



**Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature**

**of the**

**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**

**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report  
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey  
Speaker*



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

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

Tuesday, May 19, 2026

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

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

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**The Speaker:** Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**Theo Osborne**

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** Today, during what is Treaty Week here in Manitoba, I rise to affirm our government's commitment to continue building a province and an education system that reflects the histories, voices and rights of every child, advances equity and safety for every learner and strengthens the shared future we are building together.

In Manitoba, Indigenous education is not a component of learning, it is foundational. This is why our government, in partnership with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, has mandated for all teachers in Manitoba to be trained in Treaty Education for All.

It's why our Indigenous Excellence team continues working with and in community with our education partners, deepening the work of Mamàhtawisiwin, the Indigenous education policy framework. And it's why we continue to work diligently towards the release of a comprehensive anti-racism policy directive for all school divisions.

Honourable Speaker, our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has been very clear, and I quote: My view is if you're a child who has experienced racism, if you're somebody who is expressing your gender identity in a certain way and people are hating you for that, (1) you should be free from that, (2) you should be able to call it out, and (3) you should forgive and accept the apology if somebody does try to atone and make amends. End quote.

But, Honourable Speaker, it's not only the Premier that we can look to for this kind of leadership. We can look to the youth.

At this time, I would like to recognize a young champion. With us in the gallery is Theo Osborne,

accompanied by his mother, Melissa, his dad, Edward, and his sister, Talise. Theo carries the beauty, resilience and courage of his ancestors and his home community of Pimicikamak Cree Nation.

As a grade 6 student, Theo's education includes ceremony, particularly sweat lodge and sun dance. As a distinguished traditional grass dancer and an aspiring chicken dancer, Theo's spirit of dedication and humility reflect how we should relate to one another and the land. And through the length of his braided hair, we learn of his love and dedication to his grandfather and his connection to his culture.

Honourable Speaker, from time to time we may forget that we have oh so much more in common than we do that makes us different. And what's worse, we might even use those differences to try and hurt one another. But thanks to the example set by individuals like Theo, we are reminded that we always have an opportunity to learn, grow and do better.

We're also reminded that education serves as the greatest source of light from the darkness of racism. When we can speak and accept the truth, we can reconcile and heal from our past and truly advance together up the mountain that the late Honourable Murray Sinclair, Mazina Giizhik-iban, described for us.

The position of this government is to walk with everyone together on this journey. We recognize that our greatest resource is our relationship to one another, from government to government, community to community, from person to person. When one of us hurts, all of us hurts. And when one of us rises, we all rise as one Manitoba.

Today we acknowledge Theo and his family for their leadership and for leading with hope, forgiveness and with pride in yourselves and who you are.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I invite all my colleagues to stand and honour Theo Osborne.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** I, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative team on this side, welcome Theo and his family, of course, to the gallery today, especially during treaty education week as well, Honourable Speaker.

Today I rise to speak about the deep, troubling incident that Theo had to endure at his school last month.

No child should ever go to school fearing violence, bullying or discrimination. Schools must be places of safety, respect and opportunity; where every student feels valued and supported, regardless of their background or identity.

The reports surrounding this incident are deeply disturbing. Allegations of racially motivated bullying and violence directed at a young Indigenous student are unacceptable and have no place in Manitoba schools or in our society. Other issues, like meth and fentanyl on school sites, the ability for strangers to grab children in school bathrooms, among many instances of bullying, are also deeply disturbing but an unfortunate reality under this current government.

Our previous government introduced the mandatory Respect in School and Respect in Sport programs, working with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection and other advocates, along with Mamàhtawisiwin, which was an Indigenous policy framework introduced by our previous PC government to promote Indigenous excellence in schools. Our government put these programs and frameworks in place because we take preventative approaches.

This government, the Kinew government, unfortunately, have to take reactionary approaches. Why is this minister only reacting instead of preventing? What did Kelly Barkman do as a provincial adviser for the Hanover School Division Board of Trustees? That's right, Honourable Speaker; we don't actually know.

Every child deserves the chance to learn in a safe environment, free from intimidation and hate. Parents deserve confidence that when they send their children to school, their well-being will be protected and concerns will be taken seriously.

I want to recognize the courage shown by Theo and his family in speaking publicly about their experience. Sharing these difficult experiences are not easy, but it has started important conversations across Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, at this time, I'd also like to pass along condolences to the Hudson family and the community members of Poplar River, where the tragic loss of six-year-old Veronica Hudson had happened over the weekend.

To Theo and his family, we extend our support and wish him and them strength and healing in the months ahead. Let this be a moment where we recommit ourselves as legislators, teachers, parents, community leaders to building schools and communities grounded in respect, safety and opportunity for every child.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Further ministerial statements?

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Postal Worker Recognition

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** Honourable Speaker, I rise today to recognize the hard work of our incredible postal workers in Rossmere and right across Manitoba. At a time when many neighbourhoods are facing the loss of door-to-door delivery, it is more important than ever to recognize the essential role that letter carriers play in our communities.

For more than 100 years, letter carriers have been a steady and trusted presence in our neighbourhoods. Through snowstorms and heat waves, they are the familiar faces we see in our communities each day, working to keep Canadians connected. They build relationships with seniors, they support local businesses and they connect us to one another in ways both big and small.

And in a province as vast as Manitoba, postal services are more than just a service; they are a lifeline. Postal workers deliver everyday essentials like diapers, life-saving medications and life-giving birthday cards from grandma to each and every corner of our province at a cost that Manitobans can reliably afford.

But postal workers have delivered more than just parcels for Canadians. For decades, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers has fought for fair wages and benefits and stronger health and safety protections that have resonated far beyond the postal system. Advances like paid maternity leave, bargained in 1981 and later adopted by the federal government as a benefit owed to all Canadians—just one of the major advancements that CUPW made for women and towards pay equity in our country.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers have also established a child-care fund so that their members, of which I once was, so very proudly, can access affordable, high-quality child care while they go and work and serve their communities.

Honourable Speaker, very few people work harder than our postal workers. It is my sincere hope that for many years to come, the people of Rossmere will continue to see those trusted letter carriers delivering mail door to door with the dedication, reliability and care that have long defined their service.

Let us all express our deepest appreciation for the postal workers of CUPW Local 856, representing postal workers across Manitoba, whose commitment and resilience exemplify the very best of Manitoba. Through their service, our history lives, connections endure and the values of fairness and solidarity are renewed in every single neighbourhood that they serve.

\* (13:40)

I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing Sean Tugby, Myron May, Lesley Clarke, Ernie Boily and Reece Houston and the postal workers across Manitoba that serve us every single day.

#### **Agassiz Constituency**

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** Agassiz constituency is made up of strong communities, dedicated families, farmers, small-business owners, volunteers and community leaders who work every day to make Manitoba a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Agriculture producers, entrepreneurs to business owners, professionals and tradespeople, the residents of Agassiz represent the very best of Manitoba values: hard work, resilience and community spirit.

Agriculture is the backbone of the region. Producers are facing higher input costs, uncertainty in global markets, rising transportation expenses and increasing fuel costs, and these people deserve a government that understands the realities they face and supports growth instead of creating more barriers.

Families are facing challenges accessing affordable and reliable child care. A lack of child-care spaces makes it harder for parents to return to work and support their families.

There are incredible volunteers and many organizations, but with the rising costs, it is difficult for many of these organizations to operate, such as Handi-Transit services. They have not received increased funding despite growing operational costs and increasing demand.

Health care remains a major concern for residents. Communities need better access to services, including the need of a CT scanner at the new

Neepawa hospital. Rural families deserve timely access to quality health care close to home.

Infrastructure remains a serious issue with highways 352, 5 and 34 all in need of repair and maintenance. Safe, reliable roads are critical for producers, businesses, families and emergency services, yet it continues to be neglected.

Manitobans are struggling. Families are finding it difficult to afford fuel, and for some, even the cost of registering a vehicle has become a growing financial burden.

The Manitoba jobs agreement will hurt local tradespeople and businesses by increasing project costs. Rural Manitoba businesses should be given opportunities to grow and succeed, not pushed out by government policy.

The people of Agassiz are proud, independent and deeply connected to their communities—

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**The Speaker:** Is there leave for the honourable member to finish her statement?

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**The Speaker:** I hear a no.

#### **Elder Jack Robinson**

**MLA Eric Redhead (Thompson):** I rise today to honour Elder Jack Robinson, a Cree Elder whose life is woven into the very foundation of Thompson.

Elder Robinson, whose spirit name is Ōpāpatēwih-nāpēw, or Heatwave Man, he was born in Cross Lake and raised in Norway House. At 16 years old, he came north looking for work, arriving before Thompson was Thompson, before nickel was discovered, when the place we now call home was still tents and camps. He worked hard physical jobs, including as a driller, and helped build the city from the ground up.

From there, he went on to serve as a child welfare worker, and for more than 25 years has been part of the Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre, where he has served as a cultural support co-ordinator, alcohol and drug counsellor and traditional herbalist, alongside being an excellent mentor for our youth.

In an era where traditional knowledge faces the constant threat of being lost, Elder Jack Robinson

remains an accessible, passionate storyteller to youth and adults. He generously shares his ancestral legends and teachings so future generations can 'understood'—understand the profound moral lessons embedded within our oral history and advocates strongly for Indigenous peoples' customs and traditions to be expressed loud and proud.

Honourable Speaker, Elder Jack Robinson is a living bridge between Thompson's humble beginnings and its hopeful future. He embodies our city's very spirit, and it is a great honour for me to honour a man who has inspired us Thompsonites for many, many decades.

I humbly ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing this remarkable Elder for his outstanding leadership and selfless dedication to the people of Thompson.

Thanks, Honourable Speaker.

#### **Lac du Bonnet Constituency**

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** It is truly an honour and a privilege to represent the incredible constituency of Lac du Bonnet. Our region boasts stunning landscapes, offering endless opportunities for outdoor activities. From hiking along scenic trails to fishing in our pristine lakes, the natural beauty here is unmatched.

We are also home to numerous cultural and historical treasures, including the St-Georges museum, Whiteshell museum, Whitemouth museum, East Braintree museum and the Pioneer Village Museum, also known as the Brokenhead-Beausejour Pioneer Village Museum. These institutions preserve our rich heritage and educate future generations, thanks to the support and funding from the former Progressive Conservative government.

For golf enthusiasts, Lac du Bonnet is a true paradise, featuring exceptional courses such as Victoria Beach, Grand Pines, Pine Falls, Mars hills, Granite Hills, Black Bear, Pinawa, Falcon Lake and Rivers Edge in Beausejour. Each course offers unique experiences and fosters community spirit.

As your MLA, I am committed to advocating for the needs and aspirations of our residents. Together, we can enhance the quality of life in Lac du Bonnet through collaboration and community development initiatives, despite what is happening with the unaffordable times under this current Kinew government.

We know that real cost savings and real bumps to the positive for individuals, like raising the basic

personal exemption to \$30,000. We're hoping that the Kinew government today will see their way through the trees and bump the basic personal exemption so that every Manitoban can save more and more money.

Honourable Speaker, I am grateful for the trust that they have placed in me. Let us celebrate the beauty, history and spirit of Lac du Bonnet as we work together toward a brighter future for our community.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

#### **The Leaf**

**MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo):** Honourable Speaker, today, it is my joy to recognize one of the true gems of Tuxedo, The Leaf at Assiniboine Park.

Since opening its doors, The Leaf has become far more than an architectural landmark; it is a gathering place that brings people together from across Winnipeg and across Manitoba.

Inside, visitors journey through four stunning biomes, from the lush Hartley and Heather Richardson Tropical Biome, home to Canada's largest indoor waterfall, to the Mediterranean Biome, the Babs Asper Display House and the Shirley Richardson Butterfly Garden, a special favourite of my own. These spaces allow Manitobans to experience the richness of global plant life year-round, even in the cold depths of Manitoba winters.

Surrounding The Leaf are 30 acres of public gardens and green space that evolve with the seasons, offering accessible outdoor beauty to everyone who visits. Beyond the gardens, The Leaf hosts workshops, educational programs, community events and cultural gatherings that help people of all ages connect with nature and especially with each other.

Honourable Speaker, The Leaf reflects what makes Tuxedo special: community, culture, learning and shared experience. It is a place where people gather, celebrate and find inspiration through art—through the art of being together.

Please join me in celebrating The Leaf and the dedicated staff and volunteers that make such a vibrant and welcoming place. It is truly a point of pride for Tuxedo and for all of Manitoba.

Thank you.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Manitoba's LNG Export Project Operational Timeline Concerns

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Before I get into my question, a lot's happened since last week when we sat here. I want to congratulate the Niverville Nighthawks for being the MJHL and Centennial Cup champions in the Junior A.

Congratulations to the Niverville Nighthawks.

Now on to some sad news. The Premier wants you to believe that he will be the fastest person in the history of this planet to export LNG, in just three years. It took nine years to build the Alaska pipeline; it took 13 years to build the pipeline from Dawson Creek, BC, to Kitimat, BC. But this Premier wants you to believe he can do it in three years.

\* (13:50)

No one is believing this Premier. Alberta just signed a deal that would take them up to seven years to build, and from now, that would estimate 2034 completion dates. But this Kinew government wants you to think he can do it in three years.

Will the Premier come clean today and tell Manitobans he has—

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

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Honourable Speaker, I want to congratulate the Niverville Nighthawks for winning the Centennial Cup. They're the best Junior A team in the country and the first MJ champion in decades to win a national title. I also want to congratulate the Flin Flon Bombers for winning the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League, which means that the best team in Manitoba and the best team in Saskatchewan are both located right here in our great province.

But, of course, if you listen to the member opposite, it's not possible. Could never happen. Don't even get out of bed because why even try?

So, just like Niverville and just like Flin Flon who said, we're not going to listen to the haters, we're going to get it done—so, too, the province of Manitoba, bring on a brighter future.

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

### Economic Development Projects Creation of Crown-Indigenous Corporation

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** On top of unrealistic timelines is the fact that this Premier claimed he wanted to have Indigenous consultation and buy-in and that he would create an Indigenous-Crown corp or he would not proceed.

Well, almost three years into the Premier's mandate, there is no Indigenous-Crown corporation. But what he did manage to do was start up a government private company pretending to act as a Crown corporation without any passed legislation in this House.

A government-owned company with no accountability makes no sense, does it, Manitoba? And that's right. This Premier is circumventing legislation. He has not brought anything forward that would legislate an Indigenous-Crown corporation.

So the question to the Premier is: Why is he misleading Manitobans and why is he circumventing legislation of an Indigenous-Crown corporation to push through projects that he will control?

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

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** So, apparently, the first question was complete nonsense, because he's criticizing the process that we're using to build the Port of Churchill. So quit wasting our time and get out of the way. While you're at it, quit wasting our time on the budget bill. I'm trying to make groceries—

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

Just remind members to always address their comments through the Chair.

The honourable leader of the—the honourable First Minister.

**Mr. Kinew:** So, again, when we look at the track record on that side of the House, every single one of them cheered on a campaign to target the victims of a serial killer. They ran on not searching the landfill.

We showed that they were wrong, we showed it was possible and we brought dignity to those families. So I wouldn't listen to too much that they have to say about anything Indigenous, including responses to ministerial statements.

On the other hand, we are working together drafting legislation with the input of Indigenous governments in Manitoba. I look forward to introducing that tout de suite.

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

**Mr. Khan:** A process, a legal process must be followed in this Legislature. The Premier might be comfortable with breaking the law; in this Chamber, we're not. Legislation has to be passed in order for a Crown corporation to be formed. There is no legislation before this House. Therefore, there is no Crown corporation. Therefore, the timeline of three years to export LNG is completely fabricated and unrealistic.

The Premier is not telling Manitobans the reality of the situation we're in, and that is Manitoba's economy is ranked dead last. This Premier has no plan to export LNG in the next three years.

Will he come clean to Manitobans today and tell them that he has no plans to grow our economy, no plans for Churchill and there is no Crown-Indigenous-Crown corporation in Manitoba?

**Mr. Kinew:** We've got the strongest economy and the lowest unemployment rate in the entire country; I'll table the documents for the members opposite.

And we're going to keep growing the economy, including by building the Port of Churchill. While the members opposite say we can't, and they want to have their ball and go home, we remind them that the ball doesn't belong to you. The future belongs to the people of Manitoba and those who are going to work hard together to build it.

So, while they're busy trying to find new avenues of hate, we're trying to find new avenues of unity to build a bright future together for all of our children.

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I'd just remind the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition that saying things such as, will the Premier come clean—I've cautioned members previously about that. It's very close to suggesting that someone is not telling the truth, so I would caution the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **Property Taxes Increase Concerns**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** With an answer like that, it's no wonder Manitobans do not trust this Premier, because they are sick and tired of the spin job that he spews every single day to the camera. Every day, this government ignores our questions, makes personal attacks, heckles and pretends that a couple pennies off of your junk food will make all the difference.

I spoke to a single mother living in Lagimodière over the weekend that shared that her property tax bill went up hundreds of dollars last year and hundreds of dollars again this year. After all the NDP Ponzi scams of rebates, she's paying more than \$600 in education and property taxes than she ever did under the previous PC government.

Under this NDP, property taxes in Waverley, Lagimodière, Tuxedo, Kirkfield Park, Fort Richmond and McPhillips have all increased.

Will the Premier tell Manitobans that he has—will he apologize to Manitobans for taking—

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

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** I'm sorry that the Leader of the Opposition is so full of darkness and negativity; so yucky all the time, geez.

Spring is here in Manitoba. The sun is starting to shine. The lowest unemployment rate in the country. And we're following up cutting the gas tax—which gives us lower gas prices than Saskatchewan, for the record, even though they have a refinery—by taking all the tax off at the grocery store. This is a no-brainer after Manitobans have been asking for help with grocery prices for years.

Who are the only people in Manitoba who don't want us to make grocery prices lower? The members of the PC caucus. So we're looking forward to them renewing their Netflix subscriptions and polishing up their LinkedIn profiles as they spend the entire summer here debating our great budget bill to make your grocery prices cheaper.

And you know what the LinkedIn part is about: when they have to seek new employment.

#### **Basic Personal Income Tax Rate Exemption Increase Request**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** This is not a serious Premier: all jokes, insults, laughing, smiling at the camera, dismissing Manitobans' needs, dismissing the need of your family—[interjection]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** —to have more money in your pocket to pay your bills.

This Premier wants to laugh in the Chamber about his PST junk food tax. He thinks that saving you pennies off a bag of chips or a can of pop is going to make your life more affordable. On this side of the House, we want real change for Manitobans.

The Premier might not notice how much Manitobans are struggling, but they are, so we proposed increasing the basic personal exemption to \$30,000, giving Manitobans up to \$3,000 back. He refuses to do so, but will he compromise? Will he increase the basic personal exemption to \$21,000, giving Manitobans at least \$1,000 back? He wants to save you money on junk food. We want to give you \$1,000 back.

Will he do the right thing today—

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

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Honourable Speaker, the budget we brought forward this year has record investments in health care. It has huge funding for schools. It also takes the tax off of all groceries in Manitoba. It builds the Highway 1 twinning project and the Carberry overpass on the Trans-Canada. There's so much good news in this budget.

\* (14:00)

The members opposite, it's very clear, do not understand the basics of public finance. They're proposing \$1 billion in cuts to government funding. That means firing every single nurse in the province of Manitoba. It is completely ridiculous.

That's why we don't take them seriously. We take you and your family seriously. Ask yourself if you want grocery prices to be lower, and if you answer yes, then ask the PCs why they don't let our budget bill pass today.

**Mr. Khan:** Let's recap what the Premier said. Health care is worse under his NDP government. Education property taxes have gone up a billion dollars. This NDP government has taken over \$1 billion of increased taxes from your back pockets, page 7 of their budget. And now he proposes a junk food tax, saving you pennies on a bag of chips or a can of pop.

As a direct result of this NDP government, families are now paying more. Families that own their houses are seeing record increases to education property taxes. A junk food tax saving you pennies will not make up for the hundreds of dollars—if not thousands of dollars—this NDP government has taken from you.

Will the Premier do what is best for Manitobans today: put all the jokes, all the laughing, all the smiling aside and support our call for a basic personal exemption and give Manitobans back more money that they deserve?

**Mr. Kinew:** In—Honourable Speaker, in addition to taking the tax off of all groceries, in addition to record funding for hospitals and schools, in addition to simple things like new plastic health cards, this year's budget also has the lowest deficit in all of Canada.

Now the members opposite want us to go back in time. They want us to go back to a \$2-billion deficit that they left us on the way out. They want us to go back to hatred amongst Manitobans, pitting neighbour against neighbour. And apparently, now, they also want us to go back to a miserable, miserly time of not smiling. What?

This is not a serious opposition. You have in front of you a plan to save money at the grocery store, save money at the gas station, invest in health care and education and to have the lowest deficit in the country. Who would oppose that? Only the members opposite. The rest of Manitoba—

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

### Manitoba's Inflation Rate Impact on Cost of Living

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** The numbers are in and they are not good. Manitoba is leading the country in inflation under the Kinew government. Statistics Canada's CPI index is reporting Manitoba's inflation rose to 4.3 per cent in April, the highest in the country and well above the national average. Food inflation is the highest in the country at 4.9 per cent. Manitoba is trending in the wrong direction as the cost of living is getting increasingly worse under the NDP.

Why has the NDP allowed Manitoba's cost of living to become the worst in the country?

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** Honourable Speaker, the only people in the province standing between Manitobans and more money in their pockets are the members opposite. They're stopping Manitobans from getting a PST cut off all groceries across the province. They're standing in the way of an increased renters tax credit. They're standing in the way of higher education property tax benefits for Manitobans.

We know that, for years, they didn't take action. We know that they don't have a focus on everyday, regular Manitobans. This team does.

We ask the members opposite today: Will they finally stop with the games and get on board, support BITSA so we can put more money into Manitobans' pockets July 1, yes or no?

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

**Basic Personal Income Taxes  
Call for Indexation and Exemption Increase**

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** We're willing to compromise. The question is whether the minister and his boss are willing to compromise.

We want to save Manitobans more money, more of their hard-earned money in their pockets. And that's because Winnipeg is becoming more expensive than places like Toronto and Vancouver. We have higher provincial income taxes, higher education property taxes; all the while, utilities, gas and food continue to skyrocket under the Kinew government. The NDP cancelled indexation on income taxes, being the only province in Canada to do so.

With Manitoba now having the highest inflation in the country, Manitobans deserve real financial relief now.

Will the NDP do the right thing, increase the basic personal exemption and bring back indexation—

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

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** Honourable Speaker, if they want to help Manitobans, get out of the way and pass the BITSA bill. Do it today.

Look, a lot of important work has been done for lowering costs for Manitobans. We brought in a permanent 10 per cent gas tax cut that's helping save Manitobans money every single day. We've increased the renters tax credit that the members opposite cut, making life more expensive for renters. We've got the biggest education property tax credits going out the door in—ever in Manitoba history, thanks to the work we're doing, again, to focus on supporting lowering costs for Manitobans.

And now, with our most recent BITSA bill, we're proposing to take the PST off all food in grocery stores, including bringing in other important benefits like taking away costs for transit for students—

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

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

**Mrs. Stone:** This NDP government is the only government in Canada that is not recognizing the very real inflationary pressures that are hitting Manitobans as this cost of living is getting worse under the government. They clearly don't understand that because they

have not increased the basic personal exemption, they removed indexation that accounts for those inflationary pressures at the same time as food, fuel, utilities and property taxes are some of the highest in Canada.

It's clear that Manitoba is in a very real cost-of-living crisis and it is getting worse—not better—under the Kinew government. And the numbers today from the CPI index tell us that story. The NDP has provided no affordability relief.

Will they do the right thing, come to the table and—

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

**MLA Sala:** Honourable Speaker, we did bring in a broad middle-class tax cut: We increased the basic personal exemption and we changed brackets so that less of Manitobans' income is taxed at those higher levels.

We know there's important work to be done to continue to bring more affordability to Manitobans, and we know that they continue to be faced with food affordability challenges. That's why we've done things like freeze the price of a one-litre jug of milk. That's why we've done things like bring in more grocery competition. That's why we're taking on predatory pricing when it comes to groceries.

But we know that Manitobans still need that direct, targeted relief. So, again, there's only one group of folks in this whole province standing against that tax relief, taking that PST off groceries.

Will the member opposite—will that entire team—stand today, do the right thing and finally do something in support of Manitobans?

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

**School Division Taxes  
Request for New Funding Model**

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Well, it's obvious, Honourable Speaker, that the Finance Minister has not spoken to the Families Minister because the Families Minister has called Estimates today, so we're not talking about the BITSA bill today.

Honourable Speaker, the Louis Riel School Division says—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** —that their financial position has eroded. This is why they have increased their property taxes by 43 per cent over the last three years. PC government had funded Louis Riel by \$23.2 million. Under the NDP, only \$12 million over the last three years.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans just can't afford this Kinew government.

Will the Minister for Education come up with a fair funding model today for all Manitoba?

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** It gives me great pleasure to rise in this Chamber again and to talk about the new fair funding model that the Manitoba NDP has introduced here in Manitoba.

After seven and a half years of cuts and chaos under the PCs, Manitobans and the education sector now know that, every single year, every single school division can rely on steady and predictable increases to their budgets.

So—and why do we do that, Honourable Speaker? We do it for teachers and we do it for kids. Since we've come into government, in just the first two years, more than 800 new teachers teaching here in Manitoba, more than 1,600 new educational assistants, clinicians—

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

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, on a supplementary question.

\* (14:10)

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, once again, Honourable Speaker, it just shows the total disconnect that this minister has with the grassroots within the educational world here in Manitoba.

Matter of fact, I don't know why that the member from Transcona doesn't stand up and actually have a conversation with the Minister of Education and explain what it's like to be in its classroom day in and day out.

River East Transcona, Honourable Speaker, is raising their school taxes over the last three years by the tune of 36 per cent. Under this NDP, NDP in the last three years have given River East Transcona School Division less than half of what we gave in our last three years.

Again, Honourable Speaker, Manitobans can't afford this Kinew government.

Will she actually—

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

**MLA Schmidt:** I'm glad that the member from Lac du Bonnet brings up the member for Transcona (MLA Corbett), who I'm so very grateful to work with.

And the member from Lac du Bonnet only needs to ask himself and the people that he worked with around the Cabinet table as to why we have so many teachers and educators on this side of the caucus.

Honourable Speaker, it's not just the member from Transcona. It's the member from River Heights; it's the member for Brandon East (Mr. Simard); it's the member for Riel (MLA Moyes); it's the member for Seine River (MLA Cross); it is the member for Transcona (MLA Corbett). It's also the member for St. Boniface (MLA Loiselle).

And why do we have so many teachers in our caucus, Honourable Speaker? Because we could not sit by. We could not sit by and allow the cuts and the chaos years after years—[interjection]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Schmidt:** Honourable Speaker, it's the member for Lac du Bonnet—

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

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Ewasko:** And, Honourable Speaker, not one of those teachers on the NDP side are a minister of Education.

She is so disconnected with the grassroots. I mean, don't take it from me; take it from MTS president Lillian Klausner [phonetic], that all we're seeing today, once again, is political—[interjection]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** —theatrics, Honourable Speaker.

Pembina Trails School Division has raised their taxes over the last three years by 37 per cent. The Pembina Trails School Division, under the NDP, have received a merely one fifth of the money that they received from us.

Get this minister out of the way, take the kids, take the students, take the teachers at heart, listen to the grassroots and come up with a fair funding model—

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

**MLA Schmidt:** Honourable member—I apologize. Honourable Speaker, the member from Lac du Bonnet is completely out of touch, but this is what we've learned to expect from the member from Lac du Bonnet. This is the same member who stood up in this Chamber and said that the \$30-million universal school nutrition program was a bad idea.

So I ask the member from Lac du Bonnet if he will get out of the way and support BITSA today to make sure that kids have free nutrition in schools, to make sure that our \$10-million—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Schmidt:** —free transit program for youth is implemented, to make sure that the PST comes off groceries, to make sure that there's free child care for the Manitobans that need it most.

Honourable Speaker, he proved that he could not lead. Will, today, he get out of the way?

### **Property Taxes and Regulatory Environment Impact on the Economy and Affordability**

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** Honourable Speaker, the fact is many Manitobans are opening their tax bills today and seeing massive increases under this NDP. The increase is so big, the City of Winnipeg even included an insert explaining that the tax hike is the result of this NDP government downloading education costs back onto the school boards and municipalities.

At a time when Manitoba already has weak economic growth, declining exports and families struggling to afford everyday life, why is this government making Manitoba even more expensive to live and invest in?

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** Honourable Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand here and talk about all the important work that we're doing to lower costs for Manitobans, including, of course, through the very important education property tax rebates that are bringing more money into Manitobans' pockets in communities, including like the one in the member opposite's community where we know more than nine out of 10 people are better off as a function of our education property tax credit.

We're bringing the savings. And, of course, today, we're asking once again for the members opposite to stop playing games with Manitobans, get out of the way and allow us to bring in more savings into their pockets by July 1 so we can take the PST off all groceries.

Will the member opposite stand up and say yes to that proposal, yes or no?

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

**Mr. Narth:** Honourable Speaker, I'm not sure the minister even knows where my constituency is, and

that's because my constituents know that higher property—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Narth:** —taxes don't just hurt homeowners; they hurt small businesses, manufacturers, farms, investors who are already questioning whether Manitoba is competitive enough to expand in. And that's because when businesses see rising taxes, rising regulation, weak growth and exports down by more than 27 per cent in just this year, they start looking to provinces with lower costs and better investment climate.

Does this government not understand their punishing property tax increases are driving investment, jobs and economic growth out of our province?

**MLA Sala:** You know, when we talk to businesses in Manitoba, they want to see a government do the work, which we're doing, of keeping life affordable. They also want to see their government behave in a way that's fiscally sustainable.

We know the members opposite are bringing in proposals here that would see us go down the path of having another \$2-billion deficit. We know they're not focused on fiscal sustainability. They showed us that with the big mess that they left us to clean up when they were on their way out the door.

What are we bringing in? Real affordability investments, real health-care investments, while we brought forward the lowest deficit in the entire country.

We're doing that work. We're going to keep making life more affordable. Will the member opposite support, yes or no?

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

**Mr. Narth:** Honourable Speaker, the fact under this NDP government is that Manitoba families are paying more for housing, more for groceries, more for utilities and now, dramatically more for property taxes.

Manitoba's economy is weak, exports are collapsing and families are being squeezed from every direction. This government keeps shifting costs onto local taxpayers because they don't know how to grow the economy.

Will this government finally admit that higher taxes and a weak economic plan are making Manitoba less affordable and less competitive each and every single day?

**MLA Sala:** When the members opposite left government, they left a fiscal disaster. They left a \$2-billion hole that Manitobans were forced to climb out of. That's due to their inability to plan, their lack of accountability. We know what they're capable of. And, again, the proposals they're bringing forward would bring us back to the exact same place.

What are we doing? We're making huge transformational investments in health care, we're making life more affordable, and we're doing that work while we're staying on a fiscally sustainable path. Manitobans know they can trust this team to do both things at the same time.

We know, under the members opposite, they can—we can expect more chainsaw cuts and more deficits. That's not where we want to go. We know that we need to do more work to lower costs.

Again, will the members opposite stand up today, do something useful and support BITSA? Yes or no?

#### **Rural and Northern Hospitals Nurse Vacancy Rate**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** In December, the Thompson hospital was greylisted by nurses due to ongoing serious safety concerns. And just last month, the Northern Health Region called a state of emergency over nursing vacancies at the Thompson hospital. Media reported a nursing vacancy rate of 73 per cent. But just a few months ago, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) insisted that Manitoba has enough nurses.

So what is the current nursing vacancy rate at the Thompson hospital?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Honourable Speaker, our government is working very closely with our partners across the province in every single region, including the North, to make sure that we are not only repairing the damage that was done to health care but supporting the regions in developing an approach that is not only sustainable for health care in the immediate but the long term.

I do have a question for the critic, though. I talked to a number of her constituents over the weekend who are very concerned that she's not condemning the fact that her party is actively recruiting people who are against a woman's right to choose. I told those folks who reached out, her constituents, that I would ask that question of her.

Does she support a woman's right to choose and make their own health-care decisions, yes or no?

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

\* (14:20)

**Mrs. Cook:** Earlier this year, against the advice of front-line workers who warned that it would cause chaos in many areas of the province, the NDP government ordered RHAs to stop using agency nurses because, again, the Premier insisted Manitoba has enough nurses. So, they plowed ahead, it caused dire staffing shortages and chaos at hospitals in Dauphin and Swan River and the NDP was forced to rescind the directive.

So I'll ask the minister if they know: What is the current nursing vacancy rate at the hospitals in Dauphin and Swan River?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, we have over 4,000 net-new health-care workers right here in Manitoba, and we're training more health-care workers in this province today than we ever have before.

But, Honourable Speaker, I'm going to follow through on my commitment to her constituents. The majority of them are women, who reached out to me over the weekend asking if I knew whether or not their MLA stands on the side of women having the ability to make their own health-care choices. They're recruiting candidates who are against a woman's right to choose, who are anti-choice and want to strip away women's rights across Manitoba.

Is the member for Roblin in support—[interjection]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** —of women's rights to choose? Does she support abortion as health care, yes or no?

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

**Mrs. Cook:** I would beg the minister to focus on the issue at hand, and that's health care in rural and northern Manitoba. Just this morning, MNU president Darlene Jackson told CJOB that this NDP government is not working collaboratively with front-line nurses to address safety issues, burnout and vacancies, and that this NDP government just expects nurses to be their cheerleaders. Under this government, vacancy rates in rural and northern hospitals are hitting astounding highs: 73 per cent in Thompson, a hospital that is also the subject of an ongoing greylisting.

Since the northern health region declared a state of emergency three weeks ago, exactly how many nurses has this minister hired in Thompson, The Pas, Dauphin and Swan River?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, we continue to hire nurses. We have a net-new over 1,400 nurses working across the province, including in the NRHA and in Prairie Mountain Health. And we're training more nurses today than we ever have in our province.

But, Honourable Speaker, I'm going to table the article written by a PC candidate, someone who has supported and celebrated the overturning of Roe v. Wade in the United States. Her constituents are asking, women across Manitoba are asking: Does the member for Roblin stand on the side of women's rights to choose?

As the critic for health care, does she recognize that abortion is health care? She can answer that question today for her constituents—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** —and women across Manitoba. Is her answer yes or no? And I'll table the document for her constituents to read.

#### **Adult Learning and Literacy Programs Funding Announcement**

**MLA Billie Cross (Seine River):** Honourable Speaker, after years of cuts and neglects from the previous PC government that failed students, workers and families across Manitoba, our government's taking a different approach.

We know strong literacy, education and training opportunities help families, help them out of poverty and build a stronger economy for everyone.

Can the Minister of Advanced Education and Training tell us about the important announcement she made this morning to help more Manitobans build a good future here at home?

**Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** I want to thank the member from Seine River for the best question of the day.

It was with immense pleasure that I stood alongside Jim Silver and many, many other advocates for adult education at Urban Circle today, where we invested an additional \$2.5 million towards adult education.

And after the members opposite did absolutely nothing for adult basic education, our government is

proud to announce that this year alone, \$24.9 million, and that goes towards hope; that 'gords' towards transformation. That is moms and aunties and dads creating opportunities for themselves and their families—

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

#### **Expanded Municipal Board Mandate Funding and Staffing Capacity**

**Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside):** Honourable Speaker, the Municipal Board already faces a significant backlog, yet this NDP government keeps adding new responsibilities without adding new resources.

Now the board is expected to adjudicate restrictive grocery store covenants and oversee major municipal projects, all with no meaningful increase in funding or staffing.

How does the minister expect the Municipal Board to do more with less, without bringing property assessment appeals and municipal development to a grinding halt?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Honourable Speaker, we've added staffing to the Municipal Board because we're asking them to do a very important job: to knock down these anti-competitive real estate contracts that are making your grocery prices more expensive.

But listening to the member opposite, it sounds like he supports the big grocery chains. It sounds like he's cheering on Galen Weston, he's cheering on these companies that are more profitable than ever, even as you pay more and more and more.

We're going to continue to oppose the more expensive PC approach. We're going to work together with you to make your grocery prices more expensive; yes, with the Municipal Board—because we kind of have to as a result of Pallister—but more importantly with you, by also cutting the tax on all groceries in Manitoba.

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

**Mr. King:** Manitobans who appear before the Municipal Board deserve timely and fair decisions. But this government is piling on additional quasi-judicial duties while refusing to provide the resources needed to handle them. The result will be longer delays, growing backlogs, more resignations due to workload and prejudice to everyone relying on the board's decisions.

Why is this NDP government overloading the Municipal Board while forcing Manitobans to pay the price through delay and procedural gridlock?

**Mr. Kinew:** Not at all. Actually, we're adding staff to the Municipal Board.

But if you want to get to the root cause of so much of the economic headwinds Canada is facing, you've got to look south of the border to Donald Trump.

Here is a Truth Social post—whatever that is—from February 1 of this year, and he says: "Today, I have implemented a 25% Tariff on Imports from Mexico and Canada."

But I'd like the member opposite to note that one of the top replies that's visible in this country, to that post announcing tariffs, is from the member for Spruce Woods (Mrs. Robbins), saying: "I am so sorry that you have to do this to us."

News flash, PCs: Donald Trump didn't have to do this, and shame on you for selling out our country.

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

**Mr. King:** Honourable Speaker, this government needs the support—[*interjection*]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. King:**—development and economic growth, yet it continues to expand the Municipal Board's mandate without expanding its capacity. More workload with no additional resources means slower approvals, stalled projects, and delayed assessment appeals across Manitoba.

Will the minister admit that this government's approach is forcing the Municipal Board to do more with less while municipalities, businesses, and homeowners are left waiting longer and longer for decisions?

**Mr. Kinew:** No, we passed the freedom bill to set municipalities free from the overreaches of Brian Pallister's legislative agenda.

Now I'll read you another X post—whatever that is—from Althia Raj, where she's resharing an article saying: Republican senator says US should have bought Canada for cost of relief. Of course, the member for Spruce Woods, responded to that saying: Sold.

We will never sell our country. We will never be the 51st state. And I will table the documents of the PC treachery so everyone can see how they would sell

us out for a nickel and they would bow down to Donald Trump.

On this side of the House, we will stand for the true North, strong and free, we will strike down the taxes at the grocery store and we'll continue to work together to make Manitoba a wonderful place for our children's generation.

### **Manitoba's Inflation Rate Impact on Cost of Living**

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** In the middle of an affordability crisis, this government continues to ignore the realities Manitobans are facing each and every day. I've spoken with families who are struggling to afford basic necessities; families who don't know how they'll pay to register their vehicle, let alone put gas in it.

With Manitobans facing the highest inflation in Canada, why is this minister failing to deliver real results here for Manitobans?

\* (14:30)

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families):** The member for Agassiz knows that that's not true. But what is true is the Manitoba PCs are standing in the way of passing BITSA, a bill that will bring relief for groceries, for free child care, for free transit for youth. That's what's true, that the Manitoba PCs, while they pretend that they are a party for the people, it is only the people that are rich that, you know, fill their coffers in their PC Party.

So the question is: Will the Manitoba PCs support BITSA and pass it today?

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

### **Introduction of Guests**

**The Speaker:** There's some guests in the gallery I would like to introduce.

I would draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Martina Riva, Serafina Mitton and Luisa Mitton, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Families.

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

\* \* \*

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

## PETITIONS

### Programs for Adolescents with Disabilities

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

(3) To urge the Minister of Families to arrange for a full review of employment supports provided by Children's disABILITY Services for children with

disabilities aged 12 to 17, including direct consultation with impacted families and to explore a full spectrum of options to support families, empowering them to choose solutions that best fit their needs.

This is signed by Jamie [*phonetic*]—Jeremy Sulatyck, Colleen Sulatyck, Chris Brunelle and many, many, many more Manitobans.

### MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

**Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

Petition—the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

(6) Located in close proximity to the new Portage regional health facility is the Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than

adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is been signed by Jeff Dickinson [*phonetic*], Loretta Gortez [*phonetic*], Dave Orhis [*phonetic*] and many more Manitobans.

Thank you.

#### Medical Assistance in Dying

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** I wish to present the following petition.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

\* (14:40)

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

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

#### Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** I wish to present the following petition.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This is signed by Ron Poetker, Breanna Rannard and Greg Oke and many, many more Manitobans.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

**Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Turtle Mountain):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by Lorraine Giesbrecht, John McCurry and Heather Sharp and many other Manitobans.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* (14:50)

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

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

This petition has been signed by Jo-Anne Curry, Robert Curry and Linda Rithine [*phonetic*].

Thank you.

### **Intersection of PTH 75 and PR 305**

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The intersection of Provincial Trunk Highway 75, PTH 75, and Provincial Road 305, PR 305, at Ste. Agathe, has become increasingly dangerous for motorists and pedestrians.

(2) Over the past seven years there have been at least 20 accidents at this location resulting in injuries and fatalities.

(3) This intersection is heavily used by community members, commuters and commercial traffic, making safety improvements critical.

(4) Immediate action is needed to mitigate accidents and prevent further loss of life.

(5) An in-service road safety review was completed in 2022, which included recommended improvements, but no action plan.

(6) Immediate action and implementation on the maintenance issues and short-term strategies identified in 2022 study are needed.

(7) Development of an action plan with 'timelines' for the medium-term strategies identified in the 2022 study is required.

(8) Installation of traffic lights or a controlled signal system will make the intersection safer.

(9) Additional strategies, such as reduced speed limits approaching the intersection and the addition of rumble strips to alert drivers of the upcoming intersection, will save lives.

(10) Construction of dedicated turning lanes to reduce collision risk and other traffic calming designs will help reduce collisions, injuries and fatalities at the intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to undertake safety improvements at the intersection of PTH 75 and PR 305 at Ste. Agathe; and

(2) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to prioritize measures that will reduce accidents and fatalities, including, but not limited to those outlined in the 2022 in-service road safety review.

And, Honourable Speaker, this petition is signed by Brianna Dourmes [*phonetic*], Jodi Hutchison, Jen McGuire [*phonetic*] and many other fine Manitobans.

**The Speaker:** No further petitions?

### House Business

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Pursuant to rule 34(11), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business—oh, will be one put forward by the honourable member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé). And the title of the resolution is Rights of an Independent Member of the Legislative Assembly.

**The Speaker:** It has been announced that, pursuant to rule—excuse me—pursuant to rule 34(11), the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Dawson Trail, and the title of the resolution is Rights of an Independent Member of the Legislative Assembly.

\* \* \*

**The Speaker:** Grievances?

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Honourable Speaker, can you please call Committee of Supply.

**The Speaker:** It's been announced that we will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider Estimates from the following departments.

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

**(Concurrent Sections)**

### ROOM 254

### EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

\* (15:20)

**The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** So, where we left off last time during Estimates, I know that the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) had asked a couple of questions in regard to the FIPPA request that

he had had, and some of the—I'm just wondering if the minister was able to bring up some of that information that he was mentioning and if the minister would be able to share the results today.

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I thank the committee member for the question.

I think that every opportunity that we have to discuss the issue of improving attendance for students here in Manitoba is a worthwhile opportunity, worthy of a discussion. So I think that the committee can agree, I think Manitobans can agree that improving attendance in Manitoba is something that has been an issue for decades here in Manitoba—for too long, certainly.

And I think Manitobans should rest assured that they've elected a government who acknowledges the issue and who—some of our very first acts in government were to start better supporting schools, better supporting students and better supporting families because, as has been noted by many experts on this issue, this is really—you know, issues with absenteeism in Manitoba, it's not just a school issue. This is not just an issue that can be addressed via our school systems. It's not an issue that can be addressed solely by teachers and superintendents, as well-meaning as they are and they are doing incredible work in our school system to help support students and families and improve attendance in our schools.

But it's not up to schools alone; this is a societal issue. I just met with different advocates and experts in this realm just over the last few weeks, so I believe it was last week I met with community activist and advocate, Sel Burrows, who's well known in the community for the work and the advocacy that he does to improve attendance here in Manitoba. And Sel and I both agreed that this is an issue that goes beyond just our education system. This is something that we have to look at across government. It's something we are looking at across government.

\* (15:30)

I'm very proud to work alongside of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), because we know that improving attendance in schools has long-term public safety outcomes. I'm happy to work along the side of the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), who's doing incredible work supporting families across our communities, and some of the work they're doing—I think I've spoke about it the last time we met here at this committee—but the work that the Minister of Families

is doing on decolonizing our child welfare system is transformational work that's happening here in Manitoba. You know, promoting kinship-care agreements: these are the—this is the kind of work done by the Minister of Families that is really going to result in generational and foundational change here in our province.

I'm very happy to work alongside the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), and the incredible work that they are doing to house our homeless relatives, but also to provide greater access to affordable, deeply affordable and social housing here in our province. Again, a way of keeping families together, of promoting affordability here in our province.

We know that there are so many issues. We've talked at this committee, and again I welcome this conversation. It's such an important one. We've talked at this committee about how there is no one silver bullet. Our government has done many incredible things, like the universal nutrition program, like our small class size initiative, like the things that we have in Budget 2026: free transit for youth, free child care for the families that need it the most.

These are all ways that our government is working collaboratively and very intentionally to be able to support students, families and our school systems so that we can all work together to support kids in Manitoba, to make sure that they are in the classroom all of the time. We know that the best place for kids to be here in Manitoba is in school with the trusted adults that we know that they can rely on, and we know that education is the key to economic success, both for our individual learners but also for our province, you know?

We know that our government has a strong economic plan and a strong economic vision, and part of that vision is helping lift up Manitobans out of poverty, and we know that the best way to do that is to give them with a solid education.

I'm so proud of this work. I'm really happy to talk about it some more, so thank you for the question.

**Mr. Ewasko:** My question actually wasn't answered, and so we'll just refresh the minister's memory on the topic.

So the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) had asked a question, sent in a FIPPA request basically asking for data on absenteeism here in this great province, and received a response on September 11, that he received a response from the department.

And he quotes, so then I will quote from Hansard from our Estimates on May 8, that, "Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning does not collect chronic absentee data." And so then—end quote. So then his request was then denied.

So then he requested all ministerial briefings in relation to the chronic absenteeism and data collection from October 2, 2023, so that's when the Kinew government took power, to present, and on November 10 the ministry asked for a 15-day extension, which he agreed to. Didn't hear anything back until February 3, 2026, which is, you know, considerably more than the 15-day extension. And then he was able to obtain a briefing note that was to the minister, dated July 26, 2024. It was in the proper format, properly dated, and it did reveal chronic absentee numbers which the province did clearly have in its possession.

So it just seems that there's conflicting points that are being put on the record here from whoever. We're not doing any finger pointing; I'm just wondering if the briefing note from July 26, 2024, shows evidence that there is data collected from the department; if not only that briefing note can be shared with Manitobans, but also from that point on to today as well.

**MLA Schmidt:** Respectfully, to the member opposite, there were some very serious accusations related to this line of questioning that came from the member of Fort Garry. So while I do appreciate the member for Lac du Bonnet trying to couch this question by saying that he's not finger pointing, he absolutely knows what he's doing, which is continuing on a line of questioning put forward by the member for Fort Garry in which he accused the public service of fraud—he used that word several times. And so I don't take those sort of accusations lightly.

What I will say is that—and as minister, and, you know, the member from Lac du Bonnet previously served in this role. He had the great privilege of serving as an Education minister, and so he would know in that capacity as minister that it is not the minister that handles FIPPA requests.

So, again, I have full faith and confidence in the department in the handling of that FIPPA request. Again, it's not something that I have any hand in and not something I will comment on further in this question.

What I will talk about, though, are the incredible investments and advancements that we're making in addressing absenteeism in this province, the investments

that we're making in partnership with school divisions to better support students.

What I would like to really talk about here today, what I come to work every single day to do is to serve Manitobans. I put my name forward on the ballot because I want to leave this province in a better place than the place in which I found it, which, quite frankly, was quite a mess when we inherited this government in October of 2023—the government, not the province.

The province is, somehow, resoundingly, resiliently, doing well. But, again, I put my name on the ballot to leave this province in a better place than which I found it, so I'm happy to talk about some of the progress that we're making in improving attendance here in Manitoba.

We—the data shows that it's a problem. There's no one hiding from that truth. We're being transparent with Manitobans; I come to you with my hands out. Absenteeism is a problem in this province. We inherited a problem. It's been neglected for too long, and Manitobans have both a Minister of Education, a Premier (Mr. Kinew), a whole government full of teachers and educators who deeply understands this issue, deeply understands some of the root causes that are driving this issue and are deeply committed to working together as a caucus, as a government, to address the root causes of these issues.

So one of the best ways—one of the ways to support students and help them get to school and be successful in school is with some of the successful programs that we have across the province that offer peer mentorship, homework support and other after-school-type programming. These are wrap-around supports that provide, again, not only mentorship, homework supports, employment readiness. These are really a way of wrapping our arms around students that are having struggles in school for a variety of reasons, and this is a great way.

These are programs like Wayfinders, CEDA Pathways, Peaceful Village that we see across the city that have had great results. So our government, when we came in—you don't have to reinvent the wheel all the time. We got to try new things and we're trying lots of new things: universal nutrition program, free transit for youth, free child care for families that need it most. We're going to try new things in this government, but you also don't have to reinvent the whole wheel. You can build on the success of proven programs.

So, through our Bright Futures funding, we have expanded and increased our investments for these types of programming. So our Wayfinders program, something that's had huge success, for example, in the Seven Oaks School Division, we have two members of our caucus who actually were educators in that program and helped see dozens, I would argue probably hundreds, of kids get to class and get their high school diploma. That's the Wayfinders program. So we have expanded our Wayfinders program here in the city to two new high schools this year, so that's in Elmwood High School and Sisler High School in the Winnipeg School Division. So we're taking a proven model that's helping kids get to school and graduate, and we're expanding that program to expand its reach and to serve more students.

We've also—this is a really exciting expansion—the boys—in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Thompson, we have expanded a homework after-school mentorship program to R.D. Parker Collegiate with the help of our MLA from Thompson, Eric Redhead, who's—sorry, apologies.

**The Chairperson:** Just a friendly reminder that we need to use constituency names or ministerial titles.

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you, honourable Chair, for that guidance, and my apologies.

Thanks to the great work of the member, the MLA, for Thompson, we've expanded an excellent program to R.D. Parker Collegiate. We've got NorthStar program in Brandon School Division.

Much more good news to share.

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, honourable Chairperson, so just to be clear, I do understand that we usually raise our hands to be—to cede the floor and to get on to additional questions, so I'll get right into it.

So the minister again failed to answer the questions. She said herself that she's coming with open hands, or open arms—one of the two, I'll have to check Hansard—with information.

So she's talking about expanding the Wayfinders program, which, again, great program; I'm not arguing that whatsoever. But the point is, to this line of questioning—and I am not here to defend the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) and the choice of words that he uses towards the civil service or not. I'm asking a straightforward question.

Can the minister provide, now that she's aware that the member for Fort Garry's (Mr. Wasyliw) FIPPA request, that there is actually information within the department? Can the minister share that information today on the absenteeism, in the proper format, properly dated and that it does reveal some chronic absentee numbers within the province? Can she provide that information today?

**The Chairperson:** Before recognizing the minister, I'd just like to remind all folks to the opening remarks, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. So it goes directly from the critic of the opposition to the minister when the minister and the department are ready.

So that is why the opposition critic was recognized, and that's how we will continue to proceed, in a global manner as per the Estimates formulae.

**MLA Schmidt:** Again, the data is clear. The member for Fort Garry is open to put in as many FIPPA requests as he would like; there's nothing here to hide. Chronic absenteeism is an issue in Manitoba; chronic severe absenteeism is an issue here in Manitoba. Our government is working diligently after inheriting a mess from a government that failed to take any real action, and we're getting to work on it.

What I would pose to the member—we are here to talk about the supplementary Estimates. I was hoping that he might be able to point us to what budget line item his question is in reference to.

Thank you.

**Mr. Ewasko:** All right. Thank you for acknowledging my timely asking of questions, honourable Chairperson.

So the line of questioning is in regard to basically talking about budgetary items that are being used towards, I'm hoping, absenteeism that is challenging many youth, and, unfortunately, well over 15,000 youth are experiencing this.

So I've asked the minister: Can she provide the data on absenteeism? Can she provide the briefing note that was to the minister dated July 26, 2024, on absenteeism, on the chronic absentee numbers, for the province, and then can she please pass along the additional information that we know now sits in the department from also July 26, 2024, to today, May 19, 2026?

**MLA Schmidt:** Again, the member, whether in conjunction with the member for Fort Garry or on his own is—if he wants to obsess about the data, he can. What the government is here to tell him and to tell

Manitobans is that chronic and severe absenteeism is an issue here in Manitoba. We've inherited a mess; the data shows that much.

So we can FIPPA numbers all day long. The member is trying to be here to try to get into some sort of gotcha moment about data. There's nothing to hide. Is it an issue? Yes. We have nothing to hide.

Our government is transparent and we're here to—it's sort of like, things like racism, for example, like truth and reconciliation. You know, this week's Treaty Week here in Manitoba, which is something very important in our education system. And a big part of treaty education is the truth and reconciliation movement, you might want to call it—the truth and reconciliation moment in time that we're in, thanks to the late honourable—well, many, many great leaders across this province, but certainly embodied in the late great Justice Murray Sinclair, Mazina Giizhik-iban.

So what I would like to do is talk about how we can fix that problem. And that's what I wish the member from Lac du Bonnet was here talking about today. He would like to try to be fixated. He's similar to the member for Fort Garry; he's more sort of fixated on the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and trying to find gotcha moments and playing politics. What I would love to talk about here today is we—just like in truth and reconciliation, you have to acknowledge the truth. So we're acknowledging the truth. Absenteeism is an issue. You've got to call it out. We're not scared to call it out. Let's name it.

Like I said last time we were in committee, I prefer positive language. I think words matter. I like to talk about improving attendance. But we can name it; let's call it absenteeism. Let's name it and now we can start—once we can acknowledge the truth, which we're doing, we can start reconciling it. And that's what I would like to talk with the member—talk about with the member from Lac du Bonnet today.

So I asked the member from Lac du Bonnet—again, we're here to talk about the supplementary Estimates, about the amazing budget that we're putting forward. I would like to get into some of those details. I asked the member if he could point out what budget line in the supplementary Estimates that he's talking about, and he said that he wanted to talk about what investments we're making on absenteeism.

So I am so happy to talk about that, beginning with the \$30-million annual universal school nutrition program. I said this last time we were in committee on the record. I say it in front of every group of Manitobans that I get in front of that there is no government in the

history of Manitoba that has made a larger investment—a larger single investment towards addressing chronic and severe absenteeism in the history of this province than our government under the leadership of the late Nello Altomare.

And not only did here in Manitoba we invest \$30 million a year—not just the first year, \$30 million; the second year, \$30 million; this year, \$30 million; and \$30 million, or maybe more, forever and now on, because we made the universal nutrition program a law here in Manitoba, so that no government in the future that might not see the value of feeding kids and not see the benefit of feeding kids and what that does in getting them to school, we've made that the law. So \$30 million a year, this year again, on a school nutrition program.

And I say this not to brag, not to take credit, but to speak to Manitobans and to speak to educators, to speak to superintendents, to speak to trustees, to speak to families and let them know—to speak to Sel Burrows, to speak to Kent Dueck, to speak to the advocates in this community that come to me and tell me about meetings they had with the member opposite, who failed to listen; that tell me about meetings that they had with Brian Pallister, who failed to listen; that told me about meetings they had with Heather Stefanson, who failed to listen. It's our government that's stepping up and listening, and we're not just listening; we're stepping up with real dollars and cents.

So, to the Sel Burrows out there, to the Kent Duecks, to the superintendents, to the teachers, to the amazing community organizations, to the folks at CEDA Pathways, to the folks at Wayfinders, to the folks at Peaceful Village, IRCOM, you have a government that is here to work with you. We are going to finally start making progress on this issue for children in Manitoba, for families, and for the future of our economy.

Thank you.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, Manitobans, you can see it today and you can hear it loud and clear that this Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt) cannot necessarily be trusted to have those meetings with the education partners all across this province. Because then what does she do? She goes out and puts it on a public record, the results of those meetings.

And so after the minister—after I'm done asking the minister a question, maybe she might want to

apologize to Manitobans, but in—*[interjection]* So in addition to the minister heckling me from the side, she'll have her five minutes to answer a question—hopefully she can answer a question.

\* (15:50)

But she stated today that the data shows, the data shows. Well, all I'm asking is for her to show the data to Manitobans. So I am more than on the side of the department and the staff, but now this has been brought forward to the minister's desk. She is aware that these requests have been made. She is sitting on the data, so the buck stops with her.

So if she is not willing to share the data, can she put that on the record today because it's been asked on more than one occasion. I like to think that I've asked more than nicely today for the minister to share that data as far as what is driving some of these ideas that she is putting out there as to announcements, but not really actionable things so far, but I would like to see the data.

And again, so I'd like to see the briefing note that was to the minister, dated July 26, 2024, and I would like the data, which she says exists now, because the data shows that's what she said. You know, I appreciate that the member for St. Boniface (MLA Loiselle) is now working as an assistant to the Minister of Education, but that being said, I'd also like the data from July 26, 2024, to today, May 19, or the most recent data that she is sitting on and refusing to share with Manitobans.

**MLA Schmidt:** The member, again, can sit here all day and focus on the data and try to get his gotcha moment. We have nothing to hide. I find it curious, too; it's quite interesting to sit in this committee with the member from Lac du Bonnet, who used to be the minister of Education.

I don't recall—I'd love to, maybe, hear him talk about the data from the time when he was the minister. Notice how we don't hear the member talking about that.

We don't hear the member referencing—like, if he's so obsessed with the data, you'd think that he might come to committee and be armed with all sorts of data about his time as minister and the great progress that his government made in addressing absenteeism. But I note that the member doesn't bring forward that sort of data here because he doesn't have that sort of data to prove that they made any sort of progress.

Our government—like I said in my previous question, if there has ever been—absenteeism is a problem that is driven by many and—many factors, many complicated factors, some factors of which we are still trying to understand; for example, the COVID-19 pandemic. That's something that certainly, in a generation or in a few generations, was unprecedented. It's unprecedented in my lifetime, certainly, and I think in the lifetime of my parents, to ever have a period where schools across the province—no, across the country—were closed, where all students were forced to stay home, where families were forced to try to, you know, provide an educational, comprehensive—I was one of these parents, so trust me; I know exactly what it was like, of the challenge that was for parents and families and for teachers and for school systems, to try to support learning during a year where we were all at home, worried about, you know, our health and our family members and masking and distancing and the like.

We are still, as a society—not just here in Manitoba, across Canada and across the world, really—are still trying to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we know for sure that that had an impact on absenteeism here in the province and, again, around the world. So there are complicated factors, multi-faceted factors and different factors that drive absenteeism.

So, like I said earlier, just like truth and reconciliation, you have to acknowledge the truth. Chronic and severe absenteeism is an issue here in Manitoba. Focusing on the data is not constructive. It doesn't serve Manitoba students. What does serve Manitoba students is Budget 2026, which for the third year in a row, provides a \$30-million school nutrition program, the single largest investment any government has any made to address absenteeism in this province.

And I will remind the member opposite that it was him and his government that said it was a bad idea. I'm so very happy to see that they have seen the error of their ways and have been on the record many times now as saying that the universal school nutrition program is a good thing. I'm very glad to hear them say that.

But that's not the only budget line item in Budget 2026 that we can look to. We can also look to a \$3-million annual investment on the return of small class sizes. Small class sizes, having more one-on-one time with the trusted teachers, educational assistants, clinicians in the classroom also helps support students, helps them feel valued, helps them feel seen and

helps their learning. And we know that when kids feel supported in their learning that they are more likely to attend and to be successful and to have good outcomes.

Another budget line item in Budget 2026 that I'd love to talk about is a historic \$10-million investment for free transit for youth. So I want to thank the many superintendents, teachers, trustees that came forward this year and have come forward, really, for years advocating for free transit for youth.

But this year, in particular in the City of Winnipeg, there was a particular pressure in that Winnipeg Transit, for the first time in many years, reinitiated fare enforcement on city transit buses. We know for that many students in the city of Winnipeg, Winnipeg Transit is how they transport themselves to high school and we know that for some of them, that's a barrier.

So I want to thank, again, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, in particular, who were the very first group—I heard from many advocates, many groups, but it was the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents who first raised this formally in a meeting as a significant barrier facing students in school divisions across Winnipeg.

But we know this isn't only a barrier for students in Winnipeg; we know it's a barrier for students in Brandon, Selkirk and even Thompson. One of the things that we did in Budget 2025 was support the purchase of a school bus for the Mystery Lake school division. Many more investments to talk about.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So I—it's interesting when you sit here, Manitobans, and you listen to the Education Minister go on and talk about—it's unfortunate, but she says how the data doesn't matter and how I'm fixated on the data.

Well, that's how you make decisions. You ask questions to education partners all across this great province of ours, you get the data and then you learn from the data. And so what the minister has failed to do—and I watch this on a day-to-day basis, not only in the Chamber but around this great building of ours where—and she put it on the record, as well, today, on that her caucus does have many teachers, as we have many teachers and trustees on our side as well—but it almost sounds as if she's either auditioning for the Finance Minister's position, because she's talking about the overall budget, or she's looking at the Justice Minister's position.

And I know that they're long overdue for a Cabinet shuffle and I know that many of the teachers on the NDP side are chomping on the bit, waiting, waiting for that day for when the Premier (Mr. Kinew) will actually do the right thing and do a bit of a shuffle and get someone, possibly, into the chair of Education or possibly in one of the other portfolios that seem to be lacking on any type of forward progress or action going forward.

So the minister had asked me a question, and I guess she's also practicing for shortly after the next election where she'll be able to ask questions from this side, as many as she possibly wants, and whether it's me in the Education department or one of my other esteemed colleagues, I'm sure that we will be more than open, transparent and accountable, not only to her as a potential critic but also to Manitobans on any kind of data that the department may have.

And so in January of 2023, so we did come out with a program after consulting with Manitobans, and I know that the department is very much aware of this program and where it stemmed from. And, basically, it was coming from the report on Safe and Caring Schools: a policy directive and action plan to enhance students' presence and engagement attending schools, getting more students to attend schools.

\* (16:00)

So it follows that Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan's requirement for a provincial policy on attendance. This is after many consultations with many education partners from all across this great province of ours that came together. And the member had mentioned some individuals that were part of those groups earlier on in her statements—not really answers to the questions, but her statements.

And so I would like to know if, truly, if she would like to put it on the record one more time that the data doesn't matter and that I'm fixated on the data as to why certain decisions are being made. Because March 12, 2026, 15,000-plus students regularly skipped school across Manitoba and that is shameful.

And I think that the minister should be transparent, be accountable, release the data as far as how bad is it really, or is it 15,000-plus? Is it 25,000-plus? Is it 10,000? Release the data. It's been asked on more than one occasion very respectfully. This is not the department's issue; this lies on the minister's desk.

So will the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt) release the data today?

**The Chairperson:** I would like to remind the committee that our rule 53, as well as Janse and LeBlanc on page 891 of the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, caution against repetitive questions.

So we will allow this question this last time, but after would like the official opposition critic to please change up the line of questioning.

Thank you.

**MLA Schmidt:** The member opposite is putting—he's misquoting me on the record. I've never said the data doesn't matter; the data absolutely matters. Data absolutely informs our decision making.

But he really reveals himself. Like, again, this is the PCs' plan. This is the PCs' plan, okay, to collect data and not to do anything about it. Like, this is—he talks about the numbers and this is his record we're talking about, right? He's talking about these numbers, and again, I've answered I don't know how many questions; I've lost track. We've answered many questions under the same line of questioning. We can all agree that severe absenteeism is an issue in this province. We all agree that severe and chronic absenteeism is an issue in this province. This government has nothing to hide and in fact, we name it; we acknowledge it; and we are working diligently with our education partners to address it.

The member brings up his policy, his plan, his program. And what it actually was, Manitoba, was a series of billboards. And those billboards, what they said, their plan to address chronic absenteeism, which we have discussed here on the record today, is driven by many diverse, complex issues. Their plan was to put up billboards across our city that said: School. Keep Going. That was their plan, okay?

And this really exemplifies the PC plan on everything, right? It's this pull up—pull yourself up by your bootstraps and just go to school. Because that's why kids aren't going to school. If only the kids that weren't going to school could just drive by a billboard and see a big expensive billboard paid for by tax dollars that's reminded them that they should go to school. Geez.

And what does the data show? That that campaign did absolutely nothing. This was their plan on school: Keep going. This was their plan on people experiencing homelessness: Get a house. This was their plan on people experiencing addiction: Stop doing drugs. This is their plan on health care: Close the emergency rooms.

No data. This just—again, their school plan, their—like, this exemplifies—their billboard, School. Keep Going, exemplifies their entire government platform on education, on health care, on addressing homelessness, on housing. Our plan—we have to, again, acknowledge and talk about what's driving absenteeism in this province. Kids don't go to school.

And the member talks about that he did extensive consultations with the sector. You know what the sector's been saying for decades, for generations? In fact, my mom, who's a retired school teacher, sat me down the other night and told me the story, and I talked about this. I wish she had written this down for me; I wish I had all the details, because I don't have the names with me today. My mom talked to me about the very first school food program that she was aware of at John M. King in 1972, okay?

So the sector has known for decades, for generations, that kids aren't coming to school; one of the reasons is because they're hungry. They don't have a lunch. So we listened to the sector; \$30-million annual investment—school nutrition program.

Is it a silver bullet? Absolutely not. Is it the greatest investment any government has made in Manitoba to address and improve attendance in Manitoba? Absolutely. And I'll say it again. I'll say it again and again.

And the data and the outcomes here in Manitoba are going to show the results of that; \$3-million small class size initiative; \$10-million free transit, so that kids can get to school. I just told a story about MASS. Our education partners came down at the beginning of the year, talked to us about all sorts of issues. One of the issues they talked about was fare enforcement. Kids aren't coming to school because they can't pay their bus fare.

We're a listening government. We're going to step up. This is what our government's doing. We are addressing the root causes: poverty, affordability, lack of housing. This is what Minister Smith is working on in concert with the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), in concert with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), in concert with our Premier (Mr. Kinew)—

**The Chairperson:** Order.

Just a general caution to make sure that we're using ministerial titles and constituency names but not people's actual names.

**MLA Schmidt:** I apologize. Thank you very much for that guidance, honourable Chair. It was inadvertent.

But again, this is just—the member's line of questioning just really shows how sort of out of touch they are, when he brings up his School. Keep Going program. They can put up billboards; they can patronize Manitobans. That was their style.

Manitobans elected a government that wants to talk about the issues that are driving absenteeism, that wants to step up and address them, and we're going to keep doing that. We're going to do it across government, and we're going to do it for Manitobans.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So I've been told that I can no longer, Manitobans, ask this line of questioning even though the minister can continue to go down this path of no information, no answers.

You know, she says on one hand the data shows, on the other hand doesn't want to release the data. We'll check Hansard as to what she exactly said in regards to that the data doesn't matter and that I shouldn't be fixating on the data, but, again, that's how you make decisions. I know that this is a reactive government. The Kinew government is a reactive government.

Once again, the minister can't help herself. She's now possibly—you can almost tell that she's auditioning for another portfolio because she's mentioned many other portfolios: you know, Justice, Families, now Housing. I'm sure soon we'll be into the Sport, Culture and Heritage side or maybe even Advanced Education side.

\* (16:10)

But she mentioned that the consistent 30—the food nutrition program again. So she mentioned that it's been that consistent number for the last three years. I'm just wondering if she is aware that the food inflation rate was as high as 6.8 per cent. And so, in fact, if the food inflation rate is 6.8 per cent, the money that she rolled out—well, I'm sure she'll be pointing to the Finance Minister as far as it's his problem—but the money that she rolled out was, in fact, a cut to school divisions this year because of the food inflation.

And we know that the food nutrition program isn't necessarily going to food for students; it's going to many other things, which will be another line of questioning, because I think that I can ask that line of questioning if the honourable Chair will allow me to, because it doesn't necessarily stick to absenteeism or improving attendance rates; it's sort of part of the overall picture.

So I'd like to ask the minister why she cut the food and nutrition program for this year to school divisions.

**MLA Schmidt:** The member knows it brings me a whole bunch of joy to talk about our universal school nutrition program for the benefits that it's going to bring, for the transformation that it's going to initiate across our province and also because it was initiated by a great friend and leader in this province, Nello Altomare. So it always brings me great pleasure to talk about him and the great investments that we've made.

Again, these are generational investments, a \$30 million a year—it's one of the first things that we did in our very first budget. It was really the flagship of our first budget, was the \$30-million universal nutrition program. So that's about 30 more—30 million more dollars than the member opposite ever invested in a universal nutrition program, one that he called a bad idea.

Again, I'm—I will—I'm very glad to hear the member has educated himself about the value of the universal school nutrition program implemented by Nello Altomare and that he's changed his mind and has been on the record several times talking about what a fantastic program it is.

And I agree with him in that regard; it is a fantastic program. So fantastic, in fact, that it inspired the federal government to bring forward a National School Food Program, and I think about that often. I think about how proud I am to have served with Nello Altomare and the work that he did changing the face of this province and our education system, but really the work that inspired a National School Food Program. So we thank very much, our federal partners, for their investments here into Manitoba and to schools across Canada.

I also want to acknowledge the great work that happens in the department in designing, developing, initiating, rolling out, but now working on further refining our universal school nutrition program. So there's many fantastic people that work in the department that have worked on the rollout of this. I'll acknowledge our former deputy, Brian O'Leary, who was instrumental with Nello in bringing this in. I'll also mention Kate McNeil, who works in the department, who's done a lot of great work on rolling out the universal school nutrition program.

But I also want to highlight our assistant deputy minister of Indigenous Excellence, Jackie Connell, who does such great work working with government,

working with the department, working with the sector, working with community, again, to roll out this program in an incredible, meaningful way, but, like I said, also to learn, as we roll out this program and to further refine it, to make sure that these significant investments are achieving the greatest benefit and the greatest outcome that we can.

So I thank all of the people that have been involved in the rollout of this program including, perhaps most importantly, the school administrators, the principals, the teachers, the educational assistants and the students. There are so many students that volunteer and help roll out this program.

So, very, very happy to once again this year invest in a \$30-million school nutrition program that, again, has been protected by law to continue on in perpetuity. This year we've made some adjustments such that—like I said, it's a new program, so in the first few years of our program we weighted a greater amount of the dollars to go towards supporting schools in investing in the infrastructure that they might need to deliver a universal nutrition program. Every school starting off at a different starting place; some schools were already delivering universal nutrition—or, nutrition programs, and so they had the kitchens, the staff, and some schools didn't.

So in these first couple years we weighted a more significant amount of the dollars to allow schools to invest in that infrastructure, those 'invetial'—initial investments they need to make in supplies, refrigeration, dishwashing, staff, all those kinds of things. Now that those investments have been made, a greater proportion of those dollars can go directly into the purchasing of food.

I'd also like to highlight—and I know it's very curious, the member talks about me auditioning for other positions. It's actually just—this is what happens when a government works together. We talk to each other, we work across government. It has nothing to do with an audition. I love working with my colleagues.

But thank you—thanks to the Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations (Mr. Simard) and the US alcohol sales at MBLL, we've also invested this year \$3 million with the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba to further refine our nutrition program in schools.

So, happy to talk more.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Okay, thanks for the minister, I guess, going around and around and around and not really

getting to the answers again. It's unfortunate, but this is the way that Estimates are going to go for quite some time, and that's okay because I have many questions, and even though we will not get the answers from this Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister, maybe eventually the Premier (Mr. Kinew) will see fit to actually make a—make a Cabinet shuffle.

So, a couple things. So the minister decides to put incorrect information on the record, in regards to myself and various different things that I've said in the past. And so to correct the record, what I would like to say to the minister is that under—quite a few years under the former Gary Doer-Greg Selinger dark days of debt, decay and decline in the province of Manitoba, they never once increased the funding to the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba.

\* (16:20)

And so it was our government that—and, again, this is a bit of a history lesson for the minister because I know that, you know, even though she says that the data and various different things bring forward some of the decisions that her and her government have made, even though she refuses to provide that data. We had actually more than doubled the funding to the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba. And then the universal nutrition program federally, as I've put on the record before, was discussed in the summer of 2022 to bring forward that.

And, again, feeding kids is an awesome thing, and we should be doing that. And what the minister fails to know, or fails to put on the record, is the fact that when kids are leaving home in the morning and going to school, there is children that are not having breakfast, or not necessarily taking lunch with them, all across the socio-economic spectrum. So you've got kids who are less fortunate, you know, financially, at home. You've got those that are very well off, and they also are not necessarily getting the breakfast or the lunches provided to them. So, for years and years, various different community groups, whether it's churches or local businesses, especially in rural Manitoba, have got together and had food programs.

So this is nothing new, but I do know that—you know, I appreciate the minister giving some credit to the federal government, considering in this year's budget, the federal government has given \$7.8 billion in transfers to the Kinew government. So you would think that this minister would see fit to—since the food inflation rate was 6.8 per cent—to give a 6.8 per cent top-up of the food and nutrition program, but she

doesn't want to talk about that, and she doesn't want to talk about the chronic absentee or students just not attending school.

So I guess my question to the minister, again: Is she going to release any of that data that we've asked for earlier, and can she explain why some school divisions are having to do double-digit property tax increases this year yet again, and a lot of them for now three years running?

**MLA Schmidt:** I wish we had had some more time to talk about the universal nutrition program and all of the other ways that we're saving Manitobans money and all the other ways that our government is addressing food inflation. The question was about food of—the previous questions was about food inflation and man, do I have a lot to say.

You know, our Minister of Public Service Delivery (MLA Sandhu) is doing such incredible work on addressing food inflation across Manitoba, to further support the work that we're doing in schools with the universal nutrition program. The incredible work that they're doing on addressing restrictive governance, again, this was something that the previous government could have done and they didn't. If they want to talk about food—

**The Chairperson:** Order.

Some members are just joining us, but we were having a nice calm time in Estimates, so this is just a general caution to some of the folks that just arrived and are having interjections and trying to get words off the record, interrupting other folks. If you'd like to be addressed, please ask your critic to cede the floor to you.

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you for your guidance, honourable Chairperson.

Yes, the work that our Minister of Public Service Delivery is doing on addressing restrictive governments, which is—restrictive covenants, pardon me—the work that the member for—the Minister of Public Service Delivery is doing to address restrictive covenants in this in this province is really revolutionary and something that, you know, experts on food inflation from across the country are talking about.

The members opposite should try reading a newspaper sometime or listening to the radio, because if you do one of those things and you listen to—food inflation is a problem across Canada, around the world, really, thanks to Trump—and we know the

members opposite like to thank Trump—but food inflation is a problem around the world.

And when I listen to experts talk about this issue, do you know what those experts are talking about? They're talking about the Minister of Public Service Delivery of Manitoba (MLA Sandhu) and the great work that he's doing in restrictive covenants. Jurisdictions across Canada are looking at the work of the Minister of Public Service Delivery, the work that he's doing to address predatory online pricing.

People from across the country are looking to the Minister of Public Service Delivery from here in Manitoba, and they are so impressed by the work that this government is doing, work that the previous government could have done; never did. This government's also freezing the PST on groceries—that is, if the members opposite can get out of Manitobans' way. They want to talk about food inflation, they want to talk about taxes. What they need to do is help us eliminate the PST on groceries.

Now, when it comes to school funding, the member wants to talk about raising taxes, and, again, Manitobans ought to listen, because this is their narrative when it comes to schools. They act as if there's no connection between the defunding of schools that they did for seven and a half years during their time in government; the defunding of schools, the defunding of families. They don't see a line between that and outcomes and what's happening with our students. They don't see the line between that, between graduation rates and absenteeism. They don't see the line—they don't recognize the effects of their funding cuts and what that has on families, what that has on absenteeism, what that has on grade 12 graduation rates, what that has—what the impact that has on our whole province and our whole economy.

So, after years of a government that cut school funding, that eliminated the ability of school trustees to raise their own funds in the face of a government that was attacking their budgets, cutting their budgets, schools were starved for years.

And so now they have a government that supports local choice, that supports local autonomy, and there's years of catch-up that we are playing after the PC government defunded our education system, years of catch-up that we are having to recover from. And we will recover, and we're doing it in partnership with our school division partners, with trustees, with superintendents, with teachers in the classroom. But it's

going to take time to repair years of damage, years of cuts.

There are real consequences to the funding cuts of the member opposite from when he was minister. School—this is an article from the Free Press of—from March 12 of 2021: School resource officers, a milk subsidy and non-salary expenses at schools are being cut from the 2021-2022's Winnipeg School Division budget, thanks to the cuts. So—there are real consequences to these cuts.

\* (16:30)

So, in order to make sure that schools are safe, we have to invest in our schools. To make sure that kids have milk to drink, we need to invest in our schools. To make sure that teachers—I'm sorry, that students have the trusted teachers and educational assistants and clinicians in the classroom to support their learning, we need to invest in education. Manitobans elected us to invest in education and to end the cuts and the chaos under the member opposite.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I just have a couple quick questions here for the minister because, once again, she decides to go ahead and put incorrect information on the record, so I just—I'm asking for some clarification. So she said that she and her Kinew government are freezing the PST on groceries. Can she elaborate on that, and also can she name some foods which will have the PST frozen on them?

**The Chairperson:** We'd ask the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) to re-ask his question in a format that pertains to the topic at hand, which is the Estimates for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, again, it's the Education Minister's words, so I asked for some clarification on what the Education Minister meant. Can she elaborate on the fact that she said that they are freezing the PST on groceries, and can she name some of the foods that are going to have the PST frozen on them?

**The Chairperson:** Again, I'd like to ask the member to please rephrase his question—reframe his question to make it specific to the Department of Estimates for Education and Early Childhood Learning.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Sure, I appreciate the honourable Chairperson getting involved in the debate, so I can definitely elaborate—

**The Chairperson:** Order.

Like to remind all members that you're not to draw the Chair into debate. If you have something you'd like to discuss later, you could discuss it with the clerks who provide direction and guidance to the Chairperson.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I appreciate that guidance, and I think I will take the honourable Chairperson's advice and maybe do that, because it seems that the Education Minister put some words on the record. I was asking for some—for her to elaborate. And so the Education Minister said that her and the Kinew government are freezing the PST on groceries.

Basically, I'd like her to name some of the foods which will be—which will have the PST frozen on them, especially considering we're talking—we also spoke about the food and nutrition program in schools, which would definitely add or decrease the costs to those very same schools.

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak more about the incredible initiative brought forward in Budget 2026 by the best Finance Minister in the country on our plan to save Manitobans money. Again, I'm—anyways—happy to answer this question. Happy to help share the good news with Manitobans.

So I've shared in this committee before with Manitobans that I'm a mom, and so I'm at the grocery store all the time. And I personally—me and my neighbors—can't wait to stop paying PST on lots of those—like, everything in the grocery store, but lots of those convenience items that busy, working parents can pick up.

So this is something I do every week when I'm driving home on a Friday and I don't have time, I don't have energy to cook dinner for my kids. I can stop at the grocery store; I can pick up a prepared rotisserie chicken; I don't got to cook it; I can just cut it up. I can stop and get a prepared Caesar salad. I've got some great healthy protein; I've got great nutritious veg for my kids; and now, even better, thanks to the Kinew government, we are going to have—thanks to the Kinew government, it's going to be even cheaper for Manitobans.

Another one of my favorites—this is one of my kids' favorites—for their lunches, they love pretzels. Pretzels—no more PST on pretzels—that is, if the members opposite will get on board and support Budget 2026, a budget that is full of ways to save Manitobans money, not just at the grocery store. At Winnipeg—with transit: Winnipeg Transit,

Brandon Transit. If you are a youth in Manitoba and you need to get to school, you're not going to pay for transit, thanks to the Kinew government.

If you want to buy a litre of milk, guess what? PST—no more PST on your milk, so that's another thing to educate the member from Lac du Bonnet since he wants to know. So my kids love pretzels in their lunch. Those are going to be PST-free.

Another one of the things that my kids love at the grocery store that makes it so much convenient—much more convenient for me as a working mom—those prepared pizzas, you know, a little step up from, like, the frozen pizza that you might get in the frozen aisle. This is, like, the fresh prepared pizza that they make for you there with the fresh cheese on it. Maybe a little bit more expensive than the frozen one, but makes me feel a little bit less guilty feeding that to my kids. Guess what? No more PST on those prepared items.

So this is a really great initiative. I know that Manitobans are so excited about it. Manitobans, I know, are also very concerned because they know that the PCs are playing political games, trying to hold up our budget implementation bill. You know, they want to stand up here and talk about food inflation; they want to come in here and talk about inflation. But Manitobans, they are actively preventing—delaying our budget implementation bill that is going to save you PST on all of those items that I just talked about.

**The Chairperson:** Just kindly ask all members to make sure that we're having all questions and responses posed and tied back into the department at hand.

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you very much for that guidance, honourable Chair.

Again, so Budget 2026 is full of ways to save. The member from Lac du Bonnet wanted me to elaborate and share the good news with Manitobans about specifically what kind of foods they're going to be saving money on at the grocery store on July 1. Again, that is if the members opposite support our budget implementation bill, which is full of all sorts of other great investments that we're making in education.

So again, we know that affordability is top of mind for Manitobans. That's why we brought in the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, which we designed specifically in consultation with Manitobans. And the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit is designed to help those Manitobans that need it most.

So it was under the previous educational—under the previous government when the member from Lac du Bonnet was the minister. Do you know what their tax credit did? Their tax credit sent \$1 million out of our province to a numbered company in Ontario. Manitobans don't believe in that. That's why Manitobans elected a new government. The previous government sent property tax rebates to the Premier—\$4,000 property tax rebate to Brian Pallister.

Manitobans don't believe in that. That's why Manitobans—*[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** Order.

**MLA Schmidt:** —sent them to the curb and elected a good government.

**The Chairperson:** I've allowed a lot of leeway. I was talking in generalities before. There are only two members of this Estimates department that continue to interject when it is not your turn. Each person will have the opportunity to ask a question and the minister will have the opportunity to respond. When it is not your turn, there are to be no more interjections. If you have conversations that need to occur, you're welcome to exit the room and come back when you're prepared.

Before recognizing the next speaker, I'd just like to remind all members with questions and responses to make sure that we're always tying it back into the Estimates at hand.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, Manitobans, you've heard it here yet again. So the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister goes off on a bit of a tangent, named—so the pretzels and the milk. Again, technically the milk was, you know, the one-litre containers. You know, we heard loud and clear that the minister likes to go and buy freshly made pizzas for ham—for her family, which is great. I mean, that's her prerogative.

\* (16:40)

I mean, I did hear, again, some interesting information the last time committee sat on that all—that according to the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister, that all MLAs are going to be receiving a base salary bump of an additional \$10,000. And I know that the members on the NDP side were shocked, because I think—our side definitely was shocked because of course we know what each one of us makes is a base salary, you know, and especially when we talk about Estimates and the budget process. You know, those are dollars, those are not the Education Minister's dollars; those are Manitoba taxpayers' dollars.

So the minister did not elaborate on what she meant, that they were freezing the PST on groceries, but at this time, Honourable Chairperson, I'm ceding the floor to the MLA for Fort Garry 'til 5 o'clock today.

Thank you.

**MLA Schmidt:** I'm grateful to this committee for the opportunity to talk about our budget and the supplementary Estimates before the committee today. It doesn't surprise me that the member from Lac du Bonnet is already out of questions. He's a deeply unserious member of this Legislative Assembly. He—for someone who has served in the role of Education minister, I know that Manitobans and his constituents expect better.

We did not hear the member from Lac du Bonnet ask any substantive—and for the record, we did not hear the member from Lac du Bonnet ask any substantive questions on the record today about education. He did not ask about our plans to address absenteeism; he did not ask about our plans to improve literacy; he did not ask about our plans to make schools safer places; he did not ask about—during Treaty Week, he did not ask about Indigenous education.

He talked instead at length about himself. He talked at length about things that he claims that his government did in 2022 and beyond. None of those I can find in the supplementary Estimates, so I'm not really sure what the member from Lac du Bonnet was doing with his time here today.

It's quite unfortunate. I know that Manitobans expect better. I know that when I come into this room and into this building every day, I'm here to serve Manitobans and to talk about how to make things better for Manitobans. Specifically here today, we're here to talk about how to make our education system better, how to improve outcomes for kids, how to make jobs better for teachers. And really, you know, like I've said many times, the key to a thriving economy is a thriving education system.

So if the member cares about the economy and inflation, then we should be talking here about education and how to make education better. The member went on at length about a Cabinet shuffle; he tried insulting our government which he does many times, talking about how there's so many teachers in our caucus and that perhaps there should be a Cabinet shuffle.

And so to that end I think I just want to make a comment acknowledging our caucus and our government and the great work that we're doing. I'm very

proud. It's an—it's the honour of my lifetime to serve Manitobans, to serve teachers, to serve students in this role. But I'm—would be the first person to acknowledge that any person in our caucus, educator or otherwise, could serve just as well in this role.

So, while the member opposite spends his time trying to insult and demean the many incredible educators that are in our caucus, I would just take this—like to take this moment to lift them up and to thank them for the support that they offer to me in my role as Education Minister, to the support that they offer our entire government. Because again, this work that we're doing—the member from Fort Garry talked about this last week in committee, that, you know, if we can really address what's driving it; if we can start to solve chronic and severe absenteeism in this province, we're actually going to solve a heck of a lot of the problems that we have here in Manitoba. We're a great and a proud province. We're doing a lot of great work. We have a lot of great—a lot more work to do, though, and we all admit that.

And so, just finally, I'm happy to leave some time for the member to Fort Garry, but I just wanted to, again, lift up every member of our caucus, including the valuable teachers and educators that serve in our caucus and bring that—all those years of knowledge and experience that they had of serving in classrooms, serving as trustees, serving as educational assistants. The depth of knowledge that they bring to our government, to our Premier (Mr. Kinew), to me as Education Minister, is invaluable. And I very much look forward to the day where I can sit here as a committee member supporting the next minister of Education. Hopefully not too soon. I'd like to be here and I've—we've got a lot of great work to do.

But I just wanted to note that, again, our caucus is full of incredible educators. I'm proud to work beside them. I'm proud to work with them. And for the benefit of Manitobans, they should know that in our caucus—this is just a fun fact that I'd like to put on the record, just to help Manitobans understand just the depth of experience we have in our caucus when it comes to education—more than 189 years of working in the classroom. If you took all the teachers and educators in our caucus together and added up all their years of service, 189 years of service. If Nello was still with us, that number would be well over 200 years.

I thank the NDP caucus.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** I've certainly been hearing from NDP party members that are very concerned about the right-wing drift of this government. In fact, media commentators have described the

Kinew government as a right-wing populist government, and I think that that's very fair.

The one exception, of course, is the nutrition program. It's the flagship progressive program of this government, and I am absolutely in agreement with this minister that it is inspiring, a fantastic program, and it's something that needs to be expanded and cherished. And I'm also glad to hear this minister committed to investing in education. I think we probably all agree that needs to happen.

So then that sort of brings me to the question here. In 2024 when this program was introduced, the budget was \$30 million. In 2025, the budget again was \$30 million. In 2026, the budget once again was \$30 million. So we know that Manitoba leads Canada with inflation and—with both consumer price index, but also food inflation. We're hearing numbers at 6.8 per cent of food inflation, which is much higher than the consumer price index.

Yet the funding for this program hasn't kept up, which means each and every year we've had this program, it's been cut. The flagship progressive program for this government is being cut year over year and less dollars can make it to the classroom.

So I guess I'm curious why this minister allowed this cut, what was her thinking behind imposing this cut and, going forward, would she reverse her position and start funding this program properly and—based on the cost of food inflation every year?

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member for Fort Garry. I will agree that the universal nutrition program is a flagship progressive policy. I would disagree that it would be our only flagship progressive policy. I think Budget 2026—well, I guess first of all, I would just, again, like to thank him for that acknowledgement. I think, again, it's something that I think all Manitobans should be very, very proud of, our universal nutrition program here in Manitoba and the partnership that we have with the federal government in supplementing that program.

But I would argue that, you know, our government has been—we've had many, many policies that are progressive and that are designed to—that are designed progressively, designed with Manitobans in mind, designed to serve Manitobans that need it the most.

\* (16:50)

And that's what we're doing. That's what the universal nutrition program represents. That's what our

announcement in Budget 2026, the \$10-million investment that we're making to provide free transit for youth, very progressive, very widely and wildly received in community, that announcement.

Also, in Budget 2026, further advancements in child care, both providing greater access to child care, but also in Budget 2026 we've announced that we're making child care free for the families that need it the most, a very progressive policy. Another great progressive policy from the New Democratic government that serves to address poverty, will also certainly, you know, improve outcomes and economic prospects here in our province is the announcement made today by the minister of advanced education and technology, the two-and-a-half-million-dollar-funding increasing to our adult learning program here in the province, the meaningful outcomes that's going to help support.

I would argue that the \$30-million universal nutrition program was \$30 million more than had ever been previously invested, was a significant investment. I spoke earlier about the great work happening in our department, led by our assistant deputy minister of Indigenous Excellence, Jackie Connell, that worked on—with her—through her team is—it's very important, and I think this is what your question is getting at, is that we are constantly evaluating our universal nutrition program to make sure that it's having all the benefits that it's intended to.

You know, I can appreciate the member's line of questioning and the impacts of consumer price index and food inflation, but, again, I would argue that when this program was introduced, it was a \$30-million lift. So that's a significant increased investment, and our department is working diligently, very closely, in close partnership, with schools, like with school divisions but even right down to the school level. We're working with schools to make sure that we are right-sizing the amount of our school funding, making sure that it is—and, again, it's designed in a similar way that our Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit was designed.

It is a universal program in that it's open to all students that might need it, but it's not necessarily—it's designed to deliver the most help to the schools and the school communities that need it the most. So that requires constant evaluation, re-evaluation, really hands-on work with school divisions and right—like I said, right down to the school level, to make sure that we are providing the right amount of funding to support the universal nutrition program.

So to further help that work, just this year we launched, in partnership with Prairie Research Associates, I believe, we've launched a survey that's going out to families and to schools to continue on our process of collecting feedback from the partners that we have that are delivering this program to make sure that we are right-sizing it.

And, I mean, the member is absolutely correct in that—you know, and I mentioned this before, in a previous question, not only have we initiated the universal nutrition program, but we have legislated it because our government had significant concerns based on some of the comments made by members of the PC Party about how they did not see the value of this universal school nutrition program. They are on the record of saying it was a bad idea. So we know the transformational impact that the school nutrition program is having and will continue to have. So we have legislated that.

But he is right, and we are more than happy to continue looking at that number to make sure that the necessary investments are made to feed school children. We are not hearing that pressure back from school divisions yet. We're helping them in funding in all sorts of different ways. But we'll continue to do that work.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** There are approximately 61 public schools that, after two years of this program, didn't—do not have any type of nutrition program in place. There's 119 schools that they only have a snack program, which basically it's you report to the office and you get a granola bar or an apple. That's 26 per cent of Manitoba schools either have no nutrition program at all or just provide a granola bar to students and do not offer any significant breakfast or lunch program. The Interlake School Division doesn't even offer breakfast or lunch at any of their schools. In fact, 38 per cent of their students receive no food at all at their schools.

So if you're a Manitoba student and you go to the wrong school or you're in the wrong division, you have no access to any meaningful nutrition program at all. And what these stats mean is that, in my view, we don't have a 'universal' nutrition program when there's 26 per cent of students that don't have a significant meal program available to them.

So, I'm curious, what enforcement mechanisms are in place? And will there be 100 per cent schools with a breakfast and lunch program available to them? Or are we going to see, again, this sort of random availability of services where depending what school

you go to, you may get something, you may not; it may be significant as a full meal or it may be a granola bar. And we know that poverty is everywhere in every single school, in every single school division, and so I'm wondering what this minister's plans are and does universal mean universal, because right now it doesn't.

**MLA Schmidt:** I'm so pleased to be able to talk about the universal nutrition program and always making it better. So I would disagree with the assertion put forward from the member from Fort Garry that the universal nutrition program is doled out randomly. It's certainly not random. It may appear that way, but as I said in my previous answer, this is a universal nutrition program in that every child in every school in Manitoba that wants access to free food will have access to free food. It is not a universal hot breakfast and hot lunch program.

In some schools, that's exactly what it is. And like I said in my previous answer, we designed the universal nutrition program in the same way we've designed the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, recognizing that not all Manitobans come from the same starting block. Not all Manitobans have the same amount of privilege, have the same amount of luck, have the same amount of opportunity, so everyone needs a different amount of support. We designed it that way. Not every school needs a full hot lunch and hot breakfast program. If schools need that, that's what they will get.

And, again, I want to again just lift up the work of our assistant deputy minister, Jackie Connell, and her team, the work that they do every single year in going in, working very intentionally with our school division partners, with school principals, with the people that deliver this program to make sure that we are constantly right-sizing it.

Last year, when I first came into this portfolio, I worked immediately with the member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino). The member for Notre Dame approached me and talked about a particular school in a particular school division that she didn't feel was receiving the adequate amount of support. We went in, we evaluated, we changed that amount of support in partnership with the school division.

This is how we've designed it, and I'm very proud that we've designed it that way. You know, different Manitobans need a different amount of support; that's how we designed this program. It was designed that way very intentionally to address—so, again, so the member is correct that if you walk into a school in Manitoba, they may—not every school in Manitoba

will have a full hot breakfast, a full hot lunch program, but many of them do.

Some schools, if the need is not there—one of the schools that one of my children attends, that's exactly what they have, is granola bars and apples in the office, and that suits the needs of that school community just fine. And if it doesn't, our department—me, myself, as minister, will be there to hear their concerns and we will constantly be right-sizing this program.

That's what we do every single year. This is not a static program. We work with school divisions to allot the amount of funding they receive; they work with their schools to allot the funding within the schools, and where some schools are getting more money and resources than they need, we will address that. If some schools require more resources, we will address that.

And, by the way, the need is great, you know. There are schools across Manitoba who not only have a hot lunch and a hot breakfast program, but they also, thanks to our partnership and our investments that we've made with Harvest Manitoba, that we have before and after school, a meals-to-go program. And I want to shout out Vince Barletta and his team at Harvest Manitoba for the incredible work that they do in community.

So the need extends beyond the school day, and our government recognizes that; the federal government of Canada recognizes that; and Harvest Manitoba recognizes that. And so we work with them very diligently to make sure that, again, every child in Manitoba that needs access to food has access to that food.

I do want to address—

**The Chairperson:** The hour being 5 o'clock—5 p.m., committee rise.

## ROOM 255

### JUSTICE

\* (15:00)

**The Chairperson (Diljeet Brar):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Justice. Questions will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** I will cede the floor at this point to the member from Agassiz.

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** I just wanted to ask—start things off real easy with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) here and ask a question in relation to the security camera 'rebrates' program that, you know, under some scrutiny and criticism. That program was expanded to provide some assistance and relief to non-profit organizations.

And I just want to ask the minister if there's any consideration—and I know I have forwarded an email correspondence to the office—regarding consideration for rural, urban, golf courses, recreation facilities to have that rebate expand to consider those organizations.

\* (15:10)

I know in rural Manitoba there's several that have been vandalized, broken into throughout their short season, and this is something that could help prevent further damage to their property but also capture evidence if such stuff—vandalism happens in the future and—as well as provide them with a little bit of affordability measures, given that, you know, these—many of these organizations struggle to see—to save money, and their season is short.

So is there consideration to expand that to include golf courses but maybe other recreational facilities?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member.

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** All right. Well, thanks very much, Chair, and thanks to the member for the question. Took me a moment there because I—we had to decipher exactly which security rebate program she was referencing, only because we have so many.

Of course, members opposite will remember that we started with the homeowner security rebate. I know this one is—came directly off the doorsteps in the last election in '23 and really came from the good ideas of people who are in community, who were saying, you know, we want to be part of the solution; we want to, obviously, protect our own property, but we know that community safety more generally is important.

And so we committed to that in the '23 election, and, of course, we delivered on that and were very successful—in fact, dare I say, too successful, at least as far as the folks down at—in the Department of Finance were concerned, because they said you are blowing through the amount of money that we had budgeted for it; the demand has pent up, and we need

to expand it. So, of course, we quadrupled the funding, and then we extended it for another year.

And then, of course, you know, building off of that success, we went out and we talked to faith organizations—faith groups, and they identified that with the conflict in the Middle East, with tensions throughout the world, that we needed to ensure that they were also at the table, taking care of their members, of their faith communities but also, again, more broadly around public safety and community safety. And so we implemented the security enhancement fund: \$1 million going to faith organizations across the spectrum and throughout the city and across the province. Very, very successful as well.

But I think the one that she was referencing was the business security rebate, because not only did we do those two—the first two—but, you know, building off of the communication that we had with the retail sector—of course, they saw the retail crime initiative, they saw the work that we were doing at the retail crime working group, and they communicated to us that direct support for business, not only to help them deal when there have been a security issue but also to be proactive, would be helpful.

And so we implemented that Security Rebate Program, and it's ongoing right now. And, in fact, we're very excited that that's—continues to be rolled out.

But as the member opposite rightly points out, we continue to listen, continue to listen to businesses and understood that there were different kinds of retail locations that needed additional support. In this case, it was the thrift stores, who operate like any other business in the community in the sense that they have a retail storefront and, you know, there's an expectation of safety and security when folks go into those establishments as they would any other retail store. And so we were excited that we were able to expand that to those kinds of not-for-profits.

Now, I also want to just mention that, you know, there is a differentiation between the support that we give directly to folks through these three rebate programs. But there is also additional money that's being flowed to municipalities, for instance, when we're talking about rural communities, because we know that they're willing to take the initiative.

But we've had a lot of success with our CPF program, our criminal property forfeiture funding, that's gone to cameras and other things that support municipal infrastructure, but we wanted to make sure that we also gave them support heading into this summer

season. And so we've also increased the funding that we're giving directly to municipalities and to cities throughout this province. Member opposite may be aware of Steinbach and Thompson and Brandon, and the list goes on—Portage la Prairie, lots of communities. And so we're also supporting municipalities, as well.

When it comes to businesses, you know, it really is about that retail and sort of where people are at, and so while I would differentiate between the support that we give to municipalities—so if she's talking about municipal-owned golf courses or municipal-supported golf courses, that'd be a separate conversation—happy to dig into it. But if we're talking about other places of retail, then that's, you know, something that we're continuing to have the conversation with community.

Again, this is about partnerships, and it's about the kind of partnerships that really just lean into the idea that we are one Manitoba, that we are in this together. Everybody wants to be part of the solution, and when government can help to amplify the work that's already being done in the retail sector, I think that's when we're—we have the most success, so that's certainly been our focus.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Bereza:** I'd like to cede the floor to the member from Fort Garry.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry):** I appreciate the member from Portage la Prairie doing that.

On March 2025, the Auditor General released a report entitled Preparing Incarcerated Individuals for Transition from Custody. In case the minister hasn't seen the report or read it, I'll just briefly go through its findings: 82 per cent of the inmate population is Indigenous, but only make up about 18 per cent of Manitoba population. That's grossly disproportionate. The Chief Justice of Manitoba has referred to our justice system as being systemically racist. Ninety-one per cent of the inmates reported drug, alcohol or substance abuse problems or both; 6 per cent reported mental health issues. And Manitoba, that far exceeds the average. And overwhelmingly in Manitoba, the inmates are on remand, meaning they're either waiting for trial or disposition; they're not actually sentenced prisoners.

So, in addressing the causes of crime, corrections workers are supposed to basically inquire into the offender's background once they're brought into custody and address the issues of poverty, drugs, mental health, work on a plan to address those issues so that

they don't come back, and we know that's not happening. And over 40 per cent of the inmates are not getting correctional plans, and 50 per cent of the inmates were released on the day they were sentenced, which means they received no correction plan and no access to any programs at all.

So the programs that were found to be limited by the Auditor General didn't address the actual needs of the inmates and there was no reintegration plans. So, basically, people would come into jail homeless and when they get released, they become homeless again. So it's clear our justice system is very much setting up Manitobans to fail, often getting no supports, and when they do, they're not relevant to their own issues, and they're simply being kicked out the door, often many times becoming homeless.

So I'm wondering if the minister would characterize this state of affairs as being tough on the causes of crime.

\* (15:20)

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member.

\* (15:30)

\* (15:40)

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, I appreciate everyone's patience. I think we're still waiting on a couple pieces of information, but I'll just maybe jump in and we can maybe take the time, the next one to make sure we get everything in here.

You know, I mean the member opposite's question really highlights the failings of the previous government. And the Auditor General, of course, put a ton of work into that report to ensure that Manitobans had a clear picture.

When—you know, when I—when we came into office in '23 there was a lot to untangle; there was a lot of mess to clean up, right. We all know that. We knew, for instance, by coming into the department, we knew that the previous government, despite this, like, tough, you know, tough talk and ridiculous rhetoric and sort of big stuff lifted from—talking points lifted from Donald Trump or something, we knew that the reality of closing two facilities was massive—massive in this province.

So, for the record, members opposite will remember Dauphin, of course. I certainly remember Dauphin, and I'll tell you why I remember Dauphin: because

we were actually in Dauphin when the PCs just unilaterally pulled the plug.

So I'm sitting in a meeting with the mayor, with the reeve, with the councillors, and they get the news, along with every other person in this province, that the previous government is just pulling the plug, closing a jail.

And, I mean, it was devastating for the economy. It was devastating for the people of the Parkland, and to not even be consulted was just—again, I mean it's par for the course for the previous government. But we felt it that day in the town and in the Parkland. But, again, so that closure, the impact to Justice, to our capacity, to our programming, to our overall department was difficult to digest.

Couple that with Agassiz. Again, and I know I'm not supposed to mention members of this committee, but certainly members of this committee know very clearly the impact that Agassiz had, the ability that Agassiz had to offer some programming that MYC couldn't, and we knew about that.

What we didn't know, what I didn't know, coming into this job, is I didn't know just how deep those cuts actually were within corrections, how deeply the previous government—and, you know, we always used Heather Stefanson, the worst premier ever—we all know that—but she was actually the minister responsible; she was the minister of Justice at the time, and so she gets into the job and, I guess, you know, Pallister comes in and says big cuts and she just went in there and gutted it—gutted the system.

And so, you know, so that's the—that's what we're left with and that's the starting point of our government. That's what the Auditor General's report is talking about, so '22-23. We get into—I get into office and we start talking about how can we rebuild, how can we rebuild in a way that keeps people safe, that addresses the issues of recidivism, of over-representation—it's literally in my mandate letter. And based out of the work that we did coming out of that and, again, the great team that we have we developed the public safety strategy which specifically talks about these issues and what we can do to address them in our system.

What this looked like right off the hop at MYC, you know, Premier (Mr. Kinew) comes in and says we need more teachers; we need more opportunities for young people; we need more Indigenous cultural programming and language and, you know, how do we get these kids onto the right path. Across the

system it looks like more therapeutic community spaces, more opportunities. One example I always use is the sewing program that they used to have at Headingley. You know, simple thing, but it got guys thinking, hey, I've got to show up, I've got to do my job and I've got to get out of here and start thinking in a different way.

Heather Stefanson cut it. Not only was it good for inmates, it was a cost-saver, so we've reinstated that and starting to rebuild those programs.

So that's just a smattering of examples, and there's a ton more. Again, we've got such a great team and such amazing work that's being done.

I'll just end here. You know, member opposite's completely, you know, unserious in his job. This was debated for, like, three hours at the Public Accounts committee, like, a month ago. But, of course, the member opposite doesn't know that because he's not in a real party; he's just out there doing his own thing and he doesn't have—he's not taking this stuff seriously. So he thinks he's got, like, a list of gotcha questions for the previous government. Sure; have at them. I'm going to have at them; there's a lot to criticize about the previous government.

But, member opposite, he's not taking this stuff seriously. We're getting to work and that's the focus of our department.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Okay, just for the record, that non-answer took 30 minutes for the minister to come up with. And the previous meeting of this committee, I was given 60 minutes of questioning time with the minister. He burned about 47 minutes filibustering out of that 60 minutes. So this is obviously a minister who's not confident in his role or has answers for these questions, and he has to show a lack of professionalism and respect to this committee by literally wasting the time of the committee.

Now, he may be thinking he's being disrespectful to me; he's not. He's being disrespectful to Manitobans. This is a committee where the governments are supposed to be held to account. The ministers should know their portfolio and should be excited to defend their record, and it's troubling when they can't. It's troubling when they have to engage in ad hominem attacks and bluster and basically criticize a government that's been out of office for three years, and there has been no movement at all to anything of—that I was referencing.

But I'll move on because it appears the minister doesn't have the answer to the question I've asked, even though he's been given half an hour to find it.

Chief judge of Manitoba has characterized our justice system as systematically racist—82 per cent of our inmates are Indigenous for 18 per cent of the population.

Is the minister comfortable with that statistic? I certainly am not. And can he point to any program or policy that he initiated that makes our jails less systematically racist, and can he point to any data showing that, despite the increase in inmate population under this government—the numbers are going up under this government, which the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is oddly proudly proud of—has that 82 per cent Indigenous population gone down?

And if he can't point to any policy and if he can't point to any progress, why isn't this a priority for this minister? Maybe he'll take that seriously.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member Fort Garry.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, well, you know, despite member's tantrums in this place, these are important issues, and so I encourage every member of the committee to spend some time with public safety strategy and ensure that they understand that it is about being tough on crime and it is about making sure that we're addressing those acute issues that communities are seeing right now.

But, of course, that—you know, I mean, literally anyone that you talk to in this space—and I'm talking law enforcement, I'm talking corrections, I'm talking anybody in the public safety sphere—they'll tell you that we're not going to be able to police our way out of crime. We're not going to be able to incarcerate our way out of crime. It's going to be ensuring that people are being held to account, absolutely, but that we are also assuring that we are going after those root causes.

And so, you know, this is a message that came loud and clear to the previous government. Of course, there was no action, but when we were looking at our public safety strategy and we were looking at the path forward in our department, we understood not only from the Premier's direction but from the good work of people in this space, the consultations that we did with Indigenous communities, with First Nations across this province: that's where we got the best advice, and that was to continue to build the important

programming that we have in place but to really find a way to kick it to the next level.

You know, when it comes to what we're providing in-facility—and maybe I'll just pause here to just share a personal story because I had the opportunity couple weeks ago to be at the graduation ceremony for Winding River, and these are guys who've gone through the programming there at Headingley in the therapeutic community, and they have a ceremony for them. They bring them all together, not just the guys who are getting—who are graduating, who've gone through the program but the guys who are getting into it so that they can see, they can be inspired, for what's next.

And I got to say, it was inspirational, you know. I came out of there saying these are some of the guys who have some of the most grit of anyone that I've ever met; they've been through some really tough trauma themselves. They've obviously caused a lot of trauma to end up in that place, and these are the guys who are saying, I need to make a difference; I need to change my life; I need to take a different path forward.

And do I have any illusions that every one of those guys is going to get on that path and stay on that path? Not by a long shot, but every one of them is giving it their all right now, at least the guys that I met. And so I got a lot of respect for those guys and I got a lot of respect for the corrections workers that put on those programs and give them those opportunities and sometimes give them opportunity again and again, but, really, just keep putting help—putting out that helping hand and hoping that they'll get on the right track.

But it goes beyond that. So, of course, we're expanding those programs. We're now offering more programming, as I mentioned earlier, for our youth at MYC, but we also have a new therapeutic community up in Milner, and—at Milner Ridge, and they're getting that one going, and that's a really important part of the picture of how we get to those root causes and the long-term trauma.

But, you know, I'd be remiss if I didn't sort of paint an even broader picture than just talking about corrections, because when we're talking about over-representation of Indigenous people, it starts with enforcement, and the landscape of enforcement in this province has fundamentally changed because of the investments of this government and the kind of partnership that we're willing to take on with First Nations.

And you don't have to go any further than the new chief of Manitoba First Nations Police, Jason Colon, who is a heck of a good man and somebody who, I know, has taken this, you know, this mandate to expand into more communities and offer more public safety offerings to communities. He is great in that role, and I'm excited to work with him going forward.

Because of our investments, we are expanding across the province. The FNSO program has now been offered to every First Nation. I think I mentioned that last time—first—every First Nation that's ready to stand up that program is now working on that, doing that. These are the kinds of ways that we can enhance at the enforcement side.

I mentioned about the corrections, and I could talk all day about the healing lodges and the work that's done in facility, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention also in our courts and the amazing work that's being done, and you'll hear more about it. Members opposite will be interested to hear more about what we're doing, but there's good work happening in courts around restorative justice and beyond.

**MLA Bereza:** Just for the record, I just do want to point out that we're after 4 o'clock here now, and the minister has answered two questions.

Again, Manitobans deserve better than that. Hopefully, for the next number of questions, we can get them answered a little more quickly and with more substance.

So I understand the minister was quite adamant that the—that he doesn't have any staffing vacancies in corrections, but my office was speaking to staff that say they're regularly short-staffed. Is the minister implying that these work levels are planned, or is he saying the workers are lying? Which one is it?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, and I can appreciate how the member opposite might be a bit confused—and that's not a slight; I'm not trying to be cute here—I'm just saying because the way that the workforce is deployed is a little bit different than you would expect under most departments in government.

We actually went back and made sure that not only was my answer consistent over the three years that I've been in the position, but actually, if you go back even—you know, previous ministers of Justice beyond our government's term, they would have had the same response because of the way that the workforce has been deployed.

Now it's—it is going to change. I would suggest, going forward, and when member is able to ask those questions in the future, you know, he might get a bit better of a picture about what the vacancy rate looks like across corrections, and more broadly across the department, because we are implementing a full-time workforce pilot—I keep calling it a pilot; it's now rolling out so it's officially, I think, a program that we're rolling out to new facilities. And what it really is going to do is make sure that those workers are not only valued and shown that in very concrete ways about the way that their work is scheduled, but what we also hope is that it helps with recruitment.

And I think I mentioned—I might have mentioned this last time, but we've had the opportunity to—one of the things that I wanted to do, we did a couple of graduation ceremonies for our corrections guys, and they were over at the Woodsworth. Nothing wrong with the Woodsworth Building, just to put it on the record here, but it was down in the basement, and, you know, I mean, again, the training—these guys aren't expecting flowers or anything, but they put in a ton of work to put in—to do this training—and it's a very serious and important job.

And so I said, well, why are we doing it in the basement of the Woodsworth? Why don't they come to the Manitoba Legislature and just give us a chance to, like, walk in this grand building, walk into this space and kind of recognize that not only are they taking an important step and recognizing the training that they undertook and the skills that they've developed, which are second to none, I'll just say. I mean, I think it's incredible how these folks are able to implement the training that they get in in a very real way.

Oftentimes we have the ceremony, and, like, they're already deployed, right? They're already out there, and you're already in the facility working. And so they're right into the mix.

But to take it—take stock of that point, but also to take stock of the idea that you are a part of the justice system, the Justice Department, but justice more broadly, right? If you think about how the average person thinks about justice, public safety, about how they think, you know, we should enhance the justice system. We want them to feel that connection to the work that we do in the Department of Justice, and so coming into this building was one part of that.

But it's actually bigger than that, too, because they are part of Manitoba. They are representing Manitoba. They're representing those values of one Manitoba;

they're representing those values of, you know, a province that doesn't shy away from tough challenges, that—I mean, again, these folks work with some of the—in some of the most difficult situations, with folks that need a lot of help; and they do that work honourably. And so I wanted to make sure that they felt that that was part of who they are as well—they're wearing those uniforms with pride—and so we brought them here into the building.

\* (16:10)

Now, I think the member opposite talked—touched on something important, and that is ensuring that we have enough staff in all of our facilities. And so we work really closely with the union and with the workers on this because we know they have to be safe. That is the No. 1 goal, is to make sure that they are safe and, of course, that the inmates are safe.

And so the staffing levels are important, and that's why we've made sure that, as I said, this full-time workforce is about showing respect to the workers, making sure that they're seeing this as a true career—but then, also, as a recruitment tool. If I'm the—you know, a young, new officer coming on and I go, hey, this is the kind of career I can build a life on and I don't have to, you know, work all this weird shifts and overtime just to make a go of it; I think that's going to go a long way.

And so we've been measuring this as kind of a—I think making sure that it's efficient but it's also, I think, something that the workers will see as being positive going forward. So we're going to keep working on the recruitment side, make sure we bring those numbers up, and we make sure that we've got the right levels in each of our facilities. That's both inmates—because, of course, there's a lot of maneuvering there—but also, of course, with staffing.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Bereza:** I've had the opportunity to spend a fair bit of time around the mobile drug consumption site at 631 Main St., which, by the way, is right next door to a recovery centre, which is quite troubling in itself.

But does the minister feel it's fair to businesses around the 631 Main St. site to have to deal with removing drug dealers that are selling illegal drugs to people that are wanting to take them to the drug consumption site; and then getting beat and not having any enforcement there, no security around there and no city police at that time? Does the minister feel that this is a fair way for businesses to have to operate?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, I—you know, I guess I don't want to spend a ton of time on this, but, I mean, it's got to be called out once again that the member opposite—like, he got direction from his leader saying that we should use the right language, that language was important. That's what his leader said. That's not what our leader said; that's what his leader said. He said language is important. We're talking about a supervised consumption site. That's what it's called. That's what it's called in the literature. That's what it's called in the science. That's what it's called.

And so the member opposite, he's going to keep trying to ramp this up as if it's some kind of political football, and it's not. It's about saving lives and it's about getting people treatment. And, you know, I think he betrays his position really, really well by saying that this supervised consumption site is next to a recovery centre and he feels that that's an issue. Like, he still doesn't get it, honourable Chair.

It's completely mind-boggling to me that he isn't willing to go out and actually listen to the experts, understand what the underlying issues are, understand the kinds of investments that can make a difference and instead says, well, wait a minute; we want to get people treatment who are at the lowest point in their journey. The people who are accessing the supervised consumption site are the exact people that need recovery. Those are the people that we're trying to save so they can get recovered.

Like, the member opposite is so out to lunch on this. And I don't know if that's because of his own personal ideology. Might be. It might be that he's totally just—personally just doesn't get it. Or maybe it's really betrays more of what his party is actually all about, and that's trying to find ways to divide people.

Now, I'll just—he wants to tell a story about his time spending—spent around the supervised consumption site. Well, guess what? Manitobans, Winnipeggers, spend a lot of time around unsupervised consumption sites every single day. And this isn't a new problem.

In fact, I think we can all kind of track this back to this really awful confluence of the pandemic, social and economic hardship that was wrought on people during the pandemic, coupled with the rise of the most disgusting, nefarious kinds of drugs anyone could ever imagine, the kinds of drugs that grab you, you know? You try it once and you're addicted. You try it once and your life is on the wrong path. That's the

kinds of drugs that came up during that time and became prevalent.

And members opposite, they drove by in their BMWs and in their Mercedes, their big trucks, their \$150,000 trucks. And they rolled right by every one of those bus shelters—they rolled by every one of those bus shelters. And I don't know what they did. I don't know how they handled it. Because I always say I'm a kind of guy that, you know, it used to be when I saw somebody on the street that was in trouble, that I'd want to help them. But these guys, well, I don't know what happened.

I don't know what happened to them. Brian Pallister, maybe? Like, kind of—this kind of, I'm angry and I'm willing to, you know, punch down at people, I guess. Maybe that's where it all came from. But they drove by and they never—they just didn't even bother to look these people in the eye. They didn't even bother—look these folks in the eye.

And we're not going to do that, honourable Chair. We're not going to do that as a government. We're going to take action, and supervised consumption site is part of a larger plan.

I take real issue when the member opposite slams the police, WPS. They do this all the time; they mock them, they post social media posts that try to make them look like they aren't part of the solution. It's reprehensible. I think that they should know better.

We're working with WPS. WPS understands the nature of the issue. They see it across our city and across our province. And what they see is when we're standing up recovery and sobering sites and a supervised consumption site, that that helps to manage the problems and starts to get people on the right path for recovery.

You know, members opposite—this is not new. The former minister of Justice got a report that talked about the ways to start to address the issues around addictions. He released that. Oops, it had supervised consumption site in there. Ripped it out, released it that way. These guys—

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

**MLA Bereza:** I just want to point out to the minister for his information that his government is currently spending 5x the amount of dollars on consumption sites that they are on recovery, so I'm not sure what he's talking about with recovery.

I also want to point out to the minister that there was a meeting last week where three different ministers,

including himself, were invited to a public consultation meeting, and not one of them showed up. I know there was committee that night, but I understand that committee was over at 7:30 and this meeting went on much longer than that.

I also heard the minister say how horrible these drugs are and how terrible they are—again, and the minister is at least admitting that the illegal drug sales have skyrocketed under his failed term in office. Again, these drugs—and I do agree with the minister: they are horrible, they are awful and it's a one-time—it's a poisoning that's happening with these drugs.

So my question to the minister is: Why has this government not looked at calling on the federal government for stiffer sentencing for drug producers and people that are selling drugs? We have not heard of any commitment from this government on that topic there. So could the minister answer why that has not been done, why they did not attend the consultation meetings and why this current government is spending five times as much money on consumption sites as they are on recovery?

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Wow, I mean, just completely—I mean, completely ridiculous premise of the question to begin with.

Member opposite knows that we're building up our treatment and our recovery spaces as fast as partners will come on board. And I could go through the list right now of incredible projects that have been stood up just in the last couple of years to offer support for treatment and recovery.

\* (16:20)

And, you know, again, this is the kind of work that—I mean, I guess I would say that I—probably the last government was just not capable of doing it. Because they had already—by time the drug epidemic became to the—came to the point where it was at, they had already cut services to such a point and they had already soured every single relationship with partners—community partners that you could possibly work with.

That was already where they were at. They didn't have the ability to reset and go, okay, we were wrong, this is out of control, we need the supports and let's work together. Because they had already created this atmosphere of, like, pit different communities against each other, use tired, you know, alarmist rhetoric to

amp people up about a serious public health crisis. So they were probably not capable.

But, again—and I do this all the time. I don't know why I do it, but, I mean, if—I'd just like to offer advice to, like, you know, the opposition—they could probably use a lot of advice these days—but just a little bit of advice, and that is to reconcile the mistakes that were made and not to just blindly hold on to them as if they're, like, the only path forward.

Members opposite can just be clear. Like, they screwed up. They cut services. They cut social programming. They cut addictions treatment. They cut housing. They cut all of these things to the point where they helped exasperate the problem and they could just say, you know what, Heather Stefanson was the worst premier that ever was in Manitoba and we're moving on, and it's a new day.

You could do that. It's not that difficult to do. Manitobans don't care what Heather Stefanson did; they want to know what you're going to do. And by continuing to hold on to these same views and these same policies, they're never going to get anywhere. And so, maybe I should stop with my advice there because I guess in the game of politics, it's fine for them to continue to do that.

What I do think is, you know—just a couple things I want to address. So member opposite talked about a community forum that he organized with a pretty interesting moderator, I heard. Maybe he can—*[interjection]*—put some words on the record. Yes, moderator was good? Member opposite can put that on the record. *[interjection]* He really liked it, and he could say—thank you. Okay.

Anyway, so we can get to that at another—a future time. But just to be clear, we weren't invited to be on the panel. The panel was set and we were not—*[interjection]*—invited to be on the panel. So he—he's—doesn't really—I guess he—either he does know the organization or he doesn't. Now he's trying to say he knows, you know, first-hand that we were invited. Well, I can show him the letter; we weren't invited to be on the panel. *[interjection]* It's fine.

The other thing I'll just say is, you know, again, when we're talking about not only the treatments, the sobering sites, the safe consumption site; beyond all of that work that we're doing, we have convened the drug task force, which is specifically bringing together law enforcement from across the province along with our federal counterparts to talk about ways to get at the root causes of where this stuff is coming in.

So we are working on that end as well and we're going to continue to do that.

I was just, you know, talking to the Senate of Canada—new experience for me—a chance to advocate for bill C-14, a bill that by all accounts—and I'm talking about, he can go out to Alberta and talk to the minister of justice out there, minister from Ontario, from Saskatchewan. Every single one of us was supporting this bill because we want to see change in the bail system and that's what we were advocating for step one. And we're going to continue to fight for that.

But, you know, this just goes to show, members opposite never took it seriously, drove by in their fancy trucks—their lifted trucks—and their BMWs. Maybe the member opposite wants to say his leader doesn't drive a BMW now. I wonder what happened to that thing.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

A gentle reminder to all members to put their questions and responses through the Chair, please.

**MLA Bereza:** Thank you, honourable Chair; I appreciate that. And, you know, it's not very often that I add advice to these committees, but I think today is one of those days that I need to add a little advice here.

And one of the—you know, the minister talks about all the great things that were done and that, but just want to make this clear to the minister that there was 'saam'—seven RAAM clinics—that's seven—RAAM clinics that were initiated and built by the former PC government. I can—just for a little clarification, there has been zero RAAM clinics done since this government has taken power two and a half years ago.

So, again, if they want to continue to help people on the path of recovery, how is that done without things like RAAM clinics? Again, maybe that's why the staff at the RAAM clinics are telling me how overwhelmed they are, how there is no beds out there for anyone, how they don't have enough staff, how they have to turn people away at the door all the time. Or is the member think that that—or the minister think that that was a mistake, to build the seven RAAM clinics that are operating today that were built by the PC government?

So when we talk about detox centres: so there's been a 72-hour detox centre that has been opened, and I wonder if the minister could tell us how many people have been held, how many people have gone on to treatment—

**An Honourable Member:** Relevance.

**MLA Bereza:**—from these detox centres and what was the cost to have security around these detox centres, as well as what the cost was for security around the now-proposed site at 366 Henry Ave.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza).

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, I heard some calls for relevance, and I can appreciate where members are coming from because yes, these questions are probably better suited for the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), and I would—

**An Honourable Member:** I couldn't get any answers there, either.

**Mr. Wiebe:**—suggest that—you know, now the member says he couldn't get any answers over in that. Well, I think, you know, like always, he just doesn't like the answers. And so that's a bit of a separate issue.

But I'll just say that, you know, I—while I appreciate the fact that these aren't specifically Justice questions—and I do want to be respectful of the staff that we have here, because the staff that I have in the room here are very specialized in the work that they do.

Of course, they know about some of the larger issues, but when we're talking about getting information from them, I know they're reaching out to their counterparts in other departments just to gather information to, you know, to help out the member here who's already had—I guess already had his time in HAH. I didn't realize that, so.

So maybe we can we can focus on other issues when it comes to the Department of Justice. What I do want to say is—again, I mean, the member obviously can keep, you know, saying this stuff on the record; it doesn't make it true. When we're talking about, you know, RAAM clinics, Minister of Housing, Addictions, Homelessness has been working hard to build up and repair a system that was underfunded. I think these things were open part-time or something. I'm looking to other members here at the committee because they could probably remind me.

We spent a lot of time on this, like, it was like they're—yes, they were open, you know, like 9 to 3 or something and—okay, if you're an addict, just wait 'til you're—wait 'til those business hours, banker's hours to come down and access these programs. And it's—so, I mean, it was completely inadequate, and, again, it's not like members opposite didn't see this coming.

And, again, you know, members opposite, they were there—they were in government, they were at the Cabinet table—and I was the critic at one point of—well, I think it was Health at that point because there was no Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness. I was the critic of Health, and we were going to meeting after meeting, community meetings with moms who had lost their kids, you know?

And I'm getting up every day in the House, screaming and shouting about this. Like, it's not like this stuff came out of nowhere. It's not like it came out of nowhere, and then when it did come and they drove by in their fancy cars and they wouldn't even bother—you know, wouldn't even bother make eye contact with these folks—just ignored the problem, you know? They saw the problem and the issue coming, and they stuck their head in the sand.

\* (16:30)

And I guess that's a Pallister thing. That was a Pallister thing that started with him, and then it continued to permeate with Heather Stefanson. And then, again, these guys are just grabbing onto that failed policy and they're bringing it forward over and over again.

What we're doing is different. As I said, it really comes—starts with partnerships. And when we're talking about the RAAM clinics specifically, member opposite knows that we are working with our Indigenous partners. We have, obviously, the virtual option which is a different model, but we have partnerships with Indigenous community. And there's actually a lot of housing that's coming online now that is with those kinds of Indigenous nations or groups who are—who have some capacity to build up the treatment space.

And so we're doing it in a way that's generational; it's never been done before in the province. But again, if he wants more specifics, he can reconvene the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness in Estimates, and he can dig into some of those specific numbers.

You know, I think he also touched on an issue that is foremost on people's minds, and that is safety and security, public safety, when it comes to anywhere: an unsupervised consumption site or a supervised consumption site or any of our facilities that we're offering services out of. You know, again, it starts—if you fire 55 officers like the previous government, you're not going to get anywhere. We've added 36, and 12 more outside of the city. We are working with

Downtown Community Safety Partnership in a way that's never been done before.

We have the supports and the safety and security. It's all coming as an investment from our government.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

I would caution the minister about saying something like, because the member says doesn't make it true—is close to saying that the member was not speaking the truth. So I would caution the minister to be careful going forward.

**An Honourable Member:** Sorry, Chair.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much.

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain):** I just want to have a question, being that I'm from rural Manitoba. I represent Turtle Mountain, southwest corner. Also, I live in the area of Riding Mountain.

I just wanted a question when it comes to RCMP, if there's actually—where right now—we're finding right now in rural Manitoba that the crime rate has gone up quite substantially, especially break-ins to rural areas, especially to lake-cottage country in the area.

And so there's, like, basically—and being a small town, there is certain individuals who are probably basically hooked on drugs and, basically, for their own—when it comes to their own—when it comes to—what's the word used for when you—addictions. When it comes to—for their addictions, there's more crime happening in rural Manitoba, especially break-ins into houses. There's been some serious break-ins.

And so the fact is, what I have—question for the minister is: When it comes to the RCMP, what is the vacancy rate for RCMPs, especially in the Westman? And if somebody was able to provide me with that information, and what is this department doing for the vacancies of RCMP officers.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Turtle Mountain.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. And, you know, I think he highlights a couple of important points that I think are worth digging into a little bit here yet this afternoon.

So a couple of things just to kind of set the context. First of all, I think his constituents are feeling that they want to see, you know, better safety and security of their own properties and of their—themselves and their families, and I think that's something that we're definitely paying a lot of attention to,

to make sure that people feel that the investments that we're making are actually making a difference in community.

And, you know, while the stats are showing that we've turned things around, we're starting to bring down the crime rates, one of the big measures that we use, the Crime Severity Index, especially outside of the city, and those Crime Severity Index numbers—they actually drive—they're actually very important for a number of reasons, but they do drive police resource discussions, and so they are an important measure. Anyway, they are starting to show that we're trending in the right direction, as in they're starting to come down. That was years—after years and years and years of it going up. So now we're starting to bring it down. So that's encouraging.

But, again, that's really—you know, we still got to address that—how people feel and their concerns. And that's why we've really leaned into this relationship with law enforcement, made sure that law enforcement is the—you know, the point where we make some of our biggest investments, because we know that they can have some of the biggest impact in community.

And what it looks like, you know, well, across the province, is this year's budget, the budget that members opposite, I think, voted against, which I can't even imagine why—yes, okay; member for Emerson says yes—\$8-million investment in the RCMP across this province, right? So, historic funding for law enforcement. And, of course, that builds on that public safety basket funding which, you know, was flat.

And, you know, I'll actually—I'll just—not to throw the member from Virden under the bus here, but I will say that I was at that AMM where the premier of the day got the scrambled phone call, freaking out because municipal councillors were ready to have it out on the floor of the convention. And I saw Heather Stefanson come flying in in her limousine, her bulletproof, blacked-out Cadillac or whatever she was driving at the time. And she gets sent—like, they drove it right into the Keystone Centre, I think, so that she didn't even have to talk to the public because she was so scared. And then she walked straight into there, and I—and they closed the door, because I wasn't allowed in; I was the critic at the time. And I heard that it was fireworks—fireworks—in that room, and—where she finally relented and understood the severity of what she had put on municipalities.

And so, anyway, coming out of all of that, of course, we increased to 28 per cent in our first budget,

but then we locked in that escalator which municipalities were asking for, and that's the public safety basket. So that has been good.

But when it comes to, again, that relationship with RCMP, we came into a situation where we had a 30 per cent vacancy rate in the RCMP. That's what we inherited. And I tell people this—it's almost like, the number sounds fantastical. It sounds like there's no possible way that could be true. But I can tell you I started having those meetings with communities across this province, and they told me what the—what that looked like on the ground, a 30 per cent vacancy rate, and it was untenable. Like, some of these communities, we're talking—they have a handful of members to look after huge geographical areas.

So we sat down with the RCMP; we sat down—again, our funding increased and has been stable, and what that's meant is that we've actually brought that vacancy down.

So he asked about the west district. West district, the vacancy rate right now is 7.36 per cent. We inherited 30 per cent; it's down to 7.36. And more work to do; I want to see a zero per cent vacancy rate. I don't know if that's possible, but I'd love to see that.

\* (16:40)

But what I do want is I want to make sure that RCMP and police are resourced across this province because we know that it's not the only solution, as I started this session this afternoon talking about. It's a big part of it, and it's a big part of making sure that communities understand that we want their families to be safe, we want their communities to be safe. That is the No. 1 goal of our government, and it's a good place to start in that real partnership with law enforcement—again, the kind of partnership that they just never could have because of how they had soured those relationships under Brian Pallister.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Bereza:** I just want to come back to the question that I first started off with—was regarding corrections, and the minister stands by that he's fully staffed with no or little vacancies despite what staff report.

So is the minister willing to provide today, or will he let us know when he can provide to the committee, how much he paid in overtime at each facility? It should be pretty low if this minister is correct and the staff are wrong, as the minister insists. So will he provide that information to the committee and when?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, again, and this is where, you know, either the member just being new, and I give him some leeway because of that, or just doesn't want to do the reading, doesn't want to understand how the department is structured.

Well, look, I guess—look, let me back up because I do want to give the member some credit and just say, look, he's not the critic for Justice, so he probably hasn't spent the time with the books in the same way that the critic might have the opportunity to. But he's exactly highlighting why we need to implement the full-time workforce program, and that's because the way that the system was designed and built was built off of overtime, and especially once we saw—you know, again, when the members opposite froze the budget of corrections for seven and a half years, I mean, what did they think was going to happen? We lost people, and we lost people because they were stressed and they were burnt out and they were pushed to their limits.

And then they fired a bunch of people because they closed Dauphin, and they'll say, well, we didn't fire them. Okay, maybe you didn't hand them a pink slip, but you sure as heck said, hey, the place that you've been working, the facility that's been around for a hundred years, that your family has, you know, been built on, yes; we're just pulling the plug on that. And so we did retain some good folks and there's some folks that—earlier in their career and they stuck around. There's a lot of people that said, okay, well, I'm on to the next thing, I guess.

And so what did that leave for the rest of the system? It left more people—or less people working to do the work of—that was left to do. And so, yes, we came into a real challenge, and, again, the whole system had been built on this, you know, this idea that we were plugging—constantly plugging holes rather than actually understanding what the needs of the overall system were and how could we support that through, again, not freezing but increasing our budgets in corrections, again, a budget that members opposite would've voted against, and really ensuring that the workers there understand that we value them and we want to—we respect them and we want them to succeed in this really important and really worthwhile career.

So, that's the work that we're doing. The member opposite is highlighting that, you know, that the previous government never lifted a finger to do anything about addressing this issue and they just came in every year after year and the budgets for overtime were

skyrocketing, and they held the budgets flat. They saw people leaving because of burnout. They saw people leaving because of workplace injury, and they never did a thing to address it.

We're taking a different approach, and I'll tell you why we're taking that different approach. And, again, I alluded to this earlier, and that was that inspirational afternoon that I spent with our folks that work with—at Winding River. And I get a chance to talk to, you know, from time to time, some folks who work in those therapeutic communities. I spend a lot of time with our Indigenous Elders and our cultural support teams. They are incredible. They bring such knowledge and such perspective to their roles, but being in that facility with, like, folks who are really just really starting to understand the work that they put in and what it might mean for them and their families.

And I'll just share—I mean, I got a young son at home, and I know how important it is right now to be there for him. And I talked to—that day, I talked to a lot of dads who had just happened to have sons that were around my son's age and I was thinking about, you know, what those guys, what those young people are going through having their dad at Headingley, having their dad in the facility. They actually, a lot of them, talked about how not only is there—are they there, their dad was there, right? So now you're talking about a young, 12-year-old kid at home whose dad is in Headingley and whose grandpa's been in and out of the system, and maybe what, great-grandpa, right? And you think, how do you break that cycle? How do you change a path for that young person and then the generations that come after them?

And, again, just all the kudos in the world to our folks who run these communities, who spend the time with our inmates, who give them that helping hand, who offer them those supports. And, you know, again, I don't know if this is a popular thing to say, but I'll just say kudos to those inmates who are also willing to take that more difficult path and break those cycles. And it was inspiring, and I hope they have real success. It's going to make our province better, but it's just going to make their families' lives better.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Bereza:** Honourable Chair, one last question before we close here. And I'd just like to hear the minister's opinion on how him and his government will be handling this: Winnipeg School Division superintendent Matt Henderson is calling for urgent government intervention as the city's drug and homelessness crisis spills directly onto school grounds.

How will the Justice Minister and his department handle this, of having these issues showing up on Winnipeg schools?

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Yes, well, again, I—you know, I think I'd just start by saying I appreciated Mr. Henderson's comments because I—what it really just showed me is, is that we've got partners all over that are—that see the issues, see the challenges in front of us, and they don't shy away. They don't turn their heads. They don't drive by in their BMWs and their lifted trucks and their fancy limousines and pretend it's not happening.

You know, Mr. Henderson, I think, is an example of somebody who's taken on a real challenging job, a challenging role, but he's somebody who wants to meet those challenges head on. And so, you know, I got a lot of time for his comments and his words, and really, they're talking about keeping kids safe. Now, there's been a couple of really tragic situations in our schools in recent years, but there's—those challenges that we've seen, I know we're supporting that work, but it's being led primarily in the Department of Education. So I don't know if they've had a chance to be in Estimates, but I would encourage the member opposite to probably get a little bit more detail about specific school safety planning.

What I can't say is, is that what it speaks to is a larger community effort to make our neighbourhoods safer. It's about, you know, within schools, of course, making sure we have the supports for kids. Members opposite said school nutrition program was a bad idea, kind of similar to question period today, right, where we said, well, hey, this would—this is a—this is an important thing we should invest in and, right, members opposite just can't stop being dark and gloomy and negative and, you know, no, we can't do that, we can't accomplish that.

Well, Nello Altomare showed us we could, and the impacts are going to be long-lasting. In fact, when we were talking about Matt Henderson, he said: As a teacher and principal, I know that when kids haven't eaten for a day or a couple of days, they're coming in angry, they're coming in upset, and they're coming in dysregulated. So he understands the impact that the school nutrition program has had, and it's part of those root-causes approach that we've taken.

\* (16:50)

But you know, again, as I keep saying this afternoon, we're not glossing over the fact that people need to feel safe in their community now and not 10 years from now when some of these programs are implemented. And so what that looks like here in the city of Winnipeg, as I said, we've hired 36 new officers and those folks are out on the street. I've had a chance to meet with them and see them in action and, wow, just incredible. I've got nothing but respect for WPS and the way that they've implemented those resources.

But contrast that with a loss of 55 officers under the previous government. So I don't know how they can stand here on—with any kind of credibility to criticize our work when it comes to WPS and supporting law enforcement more broadly.

But, again, what are we talking about? We're talking about a more holistic response, and so what that looks like in the downtown, the specific area that Mr. Henderson was referencing, it looks like the work of the DCSP, the Downtown Community Safety Partnership. It looks like the kind of access to supports for community-led initiatives. We are constantly looking for partners.

I—you know, we talked about the rural response to public safety. I didn't even get a chance to talk about some of the programs that we've stood up and the initiatives that we've stood up out in the member opposite's area, but we do that here—even here in the city, and so more good news coming on that; stay tuned. The member opposite will learn more about what we're doing on that.

But, I mean, look, you just need to look at what we've done over the past couple of years. Every single year we've been in office we brought in a community safety—summer safety plan, and that's really been amplifying those resources in community and, again, working with our partners up and down the spectrum.

And so we're going to continue to do that. We're going to make sure that we have that solid foundation of law enforcement and then we're building on top of that. We want partners like the Winnipeg School Division at the table because we know that they care about their community; they care about kids. They see the investments that we're making; they know they're going to pay off in the long run.

But what can we do right now to keep kids and communities safe? That's what we've been super focused on. We've seen their—we haven't even gotten to the stats. I could spend the whole rest of the afternoon on stats, so if the member obviously wants

to give me more opportunities but, you know, when we're talking about crime being down, we're talking about youth crime being down, youth property—

**The Chairperson:** Minister's time has expired.

**MLA Bereza:** Just in closing—it's time to close on this as we're not seeing a lot of answers on this, so I'd like to close at this time.

**The Chairperson:** Seeing no further questions, we shall now proceed to put the question on the resolutions.

Resolution 4.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$75,216,000 for Justice, Crown Law, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 4.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,799,000 for Justice, Legislative Counsel, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$296,916,000 for Justice, Correctional Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$94,656,000 for Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 4.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$370,958,000 for Justice, Public Safety, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 4.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,700,000 for Justice, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

**Resolution agreed to.**

For the information of the committee, there is no monies allotted for resolution 4.8 this year, so there does not need to be a vote on this resolution.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates for this department is item 4.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 4.1.

At this point, we request that minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is now open for questions.

**MLA Bereza:** Do I need to wait for their staff to leave, or—*[interjection]* Okay.

I move that line—

**The Chairperson:** The member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza).

**MLA Bereza:** Sorry. I move that line item 4.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Justice's salary be reduced to \$1.

**The Chairperson:** It's been moved that line item 4.1(a) be amended so that Minister of Justice's salary be reduced to \$1.

The motion is in order. Floor is now open for debate.

Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**The Chairperson:** Shall the motion pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**The Chairperson:** Motion has been accordingly defeated—motion is accordingly defeated.

Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$78,768,000 for Justice, Corporate and Strategic Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

*Resolution agreed to.*

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Justice.

The hour being 4:57, what is the will of the committee?

**Some Honourable Members:** Rise.

**The Chairperson:** Committee rise.

## CHAMBER EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

\* (15:20)

**The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Executive Council.

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and all the members here at the committee.

This year's budget is a remarkable document. It has a strong economic plan to build the infrastructure necessary for our province to succeed in the coming decades, while at the same time bringing in many affordability measures that the average family across our province has been asking for and really deserves.

We've also increased our investments in health care to meet the needs of those working on the front lines, ensuring that we continue to build a state-of-the-art health-care system, many of which is providing—many parts of which are providing new services to Manitobans that have never been seen in this province before. We continue to invest in education and ensure that young people in the province are being put on a pathway to further success in the future.

And we are also ensuring that the future of the province will be catalyzed by investments in the Port of Churchill, as well as other megaprojects, to bring the energy economy to a new level.

So we're doing that along with being very responsible when it comes to the bottom line. We've got the lowest deficit in all of Canada—prior to Trump starting the ill-fated Iran war, that is—and through calm fiscal stewardship and management, we'll be able to deliver on that for the people of Manitoba.

We were very pleased to see the ratings agencies across the country respond very, very positively to our budget document. The Bank of Montreal titled their note, for example, about Budget '26-27, Manitoba, surplus is calling. The bottom line, they said in their write-up, Manitoba looks to be on track to achieve surplus by fiscal year '27-28 despite a backdrop of elevated uncertainty. And then, of course, they go on to give a lot of credit to the wonderful economy that we have in the province, brought to life by many

workers, employers and people working in the public sector.

We've also seen that the National Bank of Canada says that our real GDP growth numbers projected this year are in line with the previous budget forecast and the year before that, which shows that not only are we in line, in their words, with the growth observed in the country as a whole, it also means that we have a credible fiscal document before you, Mr. Chair.

At the time that RBC was writing, they said that we were the seventh project-province to table our '26 budget. Of course, they've all now tabled their budgets, and they said that our new numbers don't look as challenged as several others. And so Manitoba, and I quote from RBC, claims the smallest 2026-27 deficit-to-GDP ratios and is one of the few provinces charting a path to balance.

So you have to look at the budget as a cohesive plan to help families out with affordability, to help students out with learning, to help patients out with accessing health care in more convenient and close-to-home ways, as well as responding to the needs that Manitobans have articulated across a variety of areas including highways, where we've increased the overall infrastructure budget, emergency measures where we've added staff, as well as in the Wildfire Service and, of course, made the necessary public safety investments that people have been asking for for many, many years.

So, this year, we've continued our tradition of adding at least a dozen police officers. Was very proud to share the news in Brandon last week that we're pretty far along with negotiations with their city and their police service to add four additional officers there in the hub of the Westman.

So we see a very, very positive future in which we are diligently and responsibly stewarding the public purse, making sure that we meet the needs of Manitobans today with the services that they rely on, that we're investing in the economic growth potential for the future of our province. And, of course, we're doing all of that while still ensuring that the Province's credit rating is going to be very, very strong and improved during our time in office.

Manitobans made a choice to invest their confidence in our administration. When they did so, they were voting for health care. They were voting for affordability. They were also rejecting division and catchphrases attempting to masquerade as substantive public policy. And as a result of Manitobans showing

their confidence in us, I think our entire team has felt very, very responsible to deliver on the priorities. So, before going back to the people of Manitoba and asking for another mandate to govern, I think it will be very, very important for us to tell the people of Manitoba how we've kept our promises to them.

Now, in the last election we, of course, ran on five promises: to staff up health care, to build the Victoria ER, to freeze hydro rates, to cut the gas tax and to reduce chronic homelessness to zero over two terms. As part of that policy agenda, we also made a commitment to balance the budget within our first term in office, which, as we see, the rating agencies say that we're on track to do.

And then the Progressive Conservative Party, of which the members opposite were all participants in, decided to make the landfill search a part of the campaign as well. We were content to simply say that we would search the landfill and then leave it at that; however, they thought that that would be wedge politics or some other kind of stunt or tactic to their benefit, and so that became an election commitment that we're measured against as well, too.

And then, in office, we found out that they had tried to force through the approval of a unpopular silica mine in one of their backyards, as represented by a member who's no longer sitting in their caucus—and credit to the civil servants who turned back that unconstitutional request—and we saw three of their colleagues fined as a result of their activities. So I'd add another item to our agenda, which is to defend democracy.

So if we were to go to the polls, I would want to tell Manitobans that we kept our word, and I invite you, Mr. Chair, to consider what our track record says in office. We've hired more than 4,000 health-care staff. The Victoria emergency room is under construction. There's a clear path to balancing the budget as identified by the big banks and rating agencies in the country.

\* (15:30)

We froze hydro rates in 2025. We cut the gas tax immediately upon taking office. We searched the landfill and brought home Mercedes and Morgan. And we are defending the democracy that we all hold dear from likes—the likes of the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), Heather Stefanson and Cliff Cullen.

So if it's time to go knock on doors, I feel very, very good about saying, promise kept. More work to

do. And there's a whole heck of a lot to lose if we ever go back to the Manitoba PCs.

And so we are here today to do our part on the Committee of Supply to help the budget process move forward. I think the most top-of-mind budgetary measure, at least as seen in media coverage as recently as today, is the cut to the provincial sales tax. And so I'm here to cut your grocery prices.

And happy to take whatever questions we'll see from the members opposite in order for this budget to move forward and for us to be able to maintain another commitment, which is to reduce the price of your groceries by eliminating the sales tax on all food and drink and groceries by Canada Day of this year.

We want the opposition to pass our budget implementation bill, as well as the Estimates process, so that there can be no controversy and no room for interpretability when it comes to the implementation of this budget bill. I recognize that they have to put on a show of bravado and issue threats and critiques; that's fine. But, realistically, I do expect them to play ball and to fold and to pass this budget.

They know it's a good bill. They know it's a good budget. So do the people of Manitoba. And if not, I'm very happy to talk to people in Manitoba all summer long about our record in office to date and why we deserve more time to be able to do more things for this wonderful province.

**The Chairperson:** We thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for those comments.

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition have an opening remark?

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I do.

I want to thank the committee and all the members who have attended today. I mean, there's so much to go off of what the Premier just said, and I think everything he said could not be further from the truth if you tried. *[interjection]* And it's telling that he talks about the past, but he has no indication of the future because he has no plan for the future. And that is very telling—

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

**Mr. Khan:** —of this Premier. So he'll continue to heckle me—*[interjection]*—as I'm trying to do my opening statement—

**The Chairperson:** Order.

### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** I'll just go to the First Minister, on his point of order.

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, I think right off the top of the member's statement, it is very clear that he's using language, at the very least, which is worthy of a caution for being unparliamentary, but may also be worthy of a ruling as being unparliamentary.

And so, of course, I will make reference to a rule that says we are not to impugn others on questions of credibility. Yes—and I'll even do the Chair a favour of reining it in at that—

**An Honourable Member:** Didn't cite a rule.

**Mr. Kinew:** —and not say anything further.

I did cite a rule, the one that says you can't lie. *[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** The—*[interjection]*

Order.

On the same point of order?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli.

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader):** Yes, it's not a point of order. He didn't cite any rules that were broken, and that's been used numerous times in this Chamber by that member that asserted the point of order.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** So, while it's not a point of order, I will caution all members to not move too close to language that would insinuate or imply that other members are not telling the truth.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Khan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for standing your ground and agreeing that that was not a point of order by the Premier.

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

### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

**Mr. Kinew:** By saying you're standing your ground, mistakenly kind of, trying to create some sort of back and forth between you and I, he is reflecting on

the Chair, which is clearly a violation of the rules and also inappropriate when it comes to the role that you have, which is, of course, to defend our democracy—one of our soon-to-be campaign commitments.

**The Chairperson:** The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), on the same point of order.

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes. That's obviously not a point of order. He was not reflecting on the Chair; he was just agreeing with your ruling and thanking you for your steadfast service to this great building that we sit in.

**The Chairperson:** So that was not a point of order, but I do appreciate every member's commitment to not drawing the Chair into the debate.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** The honourable member for—sorry, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan).

**Mr. Khan:** And the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) off to a rocky start here with an 0 and 2 start, and we're less than a minute into my opening remarks, so it doesn't look very good for the Premier right now.

You know that the Premier is not good enough to help Manitobans. You know this; I know this; Manitobans know this, and it's sad. *[interjection]* You can hear him heckling across the way, laughing, clapping when we're talking about Manitobas in the struggle they're under, and it's sad. Honourable Chair, 0 and 2 start, and it's going to get a lot more worse for him. *[interjection]*

It's sad that the Premier is increasing—again he's continuing to heckle me. It's sad. Opening remarks, I didn't say anything when the Premier was speaking. It'd be nice if the Premier could extend that courtesy across the way. He's not going to like what I have to say because what I have to say doesn't align with his narrative. And it's sad that the Premier can't see that he is increasing taxes on Manitobans. He has increased the education property taxes in Manitoba. He's nodding his head no. On page 7 of your own budget, over \$1.1 billion. *[interjection]*

Again, he's continuing to heckle me. It's sad that he's allowing property taxes to rise faster than any other jurisdiction in this country. It's sad that under this NDP government, the average increase is over 20 per cent—again, the highest in the country. It's sad that under this NDP government and Kinew government that inflation is the highest level in Canada.

It's sad that food costs are at the highest levels in Canada under this NDP government, at 4.9 per cent.

But it goes beyond being really sad for this Premier and his dismal NDP government. I think sometimes, the Premier knows that he's hurting people and he knows that he can get out of the way and do the right thing, and his arrogance won't allow him to do it. His own actions in the Chamber would dictate that he can't put that aside and see what's best for Manitobans. He won't do what is needed, and that is help Manitoba families. He wants to sprinkle pennies at their feet, get them to beg for a break on junk food—on junk food. He wants to save them 7 cents on a can of pop.

Congratulations, Premier. He wants to save them 21 cents on—

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

#### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** The Honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

**Mr. Kinew:** The comments in the committee have to be directed through the Chair. You can't say, congratulations, Mr. Premier.

\* (15:40)

**The Chairperson:** So, order.

That was a point of order, in that comments do have to be directed through the Chair. So just a gentle reminder to everyone that comments do have to be directed through the Chair.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Khan:** So, as I was saying, every day Manitobans' lives are getting harder and harder under this NDP government and Manitobans are noticing it. They notice every time they walk into the grocery store, they spend \$200 on bags that somehow still feel half empty. And, again, the Premier is offering pennies off of junk food. Junk food is where this Premier wants to push Manitobans, Mr. Chair.

They notice it when their mortgage renews, that their education property taxes have skyrocketed. No matter how much the NDP government wants to pass these burdens onto—or these—the responsibility on to municipalities, it is this NDP government. They notice it every time their rent increases when their increases are far greater than what they proposed in relief, and when another bill arrives in the mailbox. Life is harder under this NDP government, a broken

promise just like every one of their other broken promises.

They promised to fix health care; health care is worse now than it is. Manitobans are dying in the waiting room and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) refuses to call—it's sad. It's actually really sad under this NDP government that this Premier won't recognize the clear and utter failures of his government.

Now he's picking fights with the Manitoba Nurses Union. He's picking fights with the paramedics. He's picking fights with Manitoba Teachers' Society. He's picking fights with contractors, 88 per cent of Manitobans who choose to work open shop. And the Premier has made it very clear that he doesn't care what anyone else has to say if it doesn't agree with what he says.

And what is this government offering in response to the affordability crisis when Manitobans open their paycheques and realize they have less and less money coming home with them? Pennies. Pennies. Bottle of pop. Pennies on the checkout line. Temporary measures that make for a good press conference, but when reality catches up with them, it's not so great.

The Premier is not making any difference when it comes to affordability for Manitobans. That's why our caucus proposed a significant increase to the basic personal exemption. *[interjection]* And the Premier wants to laugh as other members are just sitting there.

**An Honourable Member:** Awkward laugh.

**Mr. Khan:** The Premier thinks it's—yes, an awkward laugh. It's true. Because we believe Manitobans should keep more of their money. When you work for your money, you should keep your money. And this NDP government has done the exact opposite.

They have removed the indexation of your income, so as inflation grows, you are paying more taxes. That is exactly what this NDP government has done. The more you make, the more they take out of your back pocket. That's wrong. Everyone knows it's wrong. How are you supposed to work harder, study longer, write those tests, get out, get a job, work your way up, just so you can give this NDP government more money so they can spend it on more of their ideological projects instead of actually helping Manitobans?

We believe young families trying to save for the future deserve a government that helps them and makes life easier, not harder. We, on this side of the House, believe seniors who spend their lives building this province should not be watching every dollar as

costs continue to climb under this NDP. Our proposal would put real money back into Manitoba households, and the Premier refuses to even have a conversation—a adult conversation—about that.

More than \$3,000 for a family with two incomes. That's not theoretical; it's not symbolic. That's a meaningful, affordable relief. Money for groceries, money for kids, money for activities, money for rent, for hydro, transportation and everyday life.

And beyond helping families, it would help Manitoba's economy grow again. Now I know that concept is foreign to the Premier, about growing the economy. Under his watch, Manitoba has plummeted to dead last in this country when it comes to economic growth. Companies are exiting this province faster than they ever have, and this Premier is doing nothing to slow that down.

When families have more money, they will spend more money in Manitoba's economy. They will support local businesses. They will see more customers. Communities will continue to grow. Opportunities grow. That's how you build a stronger province: by growing our economy, not handcuffing it. This Premier has done exactly that by bringing in more red tape, by bringing in more artificial hurdles, by forcing 88 per cent of Manitobans to join a union.

And it's very telling, from the very first day, the very—one of the very first speeches the Premier gave was all about unions; support the unions, is what this Premier said over and over again. Not support Manitobans. Not support Manitobans' choice to where they want to work, by supporting everyone. Dividing Manitoba is what this Premier has done best. And he's done it once again with the Manitoba jobs agreement. When every association—open-shop association is speaking out against it, the Premier chooses to not listen.

When he knows that saving someone pennies on junk food won't make a difference, he continues to double down on gimmicks, headlines, heckles, insults, and that's just who this Premier is. He'll do it through headlines and smiles, but when the actual work comes, he has nothing, because he's done nothing. This province is failing under this NDP government. Manitoba now is—after Quebec, is receiving the largest transfer payment in the country, after Quebec. That is a have-not province under this Premier. And the only plan he has is Churchill, that he magically says will be done in three years, when Alberta just signed a deal with Ottawa, which this Premier does not have. They estimate minimum seven years.

Premier (Mr. Kinew) has nothing to stand on, and that's why he continues to attack, heckle, insult, intimidate in this Chamber. But the Premier—

**An Honourable Member:** You're intimidated?

**Mr. Khan:** Yes. You know, you're trying to intimidate. See, again, once again, he's trying to intimidate—*[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** —you're not going to intimidate us. *[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** Order.

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

**The Chairperson:** I will remind members to direct comments through the Chair.

On a point of order?

**Mr. Kinew:** It was exactly that. He's not directing the comments through the Chair.

**Mr. Khan:** On that note, with a few seconds remaining, I'll simply say that this province is a complete and utter failure under this NDP government. This NDP government is a failure, and the Premier—

**The Chairperson:** And the member's time has expired.

We thank the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) for those remarks.

In accordance with subrule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates the questioning has concluded.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and we ask members to please introduce their staff in attendance.

\* (15:50)

Would the honourable First Minister like to introduce his staff?

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes. This is Ann Leibfried. She is assistant deputy minister and the EFO in Executive Council. And this is Mark Rosner, who very famously is the Tories' worst nightmare.

**The Chairperson:** And would the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition like to introduce his staff?

**Mr. Khan:** To my left here, we have our chief of staff, Danny.

**The Chairperson:** And now the floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Khan:** We'll get right to some questions and hopefully the Premier can have the courtesy and respect for Manitobans to answer the questions instead of running down the clock.

So I'll ask the honourable Premier: 'Avelage'—average weekly earnings have not kept up with the Premier's tax hikes. Manitoba is leading the nation in inflation. Food inflation is at 4.9 per cent, the highest in Canada. Families simply can't keep up. Instead of offering real tax relief, this Premier is offering pennies that make no difference. A hundred dollars a year is what this Premier's tax relief is projected to help with Manitobans. On our side of the House, we are proposing 30 times that.

The Premier is offering \$50 a year to renters, which doesn't make a dent when rents go up month after month by far more than that. Saving \$100 on groceries for a family of four does not go very far, doesn't even cover a single tank of gas under this NDP government. He'll talk about the 1 and a half cents of the gas tax relief that he gave. Well, 1 and a half cents is not helping Manitobans.

The Premier can take the opportunity today to offer real tax relief for Manitobans. He can re-index the basic personal amount. He can increase basic personal exemption, Mr. Chair, as we've called for. This has proven to have an impact on families' bottom line, putting more money into Manitobans' pockets.

Why is the Premier so firmly opposed to making a real difference and helping Manitobans by re-indexing their basic personal amount?

**Mr. Kinew:** Average weekly earnings have outpaced inflation in Manitoba, as of the most recent statistics. And if you want to see the difference we want to make, open the budget to page 144. That's a section called Tax measures. Taxes are being cut in this budget by \$50 million.

The member opposite received a lot of handouts—some would say was induced to run by some government's handouts. But when you come from a background like that, then, yes, maybe it's not going to make a difference, \$50 million, or its—looks like pennies. But for us, \$50 million is huge; \$50 million is a lot of help.

So, yes, you look at the budget document. Hundreds of millions of dollars, billions of dollars worth of investment, but also \$50 million worth of tax cuts for you, the average person out there. The one that's gotten the most notoriety, of course—and that's page 144, if you want to check—the one that's got the most notoriety is our cut to the grocery prices and that's because Manitobans have been asking for help with grocery prices for quite some time now.

It started under the PCs. I'll table this document for the member opposite. Inflation, when he was sitting at the Cabinet table, was 200 per cent—more than 200 per cent what it's been at any time since we've been in office. He didn't take action. He didn't cut the gas tax. He didn't cut the price of groceries. He didn't offer assistance for all these really, really important areas. We did. The gas tax, we cut it entirely; we cut it to zero first year of taking office. And then we saw how meaningful that was to the people of Manitoba, so we decided to cut it permanently as well.

And if you look at the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics report on inflation today, you'll see that we have a cheaper price of gasoline in this province than Saskatchewan does. This despite the fact that they have a refinery in Saskatchewan. So they make the stuff there, but we're paying less in Manitoba for gas. And do you know what amount our gas is cheaper than Saskatchewan? It's cheaper by the exact amount of our permanent cut to gas. So it does make a difference.

Now, of course, we help Manitobans out in a lot of different ways. The PCs can't keep up with us when it comes to tax cuts: \$50 million this year on page 144 of the budget. But we're also investing in health care. And there's a lot of improvements to health care that we could point to, such as being able to book an appointment with a physician or a nurse practitioner online by [Medinav.ca](http://Medinav.ca).

The presence of health cards instead of health paper that we had under the PCs. In fact, when we took office from the Conservatives, and, you know, members from areas like Steinbach will know this, access to a family doctor was worst in the country; today it's best in the country. We went from worst under the member opposite to first under the best Health Minister in the country.

So I was reading in the Brandon Sun one time recently, somebody was saying we won't fix health care within a term. I can research the person who said that if the committee's interested. So I would say we're making important progress when it comes to health care, but we can't turn back now, can't go back to cuts

and chaos and higher gas and grocery prices like the PCs governed on. So we want to continue the important work here, and that's why it's important that this budget passes.

Rent: The member made comment to \$50. I just want to make clear for the committee, that's a \$50 increase, total amount, \$675. Where the members opposite cut the tax credit for renters—they didn't want to help renters; they wanted to reduce it—we are increasing it. We're also just going to mail it out as a cheque or advance it as a direct deposit. Many renters are probably not aware they're getting this sort of help when they do their income taxes. And so that it's more salient and helpful when you're paying your rent, we're going to advance it as a cheque.

And I was asked by the media who are used to, like Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson and the PC approach, if I was going to put my face on the cheques or something like that, and I said no, it's not like the Trump passport; I'm not going to put my face on anything or sign anything. We're just going to do the direct deposit. We might call it something cool like rent relief cheques, but, yes, things are going good, getting better all the time. Let's not go back to negativity and division.

**Mr. Khan:** Premier (Mr. Kinew) wants to talk about negativity and division, his whole five-minute ramble was on negativity and division. So maybe he needs to go back and listen to what he's talking about here.

And he should also pay attention to the question: was the average weekly earnings have not kept up with the Premier's taxes. Inflation was a secondary point of that; that's inflation is the highest in the country under this NDP government. The Premier's taxes—he says that there is a measly \$15 million for all of Manitoba, and yet the Premier is increasing it to \$1.1 billion—billion; that's with a B, in case people didn't hear in the room—on page 7 of his own budget.

So while he offers \$15 million back to Manitobans, he's taking \$1.1 billion out of their pockets on increased tax hikes and educational property taxes. That's the reality his own budget has clearly laid out on page 7.

So the Premier can refer to whatever pages he wants, it's \$1.1-billion increase this year alone on Manitobans that own properties in this province. That is a tax grab under this NDP government.

\* (16:00)

They also cancelled indexation, which we talked about, and that was what the question was about. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) refused to even come remotely close to answering that question. Why does he think it's okay for Manitobans to pay more taxes as they're trying to earn more money? And not only more money, but he's removed the indexation. So as you make more, you pay more. No other province in the country is doing that, but this NDP government feels it's necessary to tax you more money.

And we're talking about people earning more than \$15,000 a year. The poverty line in Manitoba is just around \$20,000—I believe 21 or 24 thousand dollars. And this Premier believes that if you're making more than \$15,000, you should pay provincial tax. And not only that, he's going to take \$1.1 billion out of property owners. And when he wants to talk about rent, it'd be noted that the Premier removed the rebates on property owners so that those increases in education property taxes that have to be paid will be paid by the renter, which are far greater than his \$50 offset.

So the Premier can spin as much as he wants, Mr. Chair, but the reality is life is unaffordable under this NDP government, that this Premier has increased taxes to record highs in this country. Now, when we talk about average income in Manitoba, it's roughly \$58,000. The average household income is around \$97,000. The Premier has talked a big game about taxing the 1 per cent, but the reality is that it's the middle class that he's coming after. The people that own a house, he's coming after you. He wants you to pay more taxes under his government.

And the reality is that he's doing it: \$1.1 billion in his budget to cover his irresponsible spending in this province, where health care has gotten worse, where Manitobans are dying waiting in the ER, where paramedics are crying out in need of more paramedics, and the Premier comes up with these numbers that are the exact opposite of what the paramedics are actually saying on the front lines. It's families that need help; it's families that need the support to grow their families and thrive.

Where we see Manitoba's success story, the Premier sees dollar signs. He seems to forget that there's only one taxpayer in Manitoba, whether it is the federal, provincial, or municipal dues, it comes out of the same set of pockets. He might want to make the municipality the bad guys, but the City of Winnipeg made it very clear that the bad guys in this building are—is this NDP government.

Now, on top of all that, he's planning to collect \$136 million more. I'll draw the Premier's attention to page 144 in his own budget, where he's offering families a whopping \$28.6 million of relief while collecting \$136 million more.

Where is the \$107.4 million coming from? Is it coming from middle-class families that cannot afford to live under this NDP government?

**Mr. Kinew:** Honourable Chair, \$50 million in tax cuts in this budget, and that's net; \$50 million—five-zero million dollars. It's a lot of money. And that is net, meaning anything you see anywhere else in the budget has to do with economic growth or assessments or other factors, but the net impact on an annualized basis is \$50 million. That's what we're trying to do for you. Members opposite are trying to delay.

Now, when we talk about the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, it's a good time to talk about how, regardless of where you are on the income scale, your biggest education property tax rebates ever came under our government. If you're a wealthy person, your biggest property tax rebate came under us in 2024. And if you're somebody in the middle-class or lower socio-economic standing as far as being a property owner, then your biggest tax rebate came this year when it came to education property taxes. That is what you call progressive approaches to raising revenue.

The members opposite continue to push measures that would benefit the rich; we want to benefit you. That's what we're focused on. And so that's exactly what we're doing.

This year, in the budget that we're debating here today, tax credits, tax refunds, go up for everyone in Manitoba who own property, except for the top 1 per cent. So, yes, if you have \$1.5-million house, we think that you've succeeded in part because of the schools and society that you grew up in and you should be enthusiastic about helping other people find a similar level of success. Members opposite look down on you if you're not already a property owner with \$1.5 million in assets, and they try to obfuscate, confuse and muddy the waters to hide that fact. But look at their policies. It always helps the rich. Saw that under the PC time in government.

So when we're talking about things improving, we're talking about things improving relative to the member opposite's time in office, when he was sitting around the Cabinet table. The gas tax is cheaper today than it was when the member opposite was at the

Cabinet table. The basic personal exemption is higher today than it was when the member opposite was sitting around the Cabinet table. That's their big political winner? You want to hit us on the basic personal exemption? It's higher now under us than it was under them. It's a fact.

Members opposite can argue with facts, like the \$50 million in tax reduction on page 144 of the budget, which is a tax measure section, which totals up the impact and then nets it out of all the tax measures in the budget. They would've been better off making an argument to Heather Stefanson not to run the landfill ads. It would be better off arguing with their colleagues who won't show up to vote on matters of human rights for LGBT folks. But, instead, they're trying to mislead you, the people of Manitoba. Taxes are better in Manitoba now because they're more progressive and they're lower for the middle class than it ever was under the member opposite's time in office. That is a fact across the board.

So, having been beaten thoroughly on the economy, we can look at health care: another emergency room in Winnipeg compared to when the member opposite—in his part of the city too—compared to when the member opposite was in office. I think Manitobans would agree that's an improvement. Four thousand more health-care workers—that's certainly an improvement—1,400 of them nurses—that's an improvement. Plastic health cards, Medinav.ca, best access to a family physician in the country, more than 300 additional doctors, these are all improvements.

Now, of course, we've got a lot more work to do. Such is the nature of trying to bring large-scale reforms to a very complicated system like you have in health. But the members opposite threw the stone and now want to hide their hand. And so, yes, I regret having to bring this up in this esteemed committee, but their signature tax cut is something that we're performing better on than they ever did during their time in office. Basic personal exemption is higher today under our administration than it was under them.

**Mr. Khan:** The Premier (Mr. Kinew) understands that the basic personal exemption will help people earning \$15,000 or more, right? I think that's—it's—I hope he understands that, that someone making \$15,000, a little bit higher, we're calling on that to be increased to \$30,000. So if you earn between 15 and 30 thousand dollars, you will not have to pay your provincial tax.

That is not the wealthy. That is the student. That is the minimum-wage worker. That might be someone working two or three jobs just to get by. We are calling on an increase of the basic personal exemption from just over \$15,000 to \$30,000. That is Manitobans that need the help the most.

Premier won't do it. He talks about that they increased the basic personal exemption to \$780. We're not talking about \$780. We're talking about a \$15,000 increase that will actually help Manitobans, that will actually put up to \$3,000 back in your pockets. The Premier, it's convenient that he doesn't—never actually lists the numbers of what they increased it by: \$780. The BPA in 2015 was \$9,134 under the NDP government; PCs increased that to over \$15,000. *[interjection]*

\* (16:10)

The Premier wants to heckle me now when I'm asking questions because that's what he does. That's what he does. He wants to try to heckle. He wants to intimidate me, Mr. Chair. You can see it happening in here. Everyone around can see that the Premier wants to heckle. He does it time and time again.

PCs increased that to \$15,000. Now we're calling on it to go from \$15,780 to \$30,000. And he continues to heckle. It's embarrassing performance by the Premier right now that—*[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing that the Premier is heckling non-stop in here.

You know, he talks about health care in this province and it's interesting because this is the one promise—this is the big promise they made and health care is worse now. Darlene Jackson from the Manitoba Nurses Union can't find these nurses that the Premier talks about. There are three greylisted hospitals in the province, the first time in the history of this province of greylisted—more than one under this NDP government. They can't find the nurses that he talks about. They can't find the paramedics that he talks about, but wait times are longer now than they've ever been—in all of Manitoba—than they've ever been before.

Now, all that being said, you know, this government, this NDP government, has killed the economic horse that he so touted during his campaign. The economic horse will supposedly pull the social cart. Well, the economic horse died in the first year, and now it's \$4.5 billion in debt. *[interjection]*

Now we have the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) who showed up and she wants to join in on the heckling too. So, more the merrier—

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

**Mr. Khan:** More the merrier—

#### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister, on a—[interjection]

Order.

The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

**Mr. Kinew:** I recognize that the member opposite is the oldest rookie in history, being in here five or six and being a rookie, but you can't reflect on the presence or absence of members in the Chamber, which he just did with the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine), so I'd ask that, yes, he be called to order.

**The Chairperson:** On the same point of order?

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), on the same point of order.

**Mr. Khan:** Chair, my comments were not in reference to the presence or absence of a member. It was simply a presence—comment on the showing up to heckle, which is what I clearly stated, which I clearly said that the member had joined the heckling party, which she has. The member has joined the heckling party led by the Premier. It was not a comment on the presence or absence of the member; it was on the heckling from the member.

**An Honourable Member:** Can I do a second point of order?

**The Chairperson:** So, that was, in fact, a point of order. We cannot comment on the presence or absence of members in the Chamber.

#### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** And would the First Minister like to bring a second point of order?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, it was in the response to the point of order that the member referenced the presence of the MLA for St. Johns a second time, so, again, yes; I would like to flag that as also a point of order.

**The Chairperson:** So I think we're clear on that rule, the ruling or recognizing the presence or acknowledging the presence or absence of members in the Chamber.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** And we have a glorious 46 minutes together until the end of the day, so I think we can make this cordial and productive.

So I would return the floor to the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Khan:** So I was mentioning, before the Minister of Families wanted to start heckling, was that the economic horse under this NDP government has been killed, the one that he so touted as pulling the social cart, with Manitoba's economy ranking where it is near the very bottom of Canada.

And now with this Manitoba jobs agreement, which is completely dividing Manitobans in where they choose to work. Democratic right for Manitobans to choose where they want to work, and this government has gone forward to divide them.

So I'll ask the Premier (Mr. Kinew) a very simple question. All that preamble aside is—can the Premier tell Manitobans who wrote the Manitoba jobs agreement?

**Mr. Kinew:** Civil servants in the Department of Public Service Delivery.

But I do want to take four minutes and 55 seconds to object to hating on unions. Again, it's easy when you get the \$500,000 golden handshake to exit from your failing juice business to go into politics to criticize unions, but for the average person out there who's got dirt under their fingernails and has to work really hard, unions are the best pathway to the middle class. Unions are proven to raise earnings for all workers, even those who are not part of a union when unions are present in a community.

Only Manitoba PCs could oppose that. And I say very specifically Manitoba PCs because what does their political godfather, Pierre Poilievre, have to say about it? He's pro-union. He can't go on Joe Rogan fast enough and hand over a kettlebell quickly enough to try and praise unions.

What about my friend Doug in Ontario? He's always talking about unions. And on and on down the list. Even Trump, who this member thanks. He's always trying to hang out with unions, but he never praises Trump when he shows up at a union shop. Mind you, I'll be quick to hate on Trump no matter where he is—union or open shop.

So, yes, unions are good. Unions are an important part of society. And I was on Golden West radio a few weeks ago, and—well, I guess probably more than a month ago now—but they were asking, like, about the

minimum wage, if we're going to raise it. And I said, well, it's tied to CPI. We want to balance workers and small business. And then the host said, well, what about workers above minimum wage? Have you thought about a way to raise their wages consistently over time? And I wish I would have said this: She's talking about unions. That's a union. That's how you raise the wages of workers who earn more than minimum wage consistently over time.

Now, the members opposite don't know anything about that. We came into office and there was a strike. There was a strike. Unionized employees. And it was another one of their silly attempted stumps—stunts in the last election. You probably remember where, like, Heather Stefanson was, like, looking this direction, then all of a sudden, she goes, that's where I draw the line.

And—like, tried to, you know, pit everyone against the people out on the strike. And it backfired completely along with everything else they tried in the last election because it's just not serious. If you're a serious Conservative, then you should be open to negotiating and working with unions. They are part of the economy.

But there's, like, too much phony conservatism going on in the Manitoba PCs right now. It's too wishy-washy. There's no principle, right? It's just, like, okay, we're going this way today and then that way tomorrow. Sounds like an Alberta Liberal to me. And I think we all know where that influence is coming from.

One day, you know, the member opposite wants to be leading the Pride parade. Next day, he wants to be the most hard-right anti-trans person, poster child of the anti-trans movement. Then the next day, he's over here, you know, criticizing Indigenous people with the ads that they put up on Route 90. Then the next day, oh, we're not doing consultation enough.

And then one day, we're bringing forward a cut to the grocery taxes in Manitoba and they oppose that. Huh? What? Even when we cut the gas tax to zero, they were still criticizing.

Something tells me no matter what we do, the PCs just aren't going to ever praise us. But that's okay. I wouldn't want to be praised by the likes of the members opposite anyways. And, besides, the most important thing that we do is serve you, the people of Manitoba.

\* (16:20)

So, again, Manitoba jobs agreements—I don't know, let's look at the word. Manitoba, sounds good to me; jobs, heck yes; agreement, yes, we're coming together. Now, who would criticize three great things like that? Well, it's the members opposite. No. Well, in his opening statement, he's criticizing the Province. Jobs? They don't care about that. They'd want to govern for people who earn their income off of interest from assets, meaning not you, not the majority. And then agreement—they don't want agreement. They want disunity and division.

So we like Manitoba jobs agreements. It's an important way to build things on time and on budget, and if you want to look for proof: Duff Roblin, a real Conservative. And he used Manitoba jobs agreements under a different name, PLAs, to build a floodway on time and on budget.

**Mr. Khan:** I apologize, Mr. Chair; I don't know why the Premier (Mr. Kinew) thinks it's funny that I'm coughing, but that's—gets his kicks, I guess.

The Premier took five minutes and 15 seconds to answer the question and then four minutes and 45 seconds, did not speak. It's clear he's just delaying, filibustering. He doesn't want questions. He just wants to put his own voice on the record like he does every single day, and the truth is catching up to him.

Unions are good—we will say unions are good—but so are non-unions, so are open-source shops, so is democracy and Manitobans' right to choose where they want to work. It's their right to choose where they want to work, not a government clearly choosing one side over the other, forcing Manitobans to choose what they want. That is what this Manitoba jobs agreement says. Winnipeg Construction Association says it, Manitoba Heavy says it, Construction Association of Rural Manitoba says it, Merit Manitoba says it, CLAC says it; 88 percent of Manitobans say that this Manitoba jobs agreement is dividing Manitobans.

The Premier is forcing Manitobans to go to a union workshop. Clear as day. Now, when I asked him who wrote the agreement, the Premier said civil—says—the Premier said civil servants. Well, in a FIPPA release today from the Winnipeg Construction Association, it is laid out very clearly that, and the document will reveal—I'm sure the Premier's had a chance to look at this—and it raises significant concerns regarding how the MJA framework was developed.

It is clear in the document that the union wrote the agreement, that the government had one meeting and then signed on the dotted line, like the Premier (Mr. Kinew) was instructed to do by his union bosses. This is a public document that's released out there, so the Premier can, and I'm sure, has seen this.

The Premier—in the document, it reveals that the Manitoba jobs agreement was developed—and this is a FIPPA release from his own government—the document reveals that the Manitoba jobs agreement was developed by Manitoba Building Trades representatives and submitted to the provincial government on July 23.

Approximately a month later, on August 26, the Province and Manitoba Building Trades held only one meeting to discuss the Manitoba jobs agreement, and then 13 days later, the jobs agreement was signed. It's clearly laid out here that what the Premier said, where he said civil servants wrote it, that the Manitoba jobs agreement was developed by Manitoba Building Trades representatives. It says it in their own document, right here, that Manitoba Building Trades representatives wrote the jobs agreement.

This is not a minor administrative policy, said Darryl Harrison, director of stakeholder engagement with the Winnipeg Construction Association. Quote, the MJA fundamentally changes procurement conditions on publicly funded infrastructure projects, affects contractors' participation, alters labour administration practices and impacts billions of dollars of taxpayer-funded construction workers.

So it's interesting the Premier brings up PLAs. Now, that's what they were called before, and on a cross-jurisdictional scan of the country, only 36 PLAs were identified, including private projects. So 36 in the entire country—in British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba—and these average projects had a value of \$1.6 billion to \$10.9 billion. Not \$50 million, not school projects.

These are billions and billions of dollars where a PLA was needed, not the Premier picking winners and losers, dividing Manitobans with Manitoba Building Trades representatives. And also, these project timelines were four to 16 years. It's all clearly laid out here in this document that is public for the Premier to consume. He already knows all this because this is his own government that did it.

So why did the Premier go on the record and say that civil servants wrote this document when it's clear that Manitoba Building Trades wrote this broad docu-

ment, an agreement for him. And why is he continuing to divide Manitobans on their democratic right to choose where they want to work?

**Mr. Kinew:** So the member opposite said unions are good and we are steering members to unions of the province, so therefore we're steering Manitobans to something good. All right, that's it.

**The Chairperson:** The—[interjection]

Order.

**Mr. Khan:** I want to thank the Premier for his quick answer there. Thank you. Yes, I did say unions are good. I also said non-unions are good. I also said open shops are good. You won't say that.

**An Honourable Member:** Oh, oh, point of order.

**Mr. Khan:** The Premier—apologize.

#### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

**Mr. Kinew:** And I apologize to my colleague from St. Johns, who I'm sure wanted to jump in here as well. But we've established already this afternoon that comments must be routed through the Chair. Clearly broke that rule—the member opposite did.

**The Chairperson:** It was a point of order. Comments have to be directed through the Chair.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Khan:** Apologize, Mr. Chair. And apologize for the Premier for not directing the comment through the Chair.

But the Premier clearly said that unions are good. I said unions are good. I said open shops are good too; non-unions are good. Premier won't say that. The Premier has been very clear that he wants to force everyone who's work in this industry to join a union. The MJA lays it out. Premier does not want to reference at all the document that was released by Winnipeg Construction Association, where it clearly lays out what this Premier is doing, who wrote the Manitoba jobs agreement.

The one time that the Premier should maybe take some time and ask the—answer the question is—he just goes on the union angle.

So it's clear that, on this side of the House, we support everyone. We support everyone's choice to work where they want to work—union, non-union, open shop. And in this agreement here, again, Winnipeg

Construction Association and the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba lay out significant concerns in that document when it comes to these projects, the scale of the projects.

Billions of dollars on projects versus building a school project for \$50 million is what this government has forced shops to go into. In the Manitoba jobs agreement—so it's clear by the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) non-answer that he will agree with the report that's put forward by Winnipeg Construction Association that this was written by Manitoba trades.

Now, on the issue of the Manitoba jobs agreement, within it there's an 85-cents-per-hour work on these jobs. We've asked the Premier numerous times on where does the 85 cents go? What is the accountability and the tracing—tracking on that? He has said, I believe, loosely, that's going to go into training. And we've asked, will there be accountability? Will they be reporting on that? How will Manitobans know where their dollars are being spent? This is an 85-cent addition to a project for every hour worked on a project under this forced-unionization Manitoba jobs agreement.

So can the Premier enlighten Manitobans and maybe—and tell us where these 85 cents per hour worked are going? Will there be accountability on it? Will there be reporting on it from Manitobans, so we can see where that money is being spent?

**Mr. Kinew:** There the member opposite goes again: \$50 million isn't a lot of money to him. Page 144 in this year's budget, \$50 million in tax cuts; that's what we're here to do. Pass this budget. Let's make sure that you save money starting at the grocery stores and \$50 million is the net tax reduction across all measures in government.

Not enough for the member opposite: \$50 million doesn't mean anything to him. But means a lot to everybody else in the province. And now, again, \$50-million project. He talks about it like it's nothing. That's a lot of work. It's a lot of people getting training, a lot of people being able to put food on the table, be able to build a career. It's great. A lot of misconceptions out there about Manitoba jobs agreements and project labour agreements.

\* (16:30)

Well, PLAs, Doug Ford uses them. I can tell him if you guys don't like that. Be tough to find any volunteers—I mean, be tough enough as it is but never mind if Doug is mad at you guys. Scott Moe uses them. I can tell him too. Scott's probably got a few

volunteers, but yes, if you don't want them, I could tell Scott. I'll see Scott next week, so we can talk about it. Be like, hey, Manitoba PCs are criticizing your guys' construction policy. Bizarre.

I don't know if I will though, because I'll probably spend more time trying to explain who the Manitoba PCs are than actually talking about the subject at hand. *[interjection]* Yes, no, it is.

So, yes. Now, when we talk about people working: everyone, you should join a union if you have the opportunity to. Stronger pay, stronger pensions, better health and safety and somebody to advocate on your behalf if you're in a dispute with your employer.

That said, people don't need to join a union in order to work under an MJA. In fact, I bet at the end of this process, most of the work building the schools, building the highways, building everything else, is going to be done by non-unionized workers. We just want to create an open door so that there's not a de facto mechanism of keeping union shops out of public construction projects.

Now the most egregious of that was when Brian Pallister banned the use of PLAs. We repealed that, of course, because it was just bizarre. And, yes, I mean, the groups that are criticizing, they're going to criticize no matter what we do. They put up billboards and digital ads mentioning me by name when we just repealed that Pallister bill. I mean, pretty reasonable move to repeal a bill that says you can't even entertain a PLA. It's freedom, liberty and cutting red tape all in one, so I like that.

And yes, I don't know—this is the big reason that we're not passing the grocery tax bill, because they want to ask me about encouraging people to join unions? Yes, I'm in the NDP; I'm going to encourage people to join unions. They're good. Member opposite agrees unions are good, then his big gotcha moment is like, you're driving people to join a union, which I've just admitted is good.

Okay, not sure what we're doing here, but can we move on with cutting the taxes for the people who vote for us? That's what I'd suggest we do.

**Mr. Khan:** What we're doing here is we're asking questions on behalf of Manitobans, non-union Manitobans—88 per cent of the workforce, and the Premier refuses to even acknowledge them again. Now in the third question set he has not even acknowledged them, where the Premier only wants to talk about unions.

We agree: unions, non unions, open shop, what—however you choose to work in Manitoba, that is your right, that is your choice. But the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has tilted the playing field to support his union bosses, his union friends, his union shops, over everyone else, and we on this side of the House and Manitobans would agree that's fundamentally wrong.

He will not answer the question on—when I issued the reports or when I brought up the report by Winnipeg Construction Association, he won't answer that question at all. He hasn't touched the 85 cents per hour of job—worked on a job sites, and I've asked him twice about those. I asked him clear—*[interjection]*—he's heckling again. He wants to continue to heckle while I'm asking questions.

You know, he wants to launch more insults over here, Mr. Chair, over \$50 million, and he might not think this, he might not think that. You know, it's below the Premier. It's actually embarrassing, insulting that he wants to go personal attacks all the time in here. I'm just asking serious questions on Manitobans' behalf and he wants to bring up Ford and Moe.

Sure, yes, they use a variation of a PLA to build projects, but not a school. On billions and billions of dollars of—worth of projects, they use a PLA, not for a school project, and this is what the Premier is doing here. *[interjection]*

But it's interesting he brings up volunteers. I don't—again, he's heckling and laughing.

**An Honourable Member:** So sensitive.

**Mr. Khan:** It's of—no, it's not a matter of sensitivity; it is a matter of, you know, decorum. Just listening to the question. I haven't said anything when the Premier is answering the question or delaying, filibustering the day.

But I'll ask the Premier again: Who wrote the Manitoba jobs agreement? In this document released by Winnipeg Construction Association from a FIPPA by your own government says the document reveals the Manitoba jobs agreement was—

**The Chairperson:** Order.

I'll remind members to direct comments through the Chair.

**Mr. Khan:** Thank you for your wisdom, Mr. Chair, on that. Appreciate it.

The document reveals the Manitoba jobs agreement was developed by Manitoba Building Trades representative and submitted to the provincial government on July 23, 2025. The Province and Manitoba

Building Trades held only one meeting on August 26, 2025, to discuss the Manitoba jobs agreement just over a month later from when a Manitoba Building Trades representative submitted it to the government. A month later, they had a meeting, and the agreement was signed only 13 days later.

It is clear that the Manitoba Building Trades representative wrote this agreement, gave it to the NDP and this Premier, and they signed it 13 days later. This is a major, major violation of Manitobans' trust. It is a major overstep by this NDP government. It is completely wrong and Shawn Wood—I'll quote the executive director of the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba—says: This issue has moved well beyond a normal policy disagreement. It is now a serious public interest procurement issue involving transparency, competition, governance, workers' choice and accountability for taxpayer dollars.

So I'll ask the Premier: The Manitoba jobs agreement requires non-union workers to give 85 cents per labour hour to Manitoba Building Trades. Where is that money going? Will there be accounting, transparency and reporting on where that 85 cents per labour hour is going in this Manitoba jobs agreement?

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, of course.

**Mr. Khan:** I want to thank the Premier for that quick answer, and I'll ask the Premier: Where is it going to be reported? When is it going to be reported?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, the—I wish the folks involved would put as much money and energy into building the schools as to the press releases and kerfuffle. Like, let's build some schools on time, on budget. I say that to unions; I say that to contractors. Let's do it.

So, yes. I mean, like, it's the government. Everything's going to be reported publicly. The member opposite's alluding to a FIPPA which—yes, I guess it could be FIPPA'd; we'll probably report on it, given the fact that we're very proud of Manitoba job agreements.

This is, like, our lead-off election promise in the last election campaign. This is not some sort of, like, secret thing that we're talking about. We came out on day one; we said we were going cut taxes. On day two, we went to the Building Trades office and said we're going to build stuff with union labour. And all the media was there.

And what were the PCs doing? Most of them were on vacation through the month of August, 2023, which is probably why we beat the brakes off them on

election day. And then the rest of them were sitting around, patting each other on the back about how great the search-the-landfill ads were. Oh, right policy, right politics too. That was a quote about what they used to say to one another about the search-the-landfill ads: Right on the policy, right on the politics. Disgusting.

So, yes. I mean, great. We're going to report on it publicly or we won't charge the 85 cents. We won't collect it. Simple as that. Question asked; question answered.

Members opposite, though, members opposite, heckling, who may or may not be present. What are you guys going to do about the complete disregard for the social fabric they were a part of in the last election campaign? There's been no reckoning with that. And so everybody wants to cry around about the quorum. No, we're going to give them a rough ride because of what they did to the people of Manitoba in the last election. Simple as that.

\* (16:40)

They want to criticize Manitoba jobs agreement? Okay. Instead of attacking trans children, go back to August 2023 and debate us on job agreements.

Did they? No. They chose some real gutter politics and then now, three or four years later, they want to show up and make accusations against us. But as you know—like, okay whatever. It's just kind of gross. You know what I mean? I think you know what I mean. I think everyone knows what I mean. *[interjection]* Yes, of course the members opposite don't know what I mean because they are a part of a cancerous addition to the public discourse of our province.

And then they came in here like trained seals and clapped for Heather Stefanson, even after she'd committed the most legendary face plant in all of history.

And that wasn't the low point. It kept getting lower after that. They lost Tuxedo, member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt). Everyone's quitting. It continues to go down and down and down.

Wally Daudrich is single-handedly bankrolling their entire party. *[interjection]* What? No, I'm not saying Riding Mountain is quitting, to those members heckling. No, I said he continues to contribute to the debasement of the party. On this point, they both concede, I would say.

So, yes, 85 cents, okay. You got the answer that you're looking for there. But the PCs do not have

moral credibility, do not have ethical credibility. They're part of that subclass of politicians who, like, pat each other. Oh, so-and-so's a good guy; you just got to get to know him. No, you have to conduct yourself ethically in public view.

And so, yes, if I say something about the 85 cents, it's going to happen, as a matter of integrity, or we won't collect it. You can mark my words. Everything else, also true. Let them squirm. They've more than earned it.

So yes, let's hold hands, agree that unions are good and then go back onto the playing field, put our partisan jerseys on and see who emerges the victor.

**Mr. Khan:** That's the third or the fourth question that I've asked the Premier (Mr. Kinew) on the Manitoba jobs agreement, citing that he has yet to still say that open-shop businesses are good, that Manitobans have the democratic right to choose where they want. He won't. He just keeps saying unions are good, unions are good. This is all the Premier—his complete ideology and mindset is on only supporting union shops and alienating 88 per cent of Manitobans. *[interjection]*

Again, the Premier across the way, Mr. Chair, wants to continue to laugh and heckle while I'm asking questions for 88 per cent of Manitobans, if not all of Manitobans who'll be affected by this Manitoba jobs agreement.

I've asked him three questions on who wrote the jobs agreement after his first immediate knee-jerk reaction, and he hasn't commented on that either. He hasn't commented on the timeline, once I asked him to comment on. He hasn't commented on where the 85 cents will be spent per labour hour worked on this job. That is just an add-on. It's just a tax. It's driving the cost up of a project. Everybody can see it clear as day. If you add on an extra 85 cents per hour worked on a job, it's going to drive the price up.

CARM, Construction Association of Rural Manitoba, came out and said that this is estimated to increase the cost of a project by about 20 per cent. So Manitobans are now paying for a school that they will never see. They are effectively paying for six schools and only getting five, or five schools and only getting four, however you want to cut the math up. They are paying for a school that they will never—*[interjection]*—again, the Premier wants to laugh at this when we're asking questions about a school that's being built. *[interjection]*

Now, he's continually—like, this behaviour in the Chamber is absolutely appalling when we're asking

questions on schools being built in Manitoba. It's a 20 per cent surplus charge by this NDP government, and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) thinks it's a laughable matter. This is your money, Manitoba. This is your taxpayer dollars that the Premier is laughing at you.

I'm asking a question: Where is the 85 cents going? Will the Premier—*[interjection]* Now we have the Minister of Advanced Ed who wants to join in on the heckling now. And, you know, the minister—I won't go down there. I'm here to ask questions.

So the question for the Premier is: He now says he's going to report on it, so when will he report on it and where are those 85 cents being spent right now per labour hour?

The MJA is in effect now. With Manitoba Building Trades scooping up the 85 cents per hour worked—labour hour worked, where is that money now, who holds it when it's collected and what is it being spent on? Manitobans have a right to know where this surcharge of 85 cents per labour hour worked is going. Where is the money now? Who holds that money, because the MJA's in effect now, and what is that money being spent on?

**Mr. Kinew:** It's being spent on building schools. They didn't build any of these schools during their time in office.

This is their winning argument? I don't know if it's four, I don't know if it's five, but they're building schools and I have some minor criticisms about the procurement process. All right, okay. Let's go have the debate outside of the new schools once they're built. We typically report on construction projects after they're complete. I'm sure you'll see all the details at that time.

But, again, why didn't they do this in office? The member was sitting at the Cabinet table with James Teitsma when they concocted a bizarre plan to try and sell non-existent schools to Bay Street financiers, rich people in Toronto who would've ended up owning the schools, not you, not the Province. And then, to what end? Zero schools. None of them got built. Then, of course, desperation mode, last minute before the election, the press release.

Okay, I don't see the cohesive political strategy here. They're mad at us for not passing the tax cut that they themselves are blocking today. They're mad at us for using unionized labour to build the schools they didn't build. They're mad at us for coming in here and answering their questions and then having fun while we're doing it. Okay.

**An Honourable Member:** You're the only one having fun.

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, the member heckling me says—he'd be saying I'm the only one having fun, is smiling as he says it. Obviously, he's having a good time.

But, anyway, Manitoba jobs agreement. I love Manitoba, I love jobs, I love agreement. When we're all in agreement, that's great. So only the PCs would find something to criticize there.

I had—speaking of Doug Ford and his use of the PLAs, I went to Council of the Federation last year. He was the host. And we went in there and he always has this thing, he's like, oh, Wab's a NDP, and he tries to razz me for that. And then I go, oh, yes, well, you know what I say to the Manitoba PCs? You guys are broke, you lose elections and you love Donald Trump. You're nothing like the Ontario Progressive Conservatives that I know.

So Doug had a good laugh. He said, that's great. So did all the Conservative GR people who were circling us and I'm sure are probably trying to tell the members opposite they're doing a good job. But, eh, *c'est la vie [that's life]*. Good times.

So let's build some schools. Let's get people some union cards while they're at it. And, again, what the evidence shows is that unions raise wages for all workers, including non-union members, when they're present in an area. So when we bring forward support for unions to participate in the bidding, again, open shops will probably do the majority of the work on these construction projects. Workers in Manitoba should be happy that the wages will go up.

The member opened his questioning today with a statement that was proven false by the data, talking about the importance of wages. You want a plan, honourable Chair, to increase people's wages in Manitoba? You got it. It's called the Manitoba jobs agreement. You want accountability and transparency? You got it. You want to build schools, you got it.

But the members opposite, you know, continue to try and throw shade. I get it; that's what you got to do as opposition. But, you know, creativity, joie de vivre. Bringing forward a unique take on things doesn't have to be dreary and hateful and negative all the time.

And so that's free advice. I probably shouldn't even give this advice. People on my side are probably cringing; why are you trying to help them?

But, I mean, God, you got to spend time with these folks on the opposition benches. Shouldn't we at least make it more enjoyable for all involved? I mean, seems—sounds like a decent proposition to me.

\* (16:50)

So, yes, this budget has more schools being built, a new emergency room at the Victoria hospital, has more people getting union cards to get a good wage, it has a cut for grocery prices, it has a cut for taxes. All of that to the tune of \$50 million. It's got more workers in health care, it's got more clinics in health care, so let's pass it.

Let's pass this budget, certainly the best budget I've seen since I've been here. I've been here 10 years now. The bizarre budgets brought forward by the former PCs resulted in chaos in health care and in the broader society and costs that were held in abeyance artificially for many years. So we're cleaning up the mess.

**Mr. Khan:** I'm just going to back up and ask for clarity maybe from the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and just point out that five or six questions now asked to the Premier on where are those 85 cents going; he won't answer it. How's it being tracked? When will it be reported on? He won't answer when. What is it being spent on right now, because it is being collected by Manitoba trades? No answers.

When I asked him specifically about the timeline laid out in the FIPPA release of his own government documents, on the timeline on who wrote the MJA, the Premier will not answer that question. When it brings into question that it was written by the Manitoba Building Trades and that the NDP government signed on to it 13 days later after only one meeting, he will not answer that question either.

Now, he does want to talk about schools being built. So let's talk about those 11 schools that are now under construction. Ten out of those 11 schools this NDP government is currently completing were started by the previous PC government. We completed 23 schools in seven years. The PCs completed 23 schools in seven years. This NDP government—10 out of 11 schools—are trying to take credit for the work of the previous PC government.

The NDP delayed these schools. It's telling that the Premier will not answer the question. Very simple on the 85 cents. Very simple on who wrote it. Very simple on—he still has yet to say that non-union shops are good, that Manitobans' choice to work where they want is a good thing, that democracy is a good thing.

He will not say those things. He says, join a union, and that's it.

That is the only way the Premier sees this. He's dividing Manitobans, he's dividing the 88 per cent of Manitobans that want to choose where they want to work. This Premier is clearly against your democratic right to vote.

Now, the Premier did say that he—*[interjection]* Again, you know, it's—I asked the Premier numerous times to please be respectful while I ask questions for Manitobans. *[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** This behaviour's unbecoming of the Premier. It is unfortunate. I have asked—just asked him be respectful. I'm asking questions. *[interjection]* And this is the behaviour we're getting from him. It's unfortunate.

So—sorry, Mr. Chair, the clocks have turned off—*[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** So the Premier says let's pass this budget. Last time I checked, he's the Premier—for now. Last time I checked, Mr. Chair, he has the majority of votes. He can pass this budget. He can do it himself if he chooses to do it. He's just choosing not to.

He's playing political games like he's done ever since he's now come into office. He has the ability to do it. His mentor and predecessor Greg Selinger did it when he increased the PST. Brian Pallister did it when he reduced the PST. His friend and colleague Mark Carney did it in Ottawa when he became a majority government that they removed the gas tax federally.

The Premier can pass his BITSA bill. He can pass his budget bill. He's choosing not to. Even in the legal opinion that he brought out the day of us bringing this forward, there's a typo in there. Steve Lambert—*[interjection]* Again, Premier wants to continue to heckle. I'm simply asking him to be respectful while I bring this point forward.

Steve Lambert reports that there is a typo in there, admittedly that there's a typo in the last paragraph. It says if the law does pass; that it should say if the law does not pass, otherwise it doesn't make any sense. And this legal opinion was written by legal counsel, by the Chief Legislative Counsel that quit the next day. Literally quit the next day—or the same day.

Still working on the timelines of how that all unveiled on that. That's convenient that this came forward—that this legal opinion came forward, names redacted, chief legal counsel's gone the next day.

Something seems fishy there. There's a typo in there that doesn't actually make sense. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) knows he can do it and pass it.

So the simple question is, will the Premier stop laughing?

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**Mr. Khan:** No. I'm asking about the budget bill—

**The Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** —and the answer is no. Will the Premier take matters seriously? Will he stop playing games? He can pass the budget bill himself, so he says let's pass the budget bill. Why will the Premier not simply pass his own budget bill when he is the Premier, he has the majority of seats and he can do it if he chooses. When will the Premier stop playing games?

**The Chairperson:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan).

The honourable member for Midland—the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Khan:** The Premier knows that he can implement what he's bringing forward to the budget bill. He knows he can implement that. He knows he can implement those measures while we've called for on our side of House is real affordability measures and he knows that. He knows that instead of sprinkling pennies at the feet of Manitobans offering them 7 cents on a can of pop, that he can pass—he can implement. He can implement—he can lower the tax right now. Mark Carney did it. Greg Selinger, his predecessor—his mentor—did it. Brian Pallister did it. This Premier can do it if he chooses. He can lower the tax right now. He is choosing not to do it.

So I ask the Premier, why is he choosing not to implement his BITSA bill? Why is he choosing not to pass the tax—junk food PST tax—the NDP junk food PST tax that he so claims he can implement it today if he's choosing to—if he chooses to. Why is he choosing not to do that?

**Mr. Kinew:** What would be the political strategy behind not passing our budget? Advance—advance this. Okay, we want to pass this budget. In order to do so let's wrap Executive Council. We'll go back to the main session. We'll ask for leave for an extra 30 minutes to go through the rest of the stages. Let's pass a budget bill right now.

I'm done talking. If they want the budget to pass, let's wrap Executive Council right now.

**Mr. Khan:** I've—*[interjection]* And here he goes again heckling me, and I don't know what he's trying—so he can implement the changes—*[interjection]*

**The Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** —he can implement the tax—PST junk food tax like he wants to do. He can do that today. What we've called for on our side of the House is meaningful tax change, is meaningful tax reform on Manitobans, helping Manitobans by increasing their basic personal exemption to \$30,000. The Premier doesn't want to go to \$30,000. We said go to \$21,000—*[interjection]* and again, he's heckling me. Non-stop heckling the entire day. I just ask the Premier to be respectful. *[interjection]* So you can implement those changes.

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

**Mr. Khan:** The Premier can implement those changes.

#### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

**Mr. Kinew:** He said you, addressing me directly, when all the comments have to go through the Chair. I just want to say, I'm here just to cut your grocery prices. Let's wrap this up if anybody else wants to cut grocery prices too.

**The Chairperson:** On the same point of order? *[interjection]*

Order. Order. Order.

So it was a point of order. All comments—*[interjection]*

Order.

Comments do have to come through the Chair. So that was a point of order, and point of order shouldn't be used to further debate.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** I believe it is the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Khan:** It's clear the Premier can implement this tax—the junk food tax—

**The Chairperson:** Order, please.

The time being 5 p.m., committee rise. And call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko):** The time being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, May 19, 2026**

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