



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CORBETT, Shannon	Transcona	NDP
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	Ind.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
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, May 7, 2026

The House met at 10 a.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 that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom, 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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Could you please call Bill 235, The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 235—The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now proceed to second reading of Bill 235, The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I move, seconded by the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza), that Bill 235, The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Stone: This bill that we are bringing forward today is about protecting taxpayers and ensuring government is accountable when decisions on taxation are being made.

I'm proud to have introduced Bill 235, the fiscal responsibility and taxpayer amendment act, which is a bill that is rooted in a simple, fundamental principle: if government wants to take more from taxpayers, it must first ask them. Because, at the end of the day, this is not government's money to do as it wishes, it is Manitobans' money, taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

So this legislation is about restoring that trust and, most importantly, giving Manitobans their voice back when it comes to tax increases. NDP governments, over time, have proven they have no problem breaking this trust. So Manitobans have every reason to be skeptical of this NDP government, which is why this bill is so important.

When we talk about fiscal responsibility, we're not talking about abstract numbers on a page, we're talking about the real cost of government decisions on Manitoba families. We are talking about the groceries that they can afford, the homes they can keep, the opportunities they can access and the future that they are working so hard to build for themselves and their loved ones.

Families today are facing very real challenges. Manitobans are already paying some of the highest provincial income taxes west of the Maritimes. Manitobans are paying the highest education property taxes in Canada, where property taxes have increased almost 20 per cent since just last year. For some homeowners, that has meant a 43 per cent increase in property taxes since this NDP came into power just two and a half years ago.

Utility rates are rising by 12 per cent over the next three years. Over 50 per cent of Manitobans are reporting that they are within \$200 of insolvency. The latest StatsCan CPI numbers show Manitoba families are facing one of the highest food inflation rates in the country at 4.9 per cent.

And, yet, while taxes continue to skyrocket under this NDP, Manitoba still receives the second highest federal transfer payments at over \$9 billion. And still, despite all this, the NDP continues to spend, borrow and add to our provincial debt. Governments continue

to look for new ways to take more from Manitobans' pockets.

This occurred last year, when the NDP government froze the basic personal exemption and ended indexation, pushing more struggling Manitobans into higher tax brackets so any increase in wages that those Manitobans might see will not be felt as they cannot keep up with inflation.

This is why Manitobans are skeptical, and rightfully so. They're skeptical this NDP won't continue to hike taxes to pay for their ballooning spending and their bloated bureaucracy, and they are skeptical that this NDP government won't again increase the RST or the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax Levy.

Manitobans deserve to have a voice when these major tax increases occur, so let's look at what currently exists and why this bill is needed. Under existing law, there is supposed to be a safeguard to protect taxpayers. There is a requirement that, before certain taxes are increased, whether that be income tax, the RST or payroll taxes, the government must first hold a referendum. This is a direct voice to Manitobans, but here is the problem: that safeguard has been ignored before and Manitobans have not forgotten.

In 2013, the NDP, under Premier Greg Selinger, broke a clear promise. He said he would not raise the PST and then he did exactly that, increasing the PST from 7 per cent to 8 per cent. But what was even more problematic is that the NDP bypassed the referendum requirement, taking away the clear expectation that the public would have a say.

And then they went further. They changed the law to get around the requirement instead of respecting it. So, rather than seeking public approval on a major tax increase, they effectively bypassed the referendum, relying on its authority to amend or override the existing law.

And although this approach was legally permissible, it raised significant concerns about the integrity of taxpayer protection measures and the extent to which statutory referendum requirements can be relied upon to ensure public input on major tax increases.

* (10:10)

This is exactly why we have brought forward this bill today. There was no consequences for government in bypassing the referendum requirement. That sent a message to Manitobans that rules can be

ignored, promises broken and voices sidelined. The decision taken by the NDP at the time showed Manitobans exactly why stronger protections are needed. So Bill 235 is about fixing that.

If a government tries to override, repeal or side-step the referendum requirement, ministers will immediately lose 50 per cent of their additional salary. And if they follow through and pass that override, they will lose it until the next election.

So this bill strengthens the framework so governments cannot simply bypass taxpayer protections without consequence. This legislation is about protecting Manitobans' finances and taxpayers' hard-earned dollars at a time when affordability is a very real concern. And families deserve to know that government will not impose new tax burdens without accountability.

Bill 235 puts that protection in place. It strengthens existing referendum frameworks without removing legislative authority. It introduces clear accountability mechanism, tied to ministerial compensation and addresses a critical gap where no consequence currently exists. It reinforces transparency in tax decision making, where Manitobans deserve clear, open communication about decisions that affect their costs of living. This legislation strengthens public trust by ensuring those decisions cannot be made without public scrutiny.

And, finally, it maintains flexibility while increasing accountability. Governments can still respond to changing circumstances and economic pressures but, at the same time, they must do so with respecting Manitobans' voices and upholding the rules that exist.

This bill is supported by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. In a press release, they said, and I quote: No government should be allowed to hike taxes without asking taxpayers' permission.

This bill is about principle, because no matter who is in government today, tomorrow or 10 years from now, no government should have the power to quietly raise taxes behind closed doors. And there is already precedent for this type of legislation. There are safeguards in place for balanced budget legislation, requiring governments to table budgets projecting a positive balance with minister salaries reduced or withheld.

And, in fact, last year, this NDP government broadened out this concept, passing similar legislation with bill 17 that mandated a 20 per cent reduction in ministerial salaries if future governments reduce or

repeal the mandatory school nutrition program. Precedent does exist.

And when we're talking about Manitobans' hard-earned dollars, that's why this bill is so critical. Manitobans work hard for every single dollar they earn, and it's up to government to treat those dollars with respect. A law exists to ensure there is a referendum for major tax increases but no consequences for breaking it. And Manitobans saw this under the previous NDP government.

So if members of this House truly believe in transparency, accountability and respect for the public in upholding the referendum requirement on major tax increases, then all members should support this bill today.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked from a member from another party; this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I'd like to ask the members opposite if they can explain how this bill lowers the cost of living for Manitobans in any meaningful way?

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): This bill is about accountability and public trust and how taxpayers' dollars are to be utilized by government, as we saw from previous NDP governments that increased the PST from 7 per cent to 8 per cent without going to a referendum for the public's sake. This is exactly what protects Manitobans' hard-earned money, and if the minister can't see that, then that's a problem with this NDP government possibly doing the exact same their predecessors did.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I'd like to thank and commend my colleague from Midland for bringing forward this very important bill.

And I'm wondering if she could explain why it is important for Manitobans to have a direct say before major tax increases are introduced?

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for that question.

Manitobans work hard for every single dollar that they earn. And they put those dollars, through taxes in trust with the government, to make decisions that best reflect their needs. There is a referendum requirement on major tax increases for a reason, and that is to ensure that Manitobans have a voice before a major tax increase is brought in. That referendum requirement was bypassed before, and what this bill does is ensure this NDP government does not do it again.

MLA Kennedy: I'd like to ask the members opposite if they can explain why, when they were in government, they chose to cut supports like the renters tax credit while allowing rents to rise, which really did affect many, many Manitobans?

Mrs. Stone: Well, that doesn't have anything to do with the bill that we're proposing today.

But, in fact, the former PC government was the one to bring in rental tax credits in addition to ensuring that homeowners across the province were receiving a 50 per cent education property tax rebate, something that homeowners are now being faced, upon the removal of it by this NDP government, with some of the highest education property taxes in the country in just their two and a half years of government.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I'd like to thank the member for Midland for bringing this important bill that is so critical for all Manitobans.

Could the member speak to how this bill helps restore trust between Manitobans and their government?

Mrs. Stone: Yes. So trust is about governments keeping their word. And the reason why this bill is so important is because the previous NDP government broke that trust with Manitobans. They indicated that they would not raise the PST from 7 per cent to 8 per cent, and then they did.

But what was more problematic about that is they did so without moving forward with the referendum, which is required under provincial legislation. So Bill 235 ensures that there are consequences—direct consequences—when NDP governments move ahead, similar to what the former NDP government previously did.

MLA Kennedy: I'd like to ask the members opposite who they consulted when drafting this bill?

Mrs. Stone: Manitobans. It is legislated that there should be a referendum for major tax increases. This was broken before. Manitobans expect if there is a major tax increase that they will be asked, because

that is existing legislation. So what this bill does is it ensures accountability and consequences if that is broken.

As I mentioned during my remarks, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation put out a press release supporting this legislation.

Mrs. Cook: We know that Manitobans are facing an affordability crisis under this NDP government. Their property taxes have been hiked, hydro rates have gone up, Manitoba leads the country in food inflation.

Could the member explain how this bill supports affordability for Manitoba families?

Mrs. Stone: What this bill does is it ensures that Manitobans are not faced with another NDP tax hike without significant consequences for a government that chooses to bypass a referendum. So what it does is it gives more Manitobans protections from government on their hard-earned dollars that they entrust with government to make decisions that are best for them and their families.

We have seen taxes increase under this NDP government since they have come into power. And we want to ensure that Manitobans are protected from this NDP's tax increases.

The Speaker: The honourable member for—the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism (MLA Kennedy).

MLA Kennedy: The previous PC government had seven and a half years to make life more affordable. Yet, costs continued to rise and services continued to be cut under the PC government.

My question to the member opposite is, why did they fail to deliver any meaningful, lasting affordability measures when they had chance to do so?

* (10:20)

Mrs. Stone: Manitobans were a lot better off under a former PC government that delivered over \$5,500 back into their pockets. This NDP government has—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: —done the opposite.

They've frozen the basic personal exemption, they've removed indexation, they've jacked up utility rates over 12 per cent—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: —over the next three years, and they have added an increase—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

Members will quit hollering across. Listen to the person that has the floor, please.

Mrs. Stone: I know the members opposite don't like it when I talk about all their tax increases and the fact that many of these increases have occurred within their two and a half years, and not by a little but by a significant margin—the highest education property taxes in the entire country, a 20 per cent increase to property taxes since just last year. That is their record on taxes and affordability for Manitobans.

MLA Bereza: Honourable Speaker, my apologies for jumping up ahead.

How does this Bill 235 reflect the Progressive Conservative approach to responsible fiscal management?

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for that question.

This bill is about ensuring that the public has a say. The PC government has respected Manitobans' wishes through legislation. The NDP government did not. This was case in point in 2013, when the previous NDP government, under Greg Selinger, increased the PST from 7 per cent to 8 per cent, bypassing the referendum requirement.

That is what this bill does. It protects Manitobans' right to have a say on major tax increases. The NDP has bypassed this referendum before, without consequence. We are saying that is wrong. We need to protect taxpayers' hard-earned dollars. This is why we're bringing this forward today.

MLA Kennedy: Honourable Speaker, this bill focuses on restricting tax decisions.

Can the members opposite explain how it supports investments in health care, education or affordability measures when Manitobans need them the most?

Mrs. Stone: I encourage the minister to read the bill. This isn't about restricting tax decisions. In fact, in my opening comments, I specifically said that governments still have legislative authority to do what they need to do, they just need to ask Manitobans. There is an existing law. That existing law is about going towards a referendum. What this bill does is it ensures that there are consequences if the NDP government chooses to bypass a referendum.

So I encourage the minister to actually read the bill and listen to the comments that I've made on the record today, because this is about consequences for breaking an existing law.

Mrs. Cook: I remember 2013 quite well. I had just had my first set of twins and was dealing with all of the additional costs that come with starting a family, times two. And then I remember Greg Selinger promising over and over again that he wasn't going to raise the PST. And then he did it anyway.

So I'm wondering if the member could explain why she believes Manitobans lost confidence in the NDP when the PST was raised after they promised not to do that?

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for that question, because Manitobans were shocked.

Premier Greg Selinger promised that he would not raise the PST from 7 per cent to 8 per cent, and then he did. And what was more problematic about that is he bypassed the referendum requirement which ensured that Manitobans' voices could be heard when it comes to major tax increases.

So he broke two promises, during that short period of time, to Manitobans. He increased the PST and he did so without Manitobans' say. That's why this bill is so important. If you bypass a referendum requirement, then there will be consequences. Manitobans lost trust—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Kennedy: If we want to talk about not having trust, or broken promises, we don't need to look any further than the members opposite. Manitobans do trust the NDP government, because they voted us in to be their government.

I want to ask the member opposite if she can actually provide any evidence that this bill will actually lower costs for Manitobans?

Mrs. Stone: As I—I've said time and time again during this debate, I encourage the minister to read the bill. This is about protecting Manitoba's voices from tax increases. If this NDP government wants to go and increase taxes, they need to go to Manitobans and ask for that.

This is what was bypassed last time. The previous NDP government increased the PST, which Manitobans didn't ask, didn't vote for and did not want. And they did it behind closed doors. And Manitobans have

every right to be skeptical that this NDP government will do the exact same thing to them.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Honourable Speaker, it is my immense honour each and every day that I get to come into this Chamber to represent the folks in Southdale, phenomenal people in Windsor Park, in Southdale, in Niakwa Park, in Southland Park, the wonderful folks who gave me the privilege of being in this seat to represent their views.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And each and every day, it's my privilege to come in here and think deeply about what is important to Manitobans. And I can assure you that when I went door to door to door in my neighbourhood, where the previous failed Health minister from the former PC government was the sitting Cabinet minister, that what I heard every—each and every day was that we needed investments in health care; we needed investments in schools; we needed investments in infrastructure; and, most importantly, we needed an end to the public-sector wage freeze that kept hard-working Manitobans from earning what they deserved.

And so when I look at the content in Bill 235, The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, I think about all of my constituents who I spoke with who had no protections against the callous cuts made by the previous PC government; my constituents, who had no recourse until election time, honourable Deputy Speaker, for things like the closure of three out of six ERs in Winnipeg—three out of six ERs.

At any point did the previous PC government go to Manitobans and say, is this what you were hoping for when you voted us in? Did they go back to Manitobans and say, would you like to travel further for care? Would you like to wait longer? Five of six QuickCare clinics, honourable Deputy Speaker—and to add insult to injury, the constituency office of the previous member for Southdale was in a closed QuickCare clinic.

Honourable Speaker, when I look at Bill 235, I think about accountability when it comes to investment. The taxation system is our agreement with one another that, on the big things, we contribute; that we've decided as a society that, as individuals, we

can't likely build a hospital, we can't likely build a school, we can't likely build a hospital, but when we pool our resources together, we invest in the services that everybody needs.

And so, honourable Deputy Speaker, when I think about what the actual responsibility is to the Manitobans that elected us, it is ensuring that those investments are made in a judicious way, that we think about not just this generation but the next seven to come and we ensure that the services that people rely on are there when they need them.

There is an affordability crisis right now. We're all aware of it, which is why our government, in this budget, has put forward many, many, many options to help with affordability. And while the members opposite may not know what it's like to really struggle at different points in their lives, I will tell them what actually makes a difference for a young single mom—because the member from Midland seems to like to talk about young single mothers a lot.

I was a young single mother. I'll tell you what helped me: I had subsidized child care so I could go back to school, I had access to health care for myself and my child when I needed it, I had supports for prenatal benefits, I had access to before-and-after-school care for my child, I had supports for employment training.

* (10:30)

And, honourable Speaker, when we reduce the amount of investment into those programs, we starve the very people who rely on them. And this is a very, very simplistic view of government operations, honourable Deputy Speaker. And Bill 235 really does nothing to address the concerns that are coming forward from Manitobans today.

And, in 2023, when Manitobans very loudly and very clearly gave us the mandate to govern, what they told us was that, we trust you to make the decisions that need to be made in this province to bring us back to the place that we want to be. And, honourable Deputy Speaker, I am so proud of this government. We have built new schools. We have built new child-care centres, we are reopening closed ERs, we are reopening the shuttered mature women's health centre, and we are investing in the next generation of Manitobans.

And, honourable Deputy Speaker, while I know that it is far more comfortable for the members opposite to come in here each and every day and try to create a narrative that might speak to some of the

very last people that are in support of their party, what I can tell you is that on this side of the House, we look at our decisions through the lens of long-term sustainability for our province. It's not about the next headline, it's not about which tennis courts should go into which constituency to ensure that they'll lock down that seat; it is really and truly about ensuring that we rebuild the trust with Manitobans in government.

The member opposite spoke a lot about trust and governance. I can appreciate that under the members opposite, that Manitobans did lose trust in their government. And Manitobans did question what the value of having people come to this building each and every day to make decisions is. But this team here, all of these amazing people on this side of the House, from the furthest north to the south, know their communities. They're in their communities. They have real relationships with the people that they serve.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, yesterday the member from Fort Richmond hosted a beautiful event with the minister of—pardon me—culture—sport, culture and heritage. And there were hundreds of people from the Asian community who came out to celebrate with us because they know that we are a government that listens, we are a government that is responsive and we are a government that truly values them in society, regardless of what their annual earnings on their T4 say, regardless of the postal code they live in and regardless of the family and social history that they come from.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the risk is very clear in this Chamber and in this province if the members opposite happen to get their hands on the levers of power again. And Manitobans know who they can trust, and Manitobans know who ought to be leading this province. And each and every day, there are announcements and policy decisions that make a real impact in Manitobans' lives. Many more exciting announcements to come from this year's budget.

If the members opposite allow us to move forward with BITSA and don't get in the way of real affordability measures for Manitobans, then on July 1, you'll see even more affordability measures for Manitobans.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I hope that the members opposite have thought long and hard about whether they want to play politics with people's hard-earned income and whether they will feel comfortable going door to door to door to tell folks that they stood in the way of real affordability measures in this House.

And maybe that's a risk that they're willing to take, or maybe they're just not going to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I'd invite the minister to bring her remarks back to the bill before us.

MLA Cable: I appreciate your guidance, honourable Deputy Speaker.

When we talk about fiscal accountability, Manitobans know who they can trust. And we look only to the headlines of 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 to see the devastation of the decisions that were made, once again, without consultation with Manitobans.

And I look forward to a day where we don't need to worry quite so much about affordability, but I can commit that each and every day we come in here to make life more affordable for Manitobans and to build a more inclusive society.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I'm honoured to stand here beside the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone), who has introduced this bill that does have a positive effect on all Manitobans—not just a few, all Manitobans.

Higher taxes don't attract investment. I rise today in strong support: The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act.

This bill is about trust, accountability, transparency and respecting the voices of Manitobans when it comes to taxes and government spending.

At its core, Bill 235 strengthens the existing referendum framework in Manitoba while still preserving the authority of this Legislature. It does not remove power of elected representatives to govern. It does not paralyze government. What it does is it creates a clear accountability mechanism and ensures Manitobans are respected when governments consider major tax increases.

Again, I am proud to stand with our team to make Manitoba more affordable for all Manitobans.

Thank you.

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): I pick up from where my colleague left off, but before I do that, I, too, just want to express some gratitude to the good folks of McPhillips, and always it's a privilege to get up and put a few words on the record and to speak to the concerns and the thoughts of the folks that we represent in the Chamber here.

And, if you'll indulge me a little bit, honourable Speaker—or Deputy Speaker, I just want to take a little brief moment, just because I want it on Hansard as well. I want to welcome Diljit Dosanjh to Winnipeg. And for those who don't know who that is, he is arguably the most popular Punjabi singer in the world right now. He was on Jimmy Fallon last week. And he's in little old Winnipeg right now and he's going to be performing here tonight. And, of course, we welcome him.

We welcome the economic benefits of his visit too. It's going to be a pretty big crowd at Canada Life tonight. [*interjection*] And so I think that, not only are folks in the community, in the wider community, excited to see somebody come to Winnipeg and perform here, as a government, it's great to see our tourism industry thrive and folks come to Winnipeg and make this a place where they want to contribute to the arts and culture scene here too. So I wanted to put that on record because, hopefully, 50 years from now people are going to look back and say, oh, yes, I remember when he came here. So welcome, Diljit.

And, despite my colleagues across the way incessantly clearing their throat through that, I want to point out the fact that, when my colleague, the minister for sport, culture and heritage, repeatedly asked the member who presented this bill how this bill would materially help Manitobans with the cost of living, she could not answer that question, not even once—not once. We got a lot of platitudes and a lot of other political speak, but she could not answer how this bill would materially help Manitobans.

That is because it can't. It is pure, 'unadultered' hypocrisy from the members opposite to come to this Chamber and talk about fiscal responsibility, the folks who left a \$2-billion hole in the finances on their final days of government after pushing out so much money out of the door to buy votes just to end up on the opposite side of the Chamber here. But they want to give us lessons about fiscal responsibility.

* (10:40)

And I would be curious to know if the member who is presenting this bill has ever costed out what a referendum would cost, because I guess, obviously, the prudent oversight of taxpayer dollars is what we all want. Referendums cost money. Did the member opposite cost this out? I very, very much doubt it. And, in case the member across the way is unfamiliar, in an election—in an election is where you go to get a mandate from the voters.

In 2023, we all went to an election. We all sought a mandate from Manitobans to govern. And guess what? They chose the NDP to govern in this province after seven and a half years of the PCs greasing the hands of their friends. They were sick and tired of that.

So for them to get into the Chamber today and pretend like they care about Manitobans, well, they didn't do one thing to help Manitobans with affordability. They jacked up hydro rates at the Cabinet table. They kept on charging Manitobans the gas tax each and every single day.

We went to the polls and we offered Manitobans, if you elect an NDP government, we're going to help you with affordability—and promise made, promise kept. We cut the gas tax. We gave a permanent cut to the gas tax. We're getting rid of PST on all groceries.

What does the opposition want to do? They want to stop us from doing that. Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition held a press conference alongside his colleagues.

An Honourable Member: Relevance.

MLA Devgan: And—well, we're talking about affordability. And the members opposite really don't like when we talk about this sort of stuff because they want to pull the wool over the eyes of Manitobans.

Fundamentally, this government is the one that's making life more affordable for Manitobans. We're cutting taxes left, right and centre. The payroll tax, gas tax, taking the PST off groceries—they don't want to see this happen. And my colleague and I were just talking about just how desperate the members are, when they come into this Chamber every day to bring in PMBs asking for things that they themselves could not live up to, standards that they could not govern themselves.

So, if this truly is about affordability, then we're succeeding on that front. We're working very hard on that front to make life more affordable for Manitobans. It's not just the PST cut—or removal, I should say, of PST on all groceries. It is also forcing the grocery sector to be more competitive, something that the opposition, or members opposite, did not do in seven and a half years.

I believe that more competition is better for consumers. Ostensibly, I thought Conservatives would believe that. But the 2026 Conservatives don't seem to be very Conservative, very free market. This government understands that, that more competition in the market, more grocers in the market, will result in

competitive prices for consumers. So we are pursuing that, actively. We're picking fights with grocers to make life more affordable for Manitobans.

The actions that this government is taking are tangible—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I would just ask the member to withdraw his comments about wool being pulled over the eyes of Manitobans. It's been ruled unparliamentary in the past.

MLA Devgan: Thank you, honourable Speaker. I withdraw.

But, as I was saying, I think we should all come to this Chamber with a good degree of goodwill and sincerity in the debates that we have, the conversations we want to have. I very strongly believe that that is not where the members opposite are coming—or the approach they're coming with to this Chamber. Fiscal responsibility, or any sort of responsibility, is not something that they demonstrated in seven and a half years in any way, shape or form. And, as I said earlier, this government is the one that's cutting taxes for Manitobans. We repeatedly talk about this—repeatedly.

And I will note that the one marquee policy that the members opposite are flaunting these days—they can't seem to decide what number it is they want to stick on. We heard a different number for their personal exemption idea a week ago, it was different yesterday and might be different tomorrow, because, fundamentally, they can't figure it out. They cannot figure out what it is that they want to offer Manitobans, because they don't have anything that can compete with what the government is offering today.

And then, when you ask them to cost things out, good luck. Good luck getting them to figure that one out. Like, as I said earlier, referendums cost money. How much money are the taxpayers going to be on the hook for, for this preposterous idea? How much money is that going to cost?

Everything costs money. We were elected here to be good stewards of the Manitoba finances. I don't think Manitobans would appreciate us going to referendums on each and every thing that they've already sent us here to do.

If they—if we—if they go to the polls and they elect a government, they vote for every single individual in

this Chamber, they know that we've come to them with a certain set of policy proposals that we want to enact when we're in government. And that is exactly what we're doing on this side of the Chamber.

What the members opposite are proposing is, in effect, higher taxes and more red tape. The Conservatives of 2026, the PC Party of 2026, wants more regulation, they want more red tape, they want to bog down the operations of government and they want to increase taxes on Manitobans. These are not even Conservatives, they are ideologues.

They get up, they thank Donald Trump for attacking Canada's economy. They are more interested in getting wins over their political enemies than in serving Manitobans. You see it in question period all the time, the vitriol that's directed from that side of the House to this side. Every time the Premier (Mr. Kinew) gets up and looks—he doesn't talk to members opposite, he talks right to Manitobans and talks about the things that we're doing to provide fiscal responsibility, but also make life more affordable for Manitobans. That's a very, very unserious opposition. *[interjection]*

And I think the members really don't like hearing that. They very much struggle with hearing this. And I understand there's some inner politics that are going on in the opposition right now, but I'll leave that to them, right? They've got members leaving their caucus. They've got staff leaving their caucus. Like, it's a mess over there.

So maybe if they spent a little bit more time thinking about the bills that they're cooking up here and come with a little bit more thought about what it is that they're asking for, because, like I said before, what they're asking for is higher taxes and red tape. That's not what we're going to get on this side of the House, that is not something that this government is going to do. We are cutting taxes, we're reducing red tape, making life more affordable for Manitobans. And we're doing all this without slashing—slashing—health care and cutting ERs.

And my colleague made a very, very good point earlier. Did they go to the polls? Did they go to a referendum and ask the folks in my end of the city if they wanted to lose Seven Oaks hospital and the ER? They didn't ask anybody. Not one single person did they consult when they cut the ERs in Seven Oaks and around the city. As our province grew in size and population, they decided to cut down the health-care services that Manitobans can access.

Did they consult anybody? No, they were all sitting around the Cabinet table, patting each other on the back. Did they consult Manitobans when they cut a \$500,000 cheque to the Leader of the Opposition? We're still all paying that on instalments. Did they consult Manitobans on that? No.

It's do as I say, not as I do, for the members opposite. Hypocrites.

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): Honourable Speaker, l'Honorable Président, it's another full-beautiful day in Manitoba as we rebuild health care and make life more affordable, invest in education; all the Conservatives want to talk about is this red tape referendum bill, right?

They want to talk about confidence and respect and, you know, transparency, but they're still trying to run away from—

An Honourable Member: Tax referendum.

MLA Loiselle: No, they're still trying to run away from Brian Pallister, possibly the worst premier in the history of Manitoba. In fact, I remember when they all went to Brandon one day, sang Kumbaya and then kicked him out of the party.

No, but hold on, hold on. He—sorry, I'm sorry. He's not the worst premier in the history of Manitoba.

An Honourable Member: Greg Selinger.

MLA Loiselle: That's Heather Stefanson. That's Heather Stefanson. That's what everybody remembers, is the horrible Stefanson record. They want to talk about Greg Selinger, who balanced the budget, actually, 10 years in a row, but—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

MLA Loiselle: —they'd rather talk about this red tape—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I would invite the member to bring his comments back to the bill before us.

French spoken

MLA Loiselle: Donc ce projet de loi semble vouloir parler de confiance, de bonne gérance, de respect, de transparence. Mais comment est-ce qu'on peut faire confiance à sept années et demie de mauvaise gérance d'un gouvernement conservateur qui a détruit notre système de santé, qui a détruit notre système d'éducation, qui a mis en péril la sécurité de nos aînés, de nos enfants et de nos familles ?

C'est vraiment hypocrite de leur part de vouloir parler de bonne gérance quand ce projet de loi vraiment parle d'agir et d'ajouter d'autre « red tape » comme on dit en anglais, avec d'autres référendums. On a eu un référendum en 2023 : c'était une élection. Une élection qu'heureusement notre gouvernement a gagnée, parce que depuis ce temps-là, nous avons remis le respect, la bonne gérance, la transparence et la confiance au sein du gouvernement.

* (10:50)

D'ailleurs, ce projet de loi prétend porter sur la responsabilisation, mais les Manitobains se souviennent très bien des dernières années du gouvernement conservateur. Les Manitobains ont eu sept ans et demi – excusez, les Conservateurs ont eu sept ans et demi pour rendre la vie plus abordable et ils ont échoué. Ils savent : ce projet de loi va rien changer.

Sans oublier que les Conservateurs ont aussi enfreint la loi en violant la convention de transition – on l'a vu – juste à la fin de la dernière élection.

Notre gouvernement se concentre sur de véritables mesures d'aide – c'est ce que les Manitobains et les Manitobaines veulent – qui font une différence dans la vie quotidienne des gens. Un autre référendum après un autre référendum ne va rien changer dans la confiance que les Manitobains ont au sein du gouvernement.

Les Manitobains et Manitobaines, d'ailleurs, font confiance à notre gouvernement. Nous avons réduit de permanente la taxe sur l'essence, remettant de l'argent dans les poches des Manitobains chaque fois qu'ils vont faire le plein. Nous avons éliminé la TVP sur les produits d'épicerie et nous continuons de prendre des mesures pour réduire les coûts et soutenir les familles partout dans la province.

Monsieur l'Honorable Président, je suis parent, enseignant. Je sais que les parents d'aujourd'hui n'ont pas le temps pour entretenir un autre référendum après un autre référendum. La vie est trop compliquée. Les Manitobains nous font confiance. Et d'ailleurs, les Manitobains ont besoin d'un gouvernement qui offre véritablement de l'aide, et c'est exactement ce que nous faisons.

La loi – cette Loi sur la responsabilité financière et la protection des contribuables – exige actuellement que le gouvernement tienne un référendum non contraignant avant de déposer un projet de loi. Vous savez, ce que les Manitobains et les Manitobaines veulent c'est avoir de l'espoir et de voir un gouvernement agir avec respect et bonne gérance. C'est

pourquoi, à la dernière élection, les Manitobains et les Manitobaines ont dit non au gouvernement Stefanson, et c'est pourquoi ils nous ont mis au pouvoir.

Les Manitobains veulent un gouvernement qui se concentre sur la réduction des coûts et l'amélioration des coûts de la vie. Ce projet de loi prétend protéger les 'contriabiles' – contribuables. C'est faux. Mais soyons clairs : il ne fait rien pour réduire réellement les coûts de la vie.

Premièrement, les Manitobains ne demandent pas des jeux politiques : ils demandent un soutien concret et tangible. Deuxièmement, ce projet de loi tente d'imposer des règles arbitraires sur la manière dont les gouvernements présentent des décisions, au lieu de se concentrer sur les résultats de ces décisions pour les Manitobains.

Les gouvernements doivent avoir la flexibilité d'agir dans l'intérêt supérieur des Manitobains lorsque les circonstances l'exigent. Alors que ce projet de loi met l'accent sur le processus, notre gouvernement est axé sur les résultats tangibles. Nous mettons en œuvre de véritables mesures d'aide que les Manitobains peuvent constater et ressentir dans leur vie quotidienne du jour au jour. Nous avons réduit de façon permanente la taxe provinciale sur l'essence, remettant de l'argent dans les poches des gens chaque fois qu'ils font le plein. Nous avons instauré le crédit d'impôt pour l'aide des propriétaires, permettant aux Manitobains d'économiser des centaines de dollars chaque année avec encore plus d'allègement à venir.

Ce sont des mesures concrètes. Pas d'autres référendums, mais des mesures concrètes et significatives qui aident les gens à faire face à la hausse du coût de la vie. Voilà la vraie différence que notre gouvernement fait dans la vie des Manitobains chaque jour.

Pendant sept ans et demi, le gouvernement conservateur a supprimé des emplois, a augmenté les coûts et démontré aux Manitobains à quel point ils se soucient peu de leurs besoins. Ce, l'Honorable Président, est un manque de respect. Ce projet de loi ne fait rien pour remettre de l'ordre dans le gouvernement; ajoute juste d'autres processus, d'autres référendums, d'autres collants rouges, « red tape » pour ceux qui ne savent pas.

Les gouvernements Stefanson et Pallister, les deux pires premiers ministres dans l'histoire du Manitoba – on le reconnaît – ont caché des Manitobains la situation financière d'Hydro Manitoba tout en vendant activement des parties de la société d'État et

en l'empêchant de soumettre des projets d'infrastructure.

En octobre 2020, ils ont vendu la participation rentable de 40 pour cent d'Hydro Manitoba dans Teshmont. Comment pouvons-nous faire confiance à un gouvernement qui fait seulement avancer d'autres référendums quand l'ancien gouvernement conservateur a vendu des parties d'une corporation de la Couronne – a vendu des actions de Manitoba Hydro. Comment est-ce qu'on peut leur faire confiance?

En février 2021, ils ont annoncé la fermeture de leur société de conseil international, Manitoba Hydro International, ce qui entraîna une diminution du nombre d'emplois spécialisés aux Manitobains.

Tout ça pour dire que ce que les Manitobains et les Manitobaines veulent vraiment d'un gouvernement, c'est de leur faire confiance. Ils nous ont fait confiance à la dernière élection. J'étais enseignant pendant les sept années et demie des deux pires gouvernements conservateurs dans l'histoire du Manitoba, le gouvernement Pallister et le gouvernement Stefanson. On n'a pas besoin de retourner en arrière, et les Manitobains et les Manitobaines n'ont pas le temps pour faire affaire à d'autres référendums de collants rouges qui vont juste perdre leur temps – perdre le temps de les Manitobains – et saboter, d'ailleurs la vraie façon dont les gouvernements doivent fonctionner.

The Speaker in the Chair

Les gouvernements élient un gouvernement, leur font confiance. Les Manitobains et les Manitobaines en ce moment font confiance à notre gouvernement et notre Premier ministre (M. Kinew). Et d'ailleurs, nous venons, grâce à l'excellent travail de notre ministre des Finances (DAL Sala), avoir le plus bas déficit de toutes les provinces au Manitoba.

Alors, quand on parle de confiance, quand on parle de respect, gardons les mains sur le volant, sur la bonne voie du respect avec notre gouvernement.

Merci, l'Honorable Président.

Translation

So this bill seems to be about trust, good governance, respect and transparency. But how can we trust a Conservative government that has, over seven and a half years, mismanaged our health-care system, destroyed our education system and jeopardized the safety of our elderly, our children and our families?

It is truly hypocritical of them to talk about good governance when this bill is really about taking action and adding more red tape, as we say in English, with further referendums. We had a referendum in 2023: it was an election. An election that, fortunately, our government won, because since then, we have restored respect, good governance, transparency and trust within government.

* (10:50)

Moreover, this bill claims to be about accountability, but Manitobans remember the Conservative government's final years all too well. Manitobans had seven and a half years—excuse me, the Conservatives had seven and a half years to make life more affordable, and they failed. They know: this bill will change nothing.

Not to mention that the Conservatives also broke the law by breaching the Caretaker Convention—as we saw—right at the end of the last election.

Our government is focusing on real measures of support—that is what Manitobans want—which make a difference in people's daily lives. One referendum after another will do nothing to change the trust Manitobans have in the government.

Manitobans, moreover, trust our government. We have permanently reduced the gas tax, putting money back in Manitobans' pockets every time they fuel up. We have eliminated the PST on groceries, and we continue to take steps to reduce costs and to support families across the province.

Honourable Speaker, I am a parent and a teacher. I know that today's parents do not have time to deal with one referendum after another. Life is too complicated. Manitobans trust us. And besides, Manitobans need a government that genuinely offers help, and that is exactly what we are doing.

The bill—the Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act—currently requires the government to hold a non-binding referendum before introducing a bill. You know, what Manitobans want is hope and to see a government act with respect and good stewardship. That is why, in the last election, Manitobans said no to the Stefanson government, and that is why they put us in power.

Manitobans want a government that focuses on reducing costs and improving the cost of living. This bill claims to protect taxpayers. That is false. Let's be clear: it does nothing to actually reduce the cost of living.

Firstly, Manitobans aren't asking for political games: they're asking for concrete, tangible support. Secondly, this bill attempts to impose arbitrary rules on how governments present decisions, rather than focusing on the outcomes of those decisions for Manitobans.

Governments must have the flexibility to act in the best interests of Manitobans when circumstances require it. Whilst this bill focuses on processes, our government is focused on tangible results. We are implementing real relief measures that Manitobans can see and feel in their day-to-day lives. We have permanently reduced the provincial fuel tax, putting money back in people's pockets every time they fuel up. We have introduced the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, allowing Manitobans to save hundreds of dollars each year with even more relief to come.

These are concrete measures. Not additional referendums, but concrete and meaningful measures that help people cope with the rising cost of living. That is the real difference our government is making in the lives of Manitobans every day.

For seven and a half years, the Conservative government cut jobs, drove up costs and showed Manitobans just how little they care about their needs. That, Honourable Speaker, is a lack of respect. This bill does nothing to bring order to government; it merely adds more processes, more referendums, more red tape—for those who don't know.

The Stefanson and Pallister governments, the two worst premiers in Manitoba's history—as we all know—hid Manitoba Hydro's financial situation from Manitobans whilst actively selling off parts of the Crown corporation and preventing it from proposing infrastructure projects.

In October 2020, they sold Manitoba Hydro's profitable 40 per cent stake in Teshmont. How can we trust a government that is merely pushing for more referendums when the former Conservative government sold off parts of a Crown corporation—sold shares in Manitoba Hydro? How can we trust them?

In February 2021, they announced the closure of their international consulting firm, Manitoba Hydro International, which led to a reduction in the number of skilled jobs available to Manitobans.

All this to say that what Manitobans really want from a government is for it to be trustworthy. They put their trust in us at the last election. I was a teacher during

the seven and a half years of the two worst Conservative governments in Manitoba's history: the Pallister government and the Stefanson government. We don't need to go back to the way things were, and Manitobans don't have time for more red tape referendums that will just waste their time—waste Manitobans' time—and, moreover, undermine the very way governments are meant to function.

The Speaker in the Chair

Governments elect a government; they place their trust in it. Manitobans right now trust our government and our Premier (Mr. Kinew). And indeed, thanks to the excellent work of our Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), we in Manitoba have the lowest deficit of any province.

So, when we talk about trust, when we talk about respect, let's keep our hands on the wheel, on the right track of respect, with our government.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): I just want to put a few words on the record here in opposition to this Bill 235 in—speaking from my perspective, my lived experience as a public servant and also my lived experience as a transgender person who's fought for trans health care and for rights for many years, and I've lived the delays and the cuts that this bill risks reviving.

Under the previous PC government, they announced and then they deleted a \$1.2-million pledge for gender-affirming care, promising funds for surgeries and youth supports, only to scrub it from their site amid NDP's questions. Wait times then, you know, exploded, leaving trans youth like 16-year-old Adam Donaghy in medical limbo for years, worsening dysphoria.

Procedural foot-dragging at the Human Rights Commission left two-plus years backlog at—and that was confirmed by the Ombudsman. And that meant that complaints, they languished in the case where, you know, there was systemic discrimination that was ruled after years of foot-dragging.

This bill, it elevates rigid processes over people, making governments timid about raising revenue for equity measures like health care and human rights enforcements.

My work and our work as a government proves we need flexibility, Honourable Speaker, not strait-jackets. I authored The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act, now law, despite four PCs

voting against our existence. Our government has invested \$1.6 million in trans health-care supports, proving flexibility deserves justice.

This bill could excuse future underfunding or delays for communities that I represent, and that is unthinkable, Honourable Speaker—

* (11:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

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

RESOLUTIONS

The Speaker: The hour being 11 o'clock, it's now time for private members' resolutions.

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

House Business

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, Honourable Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnson: Pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram). The title of the resolution is Removing the Land Transfer Tax for the First-Time Home Buyers.

The Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 34(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Agassiz. And the title of the resolution is removing the land transfer tax for first-time home buyers.

Res. 9—Calling on the Provincial Government to Prioritize the Struggles Facing Manitoba Families

The Speaker: Now, as previously announced, it's time for private members' resolutions, and the resolution before us this morning is resolution No. 9, Calling on the Provincial Government to Prioritize the Struggles Facing Manitoba Families.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I rise today in support of this resolution and, more importantly, in support of Manitoba families who are working hard, doing everything right and still finding themselves—*[interjection]*

Oh, but, first of all, I'm going to move this resolution, I will have it seconded by the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza),

WHEREAS Manitoba continues to face the worst cost of living pressures in the country; and

WHEREAS Manitoba posted an overall inflation rate of 3%, tied for the highest in Canada; and

WHEREAS extreme pressure in everyday expenses are putting significant strain on Manitoba families, forcing them to choose what expenses to prioritize; and

WHEREAS food prices remain a major driver of rising costs in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS Manitoba recorded the highest food inflation rate in the country at 4.9%, making groceries increasingly unaffordable for many Manitoba families; and

WHEREAS Manitoba represents every segment of the agriculture industry, yet leads the country in record high food prices; and

WHEREAS agriculture plays a vital role in the daily lives and livelihoods of Manitobans and to the province's economy, accounting for almost 10% of Manitoba's GDP; and

WHEREAS 81,000 Manitobans work in the agriculture sector, producing \$29.5 billion in economic benefits to Manitoba's economy; and

WHEREAS Manitoba lacks processing capacity and must send agriculture products out of province for processing, thus depriving Manitobans of good jobs; and

WHEREAS under this Provincial Government, Manitoba has fallen behind neighbouring provinces in terms of securing new markets and trade deals for world class agricultural products; and

WHEREAS Manitoba's domestic food supply is at risk.

THEREFORE IT-BE RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to take action immediately to reduce the crippling red tape on farmers and address the underlying economic causes for food inflation.

The Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), seconded by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza), that

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to take action immediately to reduce the crippling red tape on farmers and address the underlying economic causes of food inflation.

Mr. Johnson: I rise today in support of this resolution and, more importantly, in support of Manitoba families who are working hard and doing everything right and still finding themselves falling short at the end of the month and falling further and further behind.

Families across Manitoba are feeling squeezed from every direction. They feel it at the grocery store. They feel it when they fill up their vehicles. They feel it when they open their hydro bill, pay their rent or renew their mortgage or try to save for their children's future. They feel it in simple reality that their paycheques no longer stretch the way that they once did.

This resolution addresses something very real, and it addresses the growing affordability crisis facing Manitobas and the failure of this NDP government to deal with the underlying causes of that crisis.

The troubling part, Honourable Speaker, is that Manitoba should not be in this position. We are one of the greatest agriculture jurisdictions anywhere in the world. Manitoba farmers feed millions of people every single day. Agriculture contributes nearly 10 per cent of Manitoba's GDP and supports roughly 81,000 jobs across this province. We produce world-class commodities, world-class livestock and world-class food products.

Yet, Manitoba families are facing some of the highest food inflation in the country. That contradiction should concern every member of this House. Instead of addressing the cause of rising costs, this NDP government continues to focus on symbolic announcements and temporary political fixes that generate headlines but fail to solve the problem. Manitobans are being offered band-aid solutions while the structural weakness inside our economy continues to worsen.

The government froze the price of one litre of milk and spoke out about grocery price controls while food prices continue to climb, but most rural stores don't carry one litre of milk. Experts themselves describe these measures as symbolic rather than

meaningful economic policy. Families cannot continue to build a future on symbolism. Farmers cannot expand their operations on symbolism. Businesses cannot invest based on symbolism.

What Manitoba needs is serious economic growth, serious productivity growth, serious private investment and a government willing to remove the barriers that are driving up the cost of producing food and doing business. The fact outlined that this resolution paints a very clear picture of where Manitoba stands today.

Manitoba's inflation rate sits at 3 per cent, tied for the highest in Canada. Food inflation has reached 4.9 per cent, the highest in the country. That means Manitoba families are paying more and getting less for groceries than families almost anywhere else in Canada.

At the same time Manitoba ranked eight out of 10 in the provinces in the GDP in 2024.

Economic growth was only 1.1 per cent, which is far behind provinces like Saskatchewan and Alberta. Projected business investment growth has dropped to only 1 and a half per cent, again trailing our western neighbours.

That matters because investment drives productivity. Productivity drives wages and wages supported by—support a strong economic growth and are ultimately what creates affordability. When productivity stagnates, inflation hurts more. When private investment slows, wage growth weakens. When governments rely on public sector expansion instead of private sector growth, affordability worsens over the long term.

That is exactly what is happening in Manitoba today. While jobs are added, overall private sector employment has actually declined while public sector employment has increased. That is not sustainable. It's not a sustainable foundation for long-term prosperity.

Governments cannot regulate their way into competitiveness. Governments cannot spend their way into productivity and governments cannot tax Manitoba into affordability. At some point, there actually has to be an environment where business wants to invest, where entrepreneurs want to expand, and where food processors want to build facilities and where farmers can grow without being buried under escalating costs and excessive red tape.

Instead, this government appears more focused on political theatre than economic fundamentals.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are watching a government that seems obsessed with political debates happening in Washington, in Ottawa and every other jurisdiction while affordability worsens right here at home.

Families are not focused on political slogans. They're focused on whether they can afford groceries this week. They're focused on whether they can pay their bills at the end of each month. They're focused on whether their children will ever be able to afford a home or build a future in Manitoba.

Meanwhile, Manitoba businesses are losing confidence in the economic direction of this province. More than 75 per cent of Manitoba businesses report that economic uncertainty is affecting hiring and investment decisions here in the province. Half of Manitoba businesses—half of Manitoba businesses no longer believe Manitoba is competitive with other jurisdictions.

Those are serious warning signs and the consequences are real. Manitoba continues to have one of the highest child poverty rates in Canada. Tens of thousands of Manitobans rely on food banks each and every month. Seniors are cutting back on groceries so they can buy medication, keep their home and pay their rent. Parents are skipping meals so their children can eat. Young people are questioning on whether they can ever afford a home or raise a family in this province. These are not abstract statistics; these are real people facing real hardships.

* (11:10)

Affordability does not come from government announcements or temporary political fixes, affordability comes from strong economies, productive industries, rising wages, competitive taxation and confidence in the future. This is why the Progressive Conservatives believe Manitoba must focus on growing the economy rather than managing its decline.

We believe Manitoba should process more agriculture products right here at home instead of exporting raw commodities and importing finished goods back at a higher rate and higher food price. Manitoba lacks sufficient value-added processing capacity, and that means lost jobs, lost investment and lost opportunities for Manitoba workers and communities.

We believe unnecessary red tape and project delays should be reduced because they increase production costs and ultimately raise prices for consumers. We believe Manitoba should work with

provinces like Saskatchewan and Alberta to reduce interprovincial trade barriers and improve competitiveness. And we believe Manitobans should be allowed to keep more of the money they earn.

While I can see my time goes by here so quick, Honourable Speaker, this resolution calls on the provincial government to reduce crippling red tape on farmers and address the underlying economic causes of food inflation. That is a reasonable request and it is a necessary request because if we truly want lower food prices, we must lower the cost of producing food. If we truly want higher wages, we must improve productivity. And if we truly want affordability, we must grow the economy in a serious and sustainable way.

Manitobans are resilient people. Farmers are resilient people. Workers and small-business owners are resilient people. What they need from government is not another slogan or another symbolic gesture. They need practical economic solutions from a government willing to address the causes of affordability problems rather than merely talking about the symptoms. This resolution speaks directly to that challenge, and I encourage all members of the House to support it.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is open for questions.

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): You know, when the member opposite, when his failed government was running the province, they closed Agriculture service offices and they reduced supports for producers.

When that member, in fact, was appointed the minister of Agriculture, he took no steps to support farmers.

So I wonder if he can explain to us today how he reconciles this call for additional supports for farmers when he provided none and can't—you know, was really an utter failure in this area, and I'd like him to explain that to us today?

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Oh, it's great to stand up and talk about all the great things that we've done for Manitobans, including the agriculture sector. We lowered the PST from 8 per cent to 7 per cent. We raised the basic personal exemption amount. We indexed tax brackets. We expanded renter supports. The largest thing that we've done for producers is give them relief on education property tax, where members opposite, all they're doing is pulling money out of Manitobans' pockets where the PC government puts it in.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Thank you to the member for Interlake-Gimli for bringing this very important resolution forward at a time of an affordability crisis.

Can the member explain how rising costs are contributing to higher food prices for Manitoba families?

Mr. Johnson: Well, any rising costs on a producer obviously has a higher cost of input for the crops. And as that goes through the food chain and the grain becomes a loaf of bread, it reflects all of the bad policies that this NDP is—government is doing towards producers in Manitoba. And that is ultimately paid for at the grocery store.

MLA Naylor: You know, while our government is removing the PST from groceries and cracking down on practices that limit competition, the PCs stood by as costs climbed.

So can the member opposite explain what they actually did to bring prices down when they had the chance? And, you know what, I'm generous here, could he give us one example that they brought forward in seven and a half years to bring prices down during their time in government? Just even one would be impressive.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I had listed a lot more than one in my previous answer, including major education property tax relief for Manitobans. But what members opposite have done is increase the prices.

And when they do give a political stunt and decrease for a short period of time, the gas tax, what did they do? They didn't include farmers. It was our amendment brought forward that actually drove down the price of fuel for farmers. Therefore, the cost of groceries on our shelves.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Well, well, well, today we're talking about the resolution. I want to thank my colleague for bringing forward this great

resolution. It's interesting; as usual, a minister from the NDP bench stands up and asks questions about things that she should know the answers to.

So I'm going to ask my member friend, does he believe that the freezing the price of one litre of milk will lift families out of poverty?

Mr. Johnson: Two cents on a jug of milk that most stores don't even carry anymore: a one litre. A family—a family of four—I have yet to see them purchase a one litre of milk. I know our family, when we were growing up, it was gallons at a time. And the member opposite knows that two cents on a litre of milk is putting a couple of pennies in the front pocket while they're pulling bills out of your back pocket.

MLA Naylor: In my previous question, I asked the member to identify one thing that they did to lower grocery costs for Manitobans, and he failed to do that. So I will give him another chance.

But what he did talk about was some of the tax rebates that their government did, where they sent money to large corporations and out-of-province billionaires instead of targeted relief to those that need it most.

So, you know, I'm going to challenge him to explain that and, again, one thing they did to lower grocery prices?

Mr. Johnson: Well, that's another easy one, Honourable Speaker. We lowered the price on ag Crown lands. And in our 2023 election commitment, we promised to keep it that low. And it's nice—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnson: —to see that this minister is actually following through on our PC commitments and promises to farmers, keeping agriculture Crown land low.

The Speaker: There are no further—the honourable member for Lakeside.

Mr. King: Can the member explain how that, when it costs more to produce food, it costs more for families at the grocery store?

Mr. Johnson: Obviously, when something costs a set amount, that producer can't produce it cheaper than they're selling it for or they'll go out of business. So the more the red tape that this government is putting on farmers, it drives up the price of commodities. Those 'commodities' ultimately end up on our dinner

plates. And that is how they are driving up the price of your groceries.

MLA Naylor: In that last question, the actual farmers in the House had a good laugh, because they sit on our side of the House and they know that that member had no idea what he was talking about. So thanks to my farmer colleagues here.

* (11:20)

And I think I'll use this opportunity to just, you know, ask the member about economic growth and building jobs.

Like, what took place during their seven and a half years in government? Why did Manitoba see so many job losses, so many cuts to Crown corporations under their leadership instead of investments in good local jobs? That didn't happen under their leadership, so maybe the member can explain—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Johnson: Well, what I can explain is how, under this government, private jobs are plummeting. Private jobs are plummeting. Seniors—the only job growth they have is seniors having to take on another second or even a third job to try and pay for their groceries. And that's what this resolution is about, is driving down the price of groceries through reducing red tape.

Mr. Ewasko: It's interesting that the Minister for Transportation doesn't remember that her mentor, Greg Selinger, had increased the PST on various different goods and services to all Manitobans and then increased it by one point yet in 2013. And we actually took the PST down one whole point, which helps all people in all of Manitoba.

I'd like to ask the—my good friend and colleague, does the member believe that removing the PST from Slurpees or allowing families to keep thousands of dollars will have a larger impact on their pocketbooks, which one?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, removing the PST on rotisserie chickens and Slurpees is not something that's that popular in my area. For starters, you know, it doesn't come at the corner store, stores that are under a certain square footage. And members opposite in the government bench knows that this is benefiting their billionaire friends that own Walmart, Costco, all those large stores. And people that can't afford to drive, don't even own a vehicle to drive to those stores, still have to pay that PST at their local corner store.

MLA Naylor: You know, I sat in this Chamber for seven—well, for four years with the members when they were in government. I know that—I think what I'm most amazed by, by this conversation today, is how much they're not in their own message box as Conservative government. They're actually supposed to support reductions in taxes. It's actually their message box. They don't even know how to have this conversation anymore.

So on one hand, they're criticizing a previous leader of our party but, on the other hand, they are fighting against reducing the PST. It makes no sense.

And I wonder if the member can explain that? And where was his urgency—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Johnson: That was a great question on how that minister can concentrate—finally—on their portfolio.

Producers across Manitoba need to get their goods not only from their farm but to markets, and under that minister, the roads are falling apart in rural Manitoba. It is atrocious. Farmers are going through excessive repairs and their vehicles are falling apart due to potholes and just poor maintenance under that minister. She should be ashamed of herself.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions—or the time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Sat Sri Akal [*truth is God*], Honourable Speaker. Let's start with a happy note. Diljit Dosanjh is performing at Canada Life Centre today. On behalf of our government, I want to welcome him to Manitoba and Winnipeg. Jee Aayan nu, Veere. [*Welcome, Brother.*]

Okay, PMR. We are debating this PMR that is Calling on the Provincial Government to Prioritize the Struggles Facing Manitoba Families. Wonderful.

Thank you to the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) to create this opportunity to debate and talk about this wonderful issue—or issues that Manitobans are facing.

But, honestly, when I look at the wording of the PMR, I see a bias there. I see that it's biased. It ignores the actions taken by our government to address the issues listed in this very PMR. And it fails to recognize our government's progress on these issues.

And it doesn't suggest any—any—solid policy proposals. It does mention a few things, though. For example, it talks about rate of inflation being 3 per cent. Well, agreed. Data says that. But, under their watch, inflation was 8 per cent. Did they take any solid action to address that? I can't remember.

This PMR also talks about high food costs. We need to analyze what are the factors behind high food prices. The PMR also talks about agriculture's contribution to GDP. That's what we are proud of. Manitoba's GDP is supported by agriculture and our wonderful producers. That's why we are proud of them. We listen to them and we work together with them.

It also talks about jobs and workforce in agriculture: 81,000 Manitobans. Okay. So, when they were in charge, did they create jobs or cut jobs? That's my question. At one point, we are proud of the jobs that this sector creates in our province. On the other side, the very—these PC guys, they cut the jobs in agriculture and all other fields in our province.

Well, economic benefits to our economy? No doubt about it. No doubt about it that our economy benefits from agriculture. That's why we respect producers. We love them. We listen to them. We show up for them. And we stand together with them.

And we are repairing the damage done to the Agriculture Department and Manitoba producers by the previous government. They closed 20 agricultural and MASC offices. Manitobans, you need this gentle reminder. Never forget that.

I used to work in the Arborg Ag office. I used to sometimes work at the Teulon Agriculture office, which was a beautiful, beautiful space. It was supporting the economy. There were a few people working there. They would fill their cars with gas from Teulon. They would eat their lunches there.

Now that office is closed. And I remember that I was standing in front of that closed office and I posted a video on my socials and raised my voice against that action by the PC government. You can watch that video right now. Beausejour office is now closed to public. I used to work at the Beausejour office as well.

So this resolution talks about the struggles facing Manitoba families. Okay, let's list these struggles. Something very important that this resolution does not mention is that the people of Manitoba were facing the biggest struggle, which is dealing with the

PC government. So we got rid of that. That was the biggest struggle.

Then closures and cuts to health care. That is a struggle. And we are fixing the damage and we are hiring staff and we are opening ERs and expanding training and focusing retention of our health-care professionals.

* (11:30)

Another issue that our farmers, our producers, our hard-working Manitobans were facing was Crown land rent increases by the previous PC government and the damage done to the cattle industry. We have frozen Crown land rates for three years in a row and we are working to improve the business risk programs. That was the issue that was brought forward to me as critic for Agriculture when we were in opposition, and we were working along with Manitoba farmers from day one to address these issues: jobs and economy.

We are investing in Churchill. What does that mean? That means there would be more trade and more export of our grain and ag products to the world.

I agree, affordability is an issue facing Manitobans. That's why our government is working hard to make life better in Manitoba. Here is how. We have frozen hydro rates; that helps Manitobans. We are providing affordable child care. We are creating jobs by capital investment worth \$3.8 billion in Manitoba. We are opening new schools and new child-care centres, so that creates jobs. That helps everybody, including our farmers and producers. And we are addressing grocery prices, starting with a provincial study on grocery prices.

So I think my friend on the opposite side, it—he has oversimply—oversimplified how the pricing is done in the ag industry and in the business industry. It's not the farmers who set the price. I remember when farmers were not able to sell their cows at a rate that they desired; grocery pricing and meat pricing was going through the roof. There is something happening in between the farmers, the land and the customer. We need to hit that link as well. We are working to find out those issues and trying to address those.

There is a monopoly by big grocers in this society, in this market, in this province, in this country. And we need to focus on that. We need to create competition, we need to open more stores, we need to stand against the property controls by big grocers. Those big grocers do not let other grocers open their

shops beside theirs. That's where the problem is. The problem is not at the farm. The problem is in the market. *[interjection]* Let me speak, Sir. That's my turn to speak.

We are cutting payroll tax for businesses. That helps all the business owners, including our farmers. And we are providing Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit to our wonderful, wonderful Manitobans.

During the PCs' regime, they started selling our assets. They sold our share in Teshmont. They shut down Manitoba Hydro International. They cut 936 jobs across Crown corporations. They hiked rents through above-guideline rent increases, and they paid millions to billionaires. My friend just said that billionaires are our friends. How can billionaires be friends with NDP? Everybody knows that they are friends with PCs. That's why they write big cheques to their billionaire friends.

We do not support that. I do not support this incomplete resolution. We would keep working for our hard-working Manitobans and our farmers.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Again, it sounds to me like the members opposite want to open up a government-run grocery store, here.

So gives me a great pleasure to stand and talk about this resolution that was brought forward by our member from Interlake-Gimli in a—at a time when we are—experience a real affordability crisis and foodflation and the challenges that are confronting our agricultural sector because of it. And I want to acknowledge that we all understand that we're feeling those pressures.

Families are stretching every dollar further than they did just a few years ago. Parents are watching grocery bills rise while they keep up with rent and mortgage payments, utility costs, transportation expenses and all the other financial demands of daily life. Seniors living on fixed incomes are carefully budgeting between essentials. Young people are wondering whether they will ever be able to afford a home or build financial stability.

And these are real concerns. They deserve some serious discussion right here in this Legislature. And agriculture is deeply connected to those concerns because agriculture is deeply connected to Manitoba itself. It's one of the foundations of our provincial economy, supports jobs in rural communities, drives exports. It strengthens food security and contributes enormously to economic growth.

Manitoba farmers work extraordinarily hard under conditions that are often unpredictable and difficult. They face rising fuel costs, volatile markets, labour shortages, transportation challenges, weather uncertainty and of course, increasing global competition. So they deserve recognition and respect for the work that they do every single day on our farms here in Manitoba.

Manitoba's agriculture sector is not only an economic driver, it's part of our identity. Farmers and producers help feed this province. They feed this country and many parts of the world. From grain and oil seeds to livestock and food processing, agriculture supports thousands of Manitoba families and businesses. The numbers outlined in this resolution demonstrate the scale and importance of the sector right here in this province.

Food inflation is not unique to Manitoba. Across Canada and around the world jurisdictions have experienced food—rising food prices over the last several years. Global supply chain disruptions, geopolitical instability, transportation costs, labour shortages, climate-related events and rising input costs have all contributed to inflationary pressures. Farmers themselves are paying more for fertilizer, for feed, machinery, fuel and equipment. Those costs ripple through the entire supply chain.

And that doesn't mean governments should ignore the issue. On the contrary, it means governments must respond thoughtfully and strategically. We should be looking for ways to strengthen Manitoba's economy, improve competitiveness, support food production, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens where they exist. And farmers should not be spending excessive time navigating duplicative paperwork or unnecessary processes that make it harder to operate their business. Efficient government matters and predictable regulations matter, and more than importantly, timely approvals matter.

One area where I believe there's significant opportunity is food processing capacity within Manitoba. The resolution raises concerns about exporting raw agricultural products out of the province for processing. There is merit in discussing how Manitoba can capture more value-added economic activity right here at home.

When processing facilities are built in Manitoba, they create jobs. They support rural economic development. They strengthen supply chains. They create opportunities for innovation and export growth. They also help keep more economic benefits circulating

within our communities. That's why it's important for government, industry, educational institutions and economic development partners to work collaboratively to attract investment and encourage growth in value-added agriculture.

We also need to continue strengthening trade opportunities for Manitoba producers. Our farmers compete in global markets. Access to export markets is critical to long-term success. Transportation infrastructure, rail reliability, highways, border efficiency and market diversification all matter if Manitoba products are going to remain competitive internationally.

And, while we're talking about economic growth, we must remember the people at the centre of these issues, and that's Manitoba families. Families do not experience inflation through statistics. They experience it at the grocery checkout. They experience it when school lunches cost more. They experience it when they fill up their vehicle or pay heating bills during the Manitoba winter.

For many households, especially low-income households, even modest increases in food prices can create significant hardships. That reality requires government to focus not only on economic growth but on affordability and resilience.

* (11:40)

So, Honourable Speaker, I could go on and on about the great things in this resolution, but it's pretty self-explanatory how it can help affordability here in Manitoba. So I'll—with that, I'll let some of my other colleagues speak to this resolution.

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): I find it particularly interesting that, on a resolution that ends highlighting farmers, there is nothing to be said about agriculture, farmers, food affordability, coming from the opposite side. In fact, I—personally, I have great appreciation for our colleague for the Burrows, who, you know, a professor in a previous career, continues to be a professor today in teaching this entire Chamber how supply chains work.

And I think that there's a lot that we have to learn from the experts on this side of the Chamber who have experience working in agriculture, who have experience working right on their own farmland, folks who have followed the supply chain all the way from planting the crops, from fertilizing the land, all the way to the food coming into our grocery stores and coming back home with us.

The language—you know, you can even point to the language and just the way that they talk about farmers and about the supply chain itself, Honourable Speaker. The former failed Agriculture minister that moved this resolution himself, you know, said that things go just from wheat to bread that easily. Unfortunately, there is a lot in between, and there's a lot that happens before that as well.

Honourable Speaker, it's no wonder that they are so challenged with supply chain management, with the way that food goes from farm to table, because, like, you could even look just earlier today when they'd started speaking, they were so challenged with procedure in their own right.

Honourable Speaker, so, getting back to this regulation here, after listening for a little bit from the opposition here about how, apparently, Manitoba families are exclusive from Manitoba farmers, you know, the grain doesn't just become a loaf of bread, nor does—food prices don't skyrocket overnight.

The resolutions that they point to, or the preamble here in their resolution, include a whereas clause that says, Manitoba represents every segment of agriculture industry, yet leads the country in record-high food prices. Another one says, whereas under the provincial government—apparently this one—Manitoba has fallen behind neighbouring provinces in terms of securing new markets and trade deals for world-class agricultural products.

Again, Honourable Speaker, food prices do not skyrocket overnight. The alarm bells have been ringing, have—they've been sounding for too long. And, by the time that we'd been voted in, things were vastly, vastly chaotic.

Honourable Speaker, this is, you know—this has been an issue for working families for far longer than we've been in government. When it comes to their seven and a half years, you know, they didn't run the province, they ran it into the ground. They—even in their own resolution, there's so much hate that they have on Manitoba and the way things stand today that it's no wonder they're no longer governing.

Honourable Speaker, our government has an entirely different approach, where we understand that we don't exist within a vacuum, where we don't exist in a world where we're not affected by global chaos and global crises. In fact, if they had thought a little bit more intentionally about this resolution, they would have done a little bit more research and found out that present-day conflict in the Middle East has

resulted in a vast amount of fertilizer nutrients being blocked from the rest of the world.

Fertilizer can be extremely expensive, Honourable Speaker, and, now, because of the Stait [*phonetic*] of Hormuz being blocked—being blocked by someone that, frankly, they actually thanked not too long ago—the fertilizer costs could result in something unseen ever before in our entire world.

And so we are, you know, so poised here in Manitoba to have access to things like potash, to have access to things like rich soil and sustainable solution-based mines not too far from Russell.

And, Honourable Speaker, they continue to take for granted the good work that's actually happening here in Manitoba. They take for granted the very own communities that they're apparently elected to represent right now. And, instead, what they do is, when there is someone with experience, like the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar), speaking about his experience in the agriculture industry, like when we have the esteemed Minister of Agriculture, the member for Dauphin (Mr. Kostyshyn), spewing his knowledge, they have nothing to back up—*[interjection]*

They have nothing—again, my point—they have nothing to back up their own resolution except heckles, except shock and, you know, exacerbation with their own record, Honourable Speaker.

Because there's so much good work that we are doing, because we believe in Manitoba, unlike the members opposite.

Honourable Speaker, that's why our NDP government, unlike the previous PC government that had no clear plan to support producers while lowering costs for families—and, in fact, they just cut and took, like, frankly, frankly, they took so many things away from Manitobans.

They actually are the ones that, in the first place, put the carbon tax on farmers themselves, the carbon tax that they complain about, the carbon tax that they, you know, are crying out to their constituents or making up stories to say—

An Honourable Member: Oh, that's not parliamentary.

MLA Dela Cruz: I rescind that if that is unparliamentary.

But, Honourable Speaker, they have no merit when they're coming to this Chamber to talk about

farmers. Frankly, they are the ones that put the tax on farmers. They're the ones that, you know, closed so many things here in Manitoba.

And what they closed, we're opening. They shuttered housing units for Manitoba families. They shut down emergency rooms for Manitoba families. They shut the door on farmers, like the member for Burrows mentioned, who needed help in Teulon, in Beausejour, in many more communities.

And what we're doing here is we're reopening services that they closed. We've expanded access to services by opening new Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation centres in Virden and Shoal Lake, now supporting over 1,000 producers each year and helping reduce administrative burden.

So, while our incredible colleague for Burrows was being heckled by someone who was choked up representing Springfield-Ritchot, full of farmers and agricultural producers yet knowing absolutely nothing about the process in and of itself, we, here on the NDP benches, are doing things like supporting the next generation of farmers, the next generation of folks who will put food on our tables, the next generation of folks who historically were done wrong by members opposite.

Because, instead of allowing them to charge what they rightfully deserve for food, they allowed corporate conglomerates, big grocers, to instead upcharge people at the consumer level. Meanwhile, the people who are actually taking the food from the land, who are actually harvesting our meats, our poultry, et cetera, are making hardly enough to put food on their own table, Honourable Speaker.

And so what we're doing for this next generation is we're increasing the Young Farmer Rebate eligibility from \$400,000 to \$425,000, Honourable Speaker, and lowering upfront financing costs, which will help more young Manitobans get their start in agriculture.

Honourable Speaker, when I was in high school, I learned a whole lot about how young people were flocking to the city, flocking to urban communities so that they could get jobs. This policy in and of itself will keep young people in rural communities in ways that members opposite don't want them to hear about.

Honourable Speaker, through Budget 2026, we are also investing in programs like AgriInvest, AgriInsurance and the Wildlife Damage Compensation to help producers manage risk, protect their operations and keep food production strong in Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, again, we do not exist within a vacuum. Believe it or not, the role of provincial government does include intergovernmental affairs. And there is a lot that we can do as a provincial government here in Manitoba to leverage what, frankly, people down south, American governments, you know, they actually value. Like, for example, we are, you know, poised to be agricultural leaders. We're also poised to have cultural centres here in Manitoba.

* (11:50)

But going back to—seeing that my time is actually already, unfortunately, expiring here, going back to this resolution, I just want the bottom line to be, the PCs took rural communities for granted. They continue to take rural communities for granted. It's not even in the name of their own resolution. And, unfortunately, their entitlement runs so deep that they're failing to acknowledge this today and erasing the farmer experience from all supply chains that are happening as we speak in this global—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): Really pleased to get up and talk about agriculture. Some of you may not know this about me, but I grew up on a dairy farm. I know what it's about to work hard, to get up in the morning, to care for your animals, to see the hours put into making something like that work.

I'll have to say, Honourable Speaker, growing up in a rural community, growing up on the farm—nothing better. Nothing better about seeing the fruits of your labour come to fruition and then being able to make a living on it. And it's just really great to know that that's the fabric that keeps our province together. And it's why I'm so proud to be the Minister for Municipal and Northern Relations, because I get to visit all of these communities, keep in touch with what keeps Manitobans humble.

Living in a small community or even a larger community in some of these rural areas, it comes with a lot of gifts, a lot of blessings that you have, to be able to grow up and know everyone. To look out for each other, to help each other build your community is something great. And, you know, that's what motivates me as a minister, to continue our work to invest in the agriculture sector, invest in the communities that support them. Because without communities that thrive, without infrastructure in those communities, we're going to have people not be able to stay, not be able to live in the communities that they built.

And that's why I was so excited, you know, when we had our ability to go from community to community and to get up here today and remind our—my esteemed colleagues from across the aisle about some of the investments we made in their communities. You know, obviously, Portage la Prairie has a really strong agricultural history. It's a city on the rise, has great leadership and investments in agriculture: Simplot, Pickett, and they got great producing land there. But what they have great people—they have their young people in their communities that are looking for reasons to stay in Portage la Prairie.

That's why \$5 million for a fieldhouse for the RM of Portage, the city of Portage la Prairie and the community of Southport is so important. And I look forward to the MLA for Portage la Prairie to sing our praises when it opens. I just think it's a great thing for that community.

You know, looking across to who it would have been my MLA when I was growing up—the MLA for Riding Mountain. He's a big winner when minister—the minister for municipal relations heads to his communities. I think of Ellice-Archie with a new fire truck; new fire truck for Hamiota, vet services expanded in Minnedosa, which serves not only his constituency, but the constituency for Agassiz.

And, you know, it's because that's what keeps communities strong: it's the people. The people of Manitoba is what makes this place great; it's what makes this a place where we want to thrive, where we want to grow, where we want to showcase ourselves to everyone. And then, you know, you head a little bit south, and when we talk about the Steinbach region, the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth), big winner in Manitoba GRO; \$3 million for an arena in Grunthal, right? That's a pretty great place to go and to get your community together to say, hey, you don't have to go to the big city to get a nice arena. We can do that right here.

And, you know, going to the Interlake, beautiful, beautiful part of this—of the province. I know a lot of people are heading up there right now to see some garter snakes at the Narcisse snake pits—just a beautiful space. It might creep some people out. *[interjection]* Yes, I'm not sure. I'm not sure if that's for everyone, but it's for me, right? I loved growing up to be able to chase the species and the ecosystems around probably some of the best spaces in the province.

But I'm referencing the Interlake. You know, active transportation in Stonewall, about a million

dollars to build that up, to close that loop. Now my nephew's moving to Stonewall because it's a great community. So kudos to Mayor Smith, kudos to that community for investing in that community and making it a great place to live.

And we just want to be partners in making sure that happens, because Stonewall is surrounded by agricultural producers who want to stay where they grew up. They want to have their kids go to high school and just have their grandmothers and grandfathers be taken care of. And we're going to work with Stonewall and make sure that those things happen.

Head a little further north. We're building a personal-care home in Arborg, right? That's a growing community with strong manufacturing, a strong agricultural community. Kids just like me, growing up learning how to drive a tractor and pack some silage and maybe work the stooker and pile those square bales. It just—I mean, who doesn't love getting up in the morning and driving on their dirt bike to just drive that property. That's what I did.

It was just an amazing. And in Arborg—I love baseball, right? I love baseball. I still—I coached it. I was—I was good at all sports, but not excellent at any. And baseball was one I was probably really good at and played in Binscarth. I was a Binscarth Oriole. It was great.

But in Arborg, they're going to get to play on a new field because of our investment: \$1.2 million to play on a new field, beside the personal-care home. Who wouldn't want to live in Arborg and farm in Arborg when you have those facilities being invested in by this government? I think it's a great thing. I think it's a great thing to show people that people matter and that's what we're doing.

You know, I want to keep going on this excellent tour. We'll go to Springfield. In Springfield we are investing a million dollars in active transportation. You know, I was hoping to get a clap from the MLA for Springfield-Ritchot about that million-dollar investment, but I guess he's in the PC pasture there—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I hate to interrupt the minister when he's having so much fun, but perhaps he could bring his comments back to what we're supposed to be debating here this morning.

Mr. Simard: So what I uttered there was pasture. That's agricultural, isn't it? And it's—and we're—we'll continue to build—and, Honourable Speaker, thank you for that guidance, but I'll just continue to say—it's about building these communities in agriculture sectors, to make sure that the farmers and that the families that depend on agriculture have great communities to live in. And I can't think of a better community to live in at Springfield and Dugald and there to be able to go around on active transportation safely.

You know, and community of—in the community in the RM of Brokenhead, they need to get together for a social, right? After a hard day of labour at harvest time, you've got to get together and you've got to have a party. I mean, these harvests, whether it's in Ste. Rose, the big day, or the Beef & Barley in Russell. But I know in the RM of Brokenhead they got to get together. But who wants a leaky roof? That's why we're fixing it. That's why we're putting in all that kind of dollars in the RM of Brokenhead. And the MLA for Lac du Bonnet isn't cheering for something like that. You know, a harvest party, fall supper, in the hall in the RM of Brokenhead, you don't want a leaky roof, and we're fixing it.

And, you know, I was hoping to see the MLA for Borderland. We're making a lot of investments there. A lot of investments there on fire safety, right? And right now we know it's pretty dry out there. Just around Brandon there was some grass fires where we had mutual aid; make sure to protect those farmers' properties, to make sure that their properties don't burn, to make sure that—

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 12 o'clock, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m. today.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 7, 2026

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