs taken care of.

We're also adding—and this is very exciting as somebody who worked downtown front lines, as I said—we're adding 32 alternate level care beds at Siloam Mission as well, you know, along with additional funding for the protective-care centre. That means that patients who are in the ER can move from the ER to a bed faster and then get the care that they need that much sooner.

The Speaker in the Chair

And, you know, my time is running short because I really want to be aware of the fact that so many of my colleagues want to put some words on the record on this incredible budget, but I just want to touch on a few of my other favourite pieces from this.

We just announced last week there'll be a new PCH in Bridgwater, new primary-care home, which is—*[interjection]* Yes, it's so, so fantastic. It's a huge investment, and it is so desperately needed in the community.

You know, the opposition, while in government, they didn't add any capacity for primary-care homes in our province, and I'm really thrilled with all of the primary-care homes that we're going to be building, including in Lac du Bonnet. We're going to do one in Bridgwater as well. There's so much new capacity being built there. We're also adding a \$22.1-million investment with the Cardiac Centre of Excellence at St. Boniface Hospital to make sure that Manitobans receive the absolute highest standard of treatments when they need it most. So we're establishing what will be called the Heart Care Manitoba, with a centralized clinic, additional beds and a cardiologist in the ER to assess patients immediately.

We're also adding two new schools in Waverley, and we actually, through consultation with the school division and with parents in the area, we are going to

be expanding capacity in Prairie Pointe to 800 students to make sure that kids across the constituency, across the community, can go to school with their neighbors. It's a very, very exciting announcement for the community. And child care, also included, and I know that the Minister of Education and early childhood education is very excited about that as well.

One of the other things that is really thrilling for me, and I was able to chat with a whole bunch of students at Pembina Trails Collegiate about this yesterday, is the fact that now youth across our province, once this budget is passed and the logistics are worked out with municipalities, are going to be able to get on the bus for free. Whether you're 17, 16, 15, 14, you get to get on the bus and go to school or the movies or your job with your friends and it will not cost you a penny, which is such a huge deal for so many kids. They were really, really excited about that yesterday. It was a great, great announcement.

And something else that really hurts a lot Manitobans in south Winnipeg, specifically where I am representing the good folks of Waverley, was the closure of the Victoria ER and the women's health centre. Unfortunately, the callous former government shut it down. And we are rebuilding that. We are building up a new ER at the Victoria, and that process has been under way now for over a month. I'm very excited about that. There will also be a women's menopause clinic that is included as part of that project, which is such a huge deal for folks across the constituency.

I could go on and on and on—there's so many opportunities for cost savings, for better jobs, better health care in this Budget 2026—but I really want to make sure that a lot of my colleagues have an opportunity to speak to this budget as well.

Thank you so much, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today, and I wish all of you the best today as we celebrate this new Budget 2026.

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I'm really proud to rise and speak to the budget today. I do want to welcome the former member from Spruce Woods into the Chamber and in his honour make a little joke: Are you flip-flopping back to the Leg?

I think there's some confusion. Folks are wondering why am I standing. My understanding it was MLA from Tyndall Park who would go next, so therefore it reverts to me. So I will continue on.

So I'm proud to rise to speak to Budget 2026 and what it means for Manitobans in their everyday lives. From health care and education to building an economy

where businesses can grow and people can find good jobs close to home, because for most Manitobans this isn't about numbers on a page, it's about whether care is there when you need it; whether your kids are supported in school; and whether you can count on stable work and a strong local 'coconomy.' And that is exactly what this budget is focused on delivering.

* (16:20)

Honourable Speaker, rebuilding health care remains one of our top priorities. We know the challenges did not happen overnight, and they will not be solved overnight. But step by step, we are making meaningful progress.

Since 2023, we have brought in 4,054 net-new health-care workers, which includes 317 doctors. I had the pleasure of meeting one of those new doctors today when we met with folks from the Epilepsy and Seizure group of Manitoba, because it is world epilepsy today, hence, me wearing purple. Shout-out to Pat Trotter and her family for being here and all the advocacy that they do.

You know, these new health-care workers, they show up for Manitobans every single day. In our hospitals, in our care homes, they support us right across the province. We've expanded capacity with 384 fully staffed hospital beds and reopened 145 personal-care home beds so seniors can receive the care they need with dignity.

Today, Manitoba is leading the country in access to a family doctor and same-day care. That means people are getting help faster and closer to where they live. We've improved access through same-day and next-day booking, new minor injury and illness clinics and extended hours at primary care clinics. And importantly, 90 of our new doctors are working in rural and northern communities, places that have gone too long without consistent access to care.

But we know there's still so much more to do. That is why this budget focuses on reducing emergency room wait times with practical solutions. We're creating specialized patient zones connected to ERs so patients can be seen by the right provider without delay.

We are also investing in a dedicated mental health zone at Health Sciences Centre to ensure patients receive the care that matches their needs. We're improving patient flow across the system by adding 32 alternate level care beds at Siloam Mission and strengthening supports at the protective-care centre.

When patients are cared for in the right setting, it frees up hospital space and only helps others move through the system more quickly. We are also rebuilding emergency capacity with new investments in facilities like Victoria hospital, which is so important to the constituents of Seine River. We are also putting investments into the Eriksdale hospital, which is where my family homestead is located.

Honourable Speaker, we're restoring and strengthening key services. A \$22.1-million investment is bringing back the Cardiac Centre of excellence at saint-of Excellence at the St. Boniface Hospital. We are launching health care—Heart Care Manitoba with a centralized clinic, more beds and a cardiologist available in the ER, because in cardiac care, timing is critical.

In 2019, my father went to the St. Boniface Hospital with chest pains. He was in the hospital for several hours, they did some tests, they did some work on him, but they failed to find anything wrong with his heart. Approximately six months later, he was in Toronto where he had moved, along with my mother, and had a cardiac episode and had to call the—for an ambulance.

The care that he received at the time in Toronto was clearly much better than what he had experienced here in Manitoba, because they actually found that his widow-maker artery was almost 90 per cent blocked, causing him to have a heart attack. Imagine being here and being told you're fine, there's nothing wrong. That's what happens when we don't invest and maintain important health services.

We're working to shorten wait lists. That includes funding 200 additional hip and knee surgeries and 3,250 more MRIs. We're expanding specialized care with a new CancerCare headquarters and a health-care centre of excellence at Portage Place. And we're continuing to support the people who make the system work, with \$223 million to recruit and retain doctors, including targeted rural recruitment.

We are building for the long term. We are also improving workplace health and safety with permanent security measures and modernizing care through expanded electronic medical records.

Honourable Speaker, seniors' care is another key part of this work. We are building four new personal-care homes, including one in Bridgwater, and improving daily living with better food and care supports. We are opening a Manitoba menopause clinic. We are hiring more midwives and lactation consultants, and we're reducing costs for patients with free birth control and

hormone replacement therapy. We are prioritizing women's health.

This is steady, focused work to rebuild a system that Manitobans can count on. Honourable Speaker, investing in education means investing in the future of our province. This budget continues to support students, families and educators at every single stage. We're increasing school funding by \$80 million, marking the third year in a row that funding has kept pace above inflation. That helps schools manage growth and maintain strong learning environments.

We are also moving ahead with 11 new schools. Support—*[interjection]* Yes, 11. Imagine that. This is supported by \$118 million in capital funding for the first four schools and expanding capacity in growing communities. Inside the classroom we are strengthening supports. Over the past two years, we have added hundreds of teachers, educational assistants and clinicians to help students succeed. We are also helping families manage costs. Our universal nutrition program delivers \$30 million of food to schools each and every year. That is so meaningful.

As a teacher, I worked at a small school in West St. Paul, teaching grade four there for four years, and I can tell you even students in that community had food security issues. I had one student in particular that would often miss school and I couldn't figure out why, and I finally just had a very frank conversation with his mom and I said, what's going on? Why is he not at school? And she shared with me that she did not have food to send to school so that he would have a lunch. And we were on a balanced school day which meant kids ate twice.

So imagine having a kid sitting there who wouldn't be able to eat with his peers, and so his mom, protecting him, keeping him home so she can open that can of soup or whatever they have at home to make sure that he's nourished through the day. What did I do, Honourable Speaker? As a teacher, I did what was right. I made sure there was food in my classroom that I bought out of my own pocket, because the former government failed to provide nutrition to our schools. That's a story that is common amongst any teacher that you've talked to in the system.

You know, school—the teachers constantly were providing students with food, supplies. I remember running out of paper in my school every year in May. How does a school run out of paper? Going out and buying printer paper so that I could get the things I needed for my classroom.

Honourable Speaker, as a grandmother, I'm really thrilled about this next thing. We're expanding child care with 21 new centres and more than 2,300 new spaces.

An Honourable Member: Great news.

MLA Cross: Awesome news. At the same time, we're supporting the workforce behind those services. Early childhood educators are seeking—have been seeing—they will see—sorry, Honourable Speaker—see wage increases, something that they have been demanding and wanting for a long time.

Imagine you're working with the youngest learners in our system. The work that they do is so incredibly important. The patience that they have to have, the understanding that they have to work with young minds, they deserve to be paid in a fair and equitable way because we rely on them so much for those early learning opportunities.

We're expanding recruitment incentives to bring more educators into our system. Honourable Speaker, we're improving school spaces as well. New schools will now include playgrounds from the start. This reduces costs for families. I was a PAC president. I was always a part of parent council as my kids were going through school. When my kids went to Wayoata School in Transcona, I fundraised, along with the rest of the PAC, for a \$100,000 playground. I'm talking—this was, like, in early 2000. Imagine trying to fundraise \$100,000 as a small school community. I actually put on quite a few hot lunches to get that playground built, but we got it done.

Parents don't have to do that anymore. They can rely on this government to take care of those needs, to make sure that our kids have learning spaces and recreation spaces in their schoolyards.

We're investing beyond the classroom. Through community funding, we are supporting rec spaces, parks and programs where young people can stay active and stay connected to their community. We're continuing to invest in culturally relevant education. This includes land-based learning and healing lodges that support Indigenous youth. In partnership, work is under way towards a youth healing lodge in Thompson that will provide culturally grounded support.

* (16:30)

This is so very important, Honourable Speaker. As a former Indigenous educator, I can tell you how many Indigenous students in the classroom simply don't feel like they belong. And they don't feel like

they belong because of the people around them, because of the students around them not having the understanding of the true history of this country. And so, to see this work happening warms my heart beyond compare, because I know when we do the work like this, students will feel like they belong. They will have confidence and they will succeed, something that is extremely important.

We're seeing positive outcomes through the work that we're doing. Youth crime rates are declining; a lot of that is due to the nutrition program. Kids are showing up at school because they know there's food there. They know we're going to take care of them. You know, these impacts of the choices we make are far-reaching, and they're far-reaching not just across the province, but into the future.

You know, we're also seeing French-language education expanding as well, and I know my colleague from St. Boniface loves that. You know, a new school in Saint—is coming in St. Boniface with continued support for teacher development. And, for adults, we are continuing to invest in education and literacy programs. Why, Honourable Speaker? Because as human beings, we are lifelong learners and we understand that learning happens at every stage of life. These are the kinds of investments that build strong communities and give every child a fair start.

A strong economy depends on both good jobs and strong businesses. This budget focuses on creating the conditions for both. We're making significant capital investments: \$3.8 billion to build the infrastructure Manitoba needs. That includes schools, hospitals, roads and other critical projects that create jobs while improving services. We are also investing in transportation infrastructure, including projects like the Carberry overpass and highway improvements, making it easier and safer for people to move around and to move goods across our province.

We're preparing the workforce for these opportunities. Apprenticeships have increased by 40 per cent, helping more Manitobans enter the skilled trades. You know, at the same time, we're supporting workforce participation by expanding that child care, making it easier for parents to work.

Honourable Speaker, we are also growing key sectors for our economy. We're investing in critical minerals, supporting new opportunities, including the first First Nations-owned mine and—which will mean we can maintain jobs in northern communities like Thompson. Through the Churchill Catalyst Fund, we are working

to unlock long-term economic potential and expand trade opportunities through the Port of Churchill.

We are helping small businesses to grow. This includes \$50 million in financing through the trade growth investment program, and the creation of a new economic development agency to reduce barriers and support business expansion. In rural Manitoba, we're supporting agriculture with significant investments, including Crown land leases. Honourable Speaker, these efforts are all connected. We are investing in infrastructure, supporting businesses, training workers and creating opportunities across this province. And we're seeing progress with job growth, rising wages and a strong private sector.

Honourable Speaker, Budget 2026 is about focusing on what matters most to Manitobans. It's about improving access to health care. It's about supporting students and families through the education system. And it's about building an economy where businesses can succeed and people can find good jobs. At its core, this is about making life better for Manitobans, today and in the future. And that is exactly what this budget sets out to do so that we can support a strong and healthy one Manitoba.

The Speaker: The honourable—oh, yes.

Just before I recognize the next speaker, I would like to remind all members that it's not appropriate to draw members that are visiting, either in the gallery or the loge, into the debate. So I'd just keep that in mind in the future.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you for that guidance 'cause otherwise I may have wanted to recognize the previous member for Spruce Woods, but now? Now I won't, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Order, please.

I just directed you to not try and draw members in and you've disregarded my direction. So please don't do that again either.

Mr. Narth: So laser focused, on track here to speak to my support on the amendment brought forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) to the 2026-2027 budget. And I want to be very clear at the outset: This amendment is not just a list of criticisms; it's a reflection on what Manitobans are actually experiencing in their daily lives.

And we see it every day, because when we strip away the messaging, the announcements and the talking points, what this budget represents is a government that has fundamentally missed the mark: missed

the mark on affordability; missed the mark on economic growth; and missed the mark on supporting the very people who drive this province forward.

Honourable Speaker, at its core, this amendment speaks to one central issue: Manitobans cannot afford this government. Families across my constituency of La Vérendrye and across this province are feeling it every single day. They feel it at the grocery store. They feel it when they open up their property tax bill. They feel it when they look at their paycheques and realize there is less left over and over each month. And what does this budget do? It asks them to pay more while offering them less.

That is why this amendment rightly points out the failure to take meaningful action on cost pressures, the failure to provide real tax relief and the failure to recognize just how close many families are to the edge. We know that nearly half of Manitoba families are within \$200 of not being able to meet their monthly obligations. That is not a statistic to just gloss over. That, Honourable Speaker, is a warning sign, and yet this budget offers no structural solution.

On this side of the House, we have been clear. The fastest way to improve affordability is very simple: Let Manitobans keep more of their own money, the money that they work hard each and every day to earn. Apparently, the NDP, the socialist NDP government that we have leading this province have a hard time understanding that.

And that's why we have proposed raising the basic personal tax exemption to \$30,000. We've called on this government to do that. They're in office right now. They have the opportunity to truly make life more affordable to Manitobans.

So we've given them the idea and we've told them, run with this; this can be the legacy of this NDP government: making serious, lasting change. That would be real relief. That would be an immediate impact. That is a policy that respects the people earning the income, not the government who's spending it. Because, Honourable Speaker, you cannot tax and spend your way out of an affordability crisis. And this government then stands up and completely disregards our direction for the province. They say that that money would be wasteful, and it's too expensive.

Well, Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we don't think that that money is the government's money. We think that that is the money of the people that go out each and every day to earn a living. The government thinks that that's irresponsible.

* (16:40)

This government thinks that they can better spend the money that people go out each and every day to earn. On this side of the House, we think that's wrong. We think that the people that go out and earn a living, feed their families to support their communities, would be best to spend that money and not the other way around.

Let me ground some of the promises in this budget in reality. A constituent of mine has recently shared a story. Honourable Speaker, I've shared this in question period. After a long day's work during the day of the budget presentation, he stopped to pick up groceries. And may I add that this isn't someone who's in tune with the politics of our province or the actions of the government on a daily basis. But he listens to the radio, he listens to commercials, as many Manitobans do. And these are the same Manitobans that this government targets with some of these publicity stunts that they call affordability measures.

So like I say, this isn't someone who has a party membership, goes out to support certain candidates. This is someone who is a small-business owner in my constituency, goes out each and every day to make the community, the province a better place for his family and the future families to come. This same person heard on the radio the government speaking of tax relief, grocery tax relief. So he pulled over; he was curious. He just stopped at a grocery store and he thought, I should look; I'm curious to see how much of a savings this is. No more tax on my groceries.

And, you know, albeit this is somebody who normally doesn't do the grocery shop for his family, but was asked to pick up some groceries, knew that it was over a \$100 bill, realized that he didn't get a whole lot out of it, but he picked up the essentials to feed his family of four for the evening. And he reached in his pocket and pulled out a crumpled-up receipt, put it out on the console of his truck and looked in shock, in absolute shock. He tells me that this is exactly what he did: pulls out the receipt in absolute shock. He snapped a picture and sent it to me because he's got my phone number, and I'm the only person that he knows to contact within the government.

And he was shocked—2 cents—just after listening to a commercial on the radio that this government is bringing forward real affordability measures. You know what he was? He was insulted. He was insulted that he was fooled to believe that this government is actually representing him.

Honourable Speaker, the 2 cents does nothing for his family; the 2 cents does nothing for any other Manitoba family. That is not affordability; that is political messaging disconnected from real life.

This amendment also speaks to something deeper: the lack of an economic plan, because affordability does not exist in a vacuum. It is built on strong economic growth, rising productivity and private sector investment, as much as this government has such a hard time understanding and accepting that our economy is driven by private sector investment. That's right, Honourable Speaker, not through government spending. You can't take the taxes from one pocket, put it into the other and expect that that is economic growth.

Manitoba is falling behind on all three of these: private sector investment, productivity and economic growth. We are seeing, unfortunately, GDP growth lacking behind the national average, not just lacking behind the national average, sitting at dead last; business investment significantly trailing our western neighbours and job growth increasingly concentrated in the public sector, like I had mentioned. That, unfortunately, is not sustainable growth. That is an imbalance. And this amendment rightly calls out the government's failure to bring forward a credible economic strategy.

At the same time, we see policies that actively discourage investment, unfortunately. The Manitoba jobs agreement is one of those. We've heard absolute outcry. We are hearing clearly, not only from industry, but people that work within that industry, that it increases costs, it creates uncertainty and it limits participation in major projects. At a time when we should be attracting investment, this government is putting up barriers.

And, Honourable Speaker, that is the wrong direction. We see what's even more concerning in the direction—in the ideological driven direction of this province and this Premier (Mr. Kinew), that something like the Manitoba jobs agreement, which we've seen industry speak out against, we've seen the labour force speak out against, these are the people that this government claims to be representing. When we see 88 per cent of them speaking out on how devastating this is going to be to the industry and the productivity of our province, that is extremely alarming.

Then we go through weeks of back-and-forth discussion, industry and the stakeholders of the industry trying to showcase, plead with this government to reverse their track, or at least, at bare minimum, put a pause and listen to those that will be affected.

And, may I add, Honourable Speaker, that includes every single Manitoban. If you're a Manitoban and you pay taxes, you will be affected by the Manitoba jobs agreement.

Instead of listening, instead of consulting, instead of respecting the concerns of everyday Manitobans, they've ignored it. Not only have they ignored it, they've doubled down on it in this budget. They've said if it's a government project, it will need to be part of the Manitoba jobs agreement, something that has been clearly showcased as being an additional cost to everyday Manitobans.

Honourable Speaker, as the critic for Agriculture, I cannot speak to this amendment without addressing what may be one of the most glaring omissions in this budget: the lack of support for agriculture. This budget literally had nothing in it for agriculture. What it did hide is some of the cuts to agriculture. We saw millions of dollars cut from AgriInsurance.

When the Finance Minister stood up and talked about the budget, he unfortunately missed that part, that there were cuts to agriculture in the budget. This is at a time when agriculture is most vulnerable. Honourable Speaker, we see the vulnerability in almost every sector of agriculture, but where we see it most is when we buy beef at our grocery store. We all can realize that beef prices are sky-high, not because all of a sudden the beef farmer's getting rich on the backs of the consumer; it's because of supply and demand, one of the most basic theories of economics. We don't have the supply anymore. We simply do not have the supply and this government is doing absolutely nothing to expand that.

What they've done they claim is a win, and that is a freeze to the Crown land pasture dues for a third straight year. Unfortunately, Honourable Speaker, this comes with no support to expand Crown land grazing acres, to expand herd numbers in the province.

Honourable Speaker, agriculture is at the cornerstone of our economy. Up to 10 per cent of our GDP is created by agriculture. Nearly half of our exports, billions of dollars in economic activity is what agriculture provides to our province. And yet, in this budget, funding is reduced in real terms. No new growth strategy is introduced and key structural issues remain unaddressed. That is not in alignment with importance; that is simple neglect.

* (16:50)

Honourable Speaker, producers in my region are facing rising input costs, higher interest rates, increased

tax burdens and growing uncertainty. And what does this budget do to help them? Nothing. No targeted affordability measures. No tax relief fund. Farmland—no strategy to expand market access.

And perhaps most concerning: no action on Crown land access. That's right, Honourable Speaker. For the third consecutive year, no forage lease auctions at a time when cattle prices are strong and producers are looking to expand.

In agriculture, you prepare during the good times for the inevitable downturns. And access to land is central to that. By withholding access year after year, this government is now outright banning the growth. But it is achieving the same result quietly, indirectly but effectively. And that is exactly what this amendment is highlighting.

We have seen this before, though, Honourable Speaker, and we've seen it under an NDP government. The hog barn moratorium did not say no hog production—it didn't say that. It simply made expansion impossible. And the result? An industry that stagnated and lost ground.

We cannot afford to repeat the mistake in the cattle sector. What this Agriculture Minister is doing by not expanding Crown land leaseholds is exactly what the previous NDP government had done to the hog industry through the hog moratorium.

Honourable Speaker, this amendment also speaks to fiscal mismanagement. We see growing deficits, growing debt, increasing reliance on federal transfers—now making up over one third of provincial revenue. How concerning is that? That's not independence; that is dependency. And without a plan to grow the economy, there is no plan to fix the finances.

This amendment also addresses failures—health care, public safety, mental health services. And here is the key point: spending is increasing, but outcomes are not improving. Wait times remain high. Communities feel less safe. Access to care is still inconsistent. That is not a funding problem, that is a results problem.

Honourable Speaker, I represent a region that is entrepreneurial, productive and deeply tied to agriculture and small business. The people I represent are not asking for handouts; they are asking for a fair tax system, a predictable regulatory environment and the ability to just simply grow. This budget and this government are not delivering that.

Honourable Speaker, this amendment matters because it tells the truth about this budget. It

acknowledges that affordability's getting worse, the economy is falling behind, agriculture is being overlooked and Manitobans are being asked to carry more of the burden. This is not about politics; this is about direction. And, right now, the direction is wrong.

We have the opportunity right now as legislators to stand up and speak to the future of our province. This government has the ability to take the reins and drive that economic horse. Everyone will benefit. Unfortunately, we have a government who is stuck, loyal to their political ideologies. And, Honourable Speaker, that is not delivering results.

If we want a stronger Manitoba, we need a government that trusts its people, supports its industry and builds an economy that works for everyone. This budget does not do that. This amendment recognizes that. And for that reason, I am proud to support it.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: The honourable Minister of Housing, Addiction and Homelessness, acting as Government House Leader.

House Business

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Acting Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, on House business.

The Speaker: On House business.

Ms. Smith: I'm seeking leave of the House to allow the Assembly to provide live interpretation on Indigenous languages and non-Indigenous languages other than English and French spoken by members during House— or House or committee proceedings.

Under this agreement, a member wishing to address the House or a committee in another language,

(1) Must provide adequate notice to the Clerk of the language they wish to speak so that the appropriate interpretation and translation service can be arranged.

(2) Must provide notice 90 minutes before the commencement of the House or committee proceedings to the members or other recognized parties and independent members.

The Assembly will endeavour to provide interpretation services for all requests. In the event that no interpreters are available, the text of the member's speech in the Indigenous or other language, followed by the English translation, will be included in the Hansard transcript.

These provisions will remain in effect for the remainder of the 43rd Legislature.

The Speaker: Is there leave to allow the Assembly to provide the live interpretation of Indigenous languages and non-Indigenous languages other than English and French spoken by members during House or committee proceedings under the terms identified by the acting Government House Leader?

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

* * *

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): I just want to point out that the single largest shrinkage in the Manitoba economy in the last few decades happened under their watch. So the member got up and talked a pretty good game about growing the economy, and the largest collapse in Manitoba's history in the last several decades happened under their watch—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Devgan: —so not a leg to stand on.

But we've got good things to talk about. We've got a new budget in Manitoba, 2026, Budget 2026, a lot of good stuff in here. And the member opposite shared an anecdote about a conversation that I guess he had. I will share an anecdote about a conversation that I actually had this morning with a constituent of mine, and we were just talking about things that are going on in the world in general, the cost of living, Donald Trump's war in Iran and the impact that's having at the pump.

But he said to me, you guys are doing fantastic work with removing the PST off of groceries. Fantastic work. And the members are laughing at that. They're laughing at that because they don't care that Manitobans are getting relief on groceries, right? This is the party led by a member who had to get half a million dollars to keep his juice bar afloat and he couldn't do that. But they're laughing at Manitobans when they get a break at the pump, when they get a break at the grocery store.

These people are so detached from the realities of life for the average Manitoban. They're more connected to Heather Stefanson and her board position on WestJet than they are the average cab driver, truck driver, small-business owner in Manitoba. They have no connection to Manitobans.

But when you actually talk to the people out in our constituencies, they're happy to see a government taking these measures and trying to cut taxes wherever we can and reduce the cost of living for Manitobans, but also making important investments in health care. This is what Manitobans want to see. This is what we're delivering on.

But, unfortunately, the members can't—members across the way can't decide whether they want to blow up the finances of Manitoba and our province and put a billion-dollar deficit into the finances here, or talk about axing the tax, bringing up an oldie but goldie from Pierre Poilievre.

So the messaging from members opposite is all over the place, but the feedback and the word is clear. Manitobans are very happy to see this budget drop and some of the exciting announcements. I'm going to highlight a few of them.

Like I said, removing the PST off of grocery store—sold—food sold in grocery stores, cracking down on predatory pricing at grocery companies, increasing the homeowner's tax credit to \$1,700, increasing support to renters, delivering rent relief sooner, free child care for low-income families, a permanent tax relief at the pump for Manitoba drivers, extending the EV rebate, free menstrual products in workplaces.

Something that I'll mention, the member—

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have 17 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 26, 2026

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