

Fourth Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Man.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	Ind.
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen, Hon.	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 16, 2019

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 240—The Elections Amendment Act

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Selkirk (Mr. Lagimodiere), that Bill 240, The Elections Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Guillemard: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce Bill 240 to this House. The Elections Amendment Act requires candidates to disclose offences that they have pleaded guilty to or been convicted of. Offence convictions while a youth or for which a pardon was granted under the Criminal Code are excluded.

This bill will encourage the practice of voluntary disclosure of information for anyone seeking to run in the provincial election. It does not exclude those with offence records from running for any party.

Madam Speaker, it is important for Manitobans to be informed about the candidates who are seeking their vote and trust. Informed choices create a stronger democracy.

Thank you.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Vyshyvanka Day

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am proud to rise in the House today to celebrate international Vyshyvanka Day.

Vitayemo, welcome, to our guests from our Ukrainian community who have joined us to celebrate this very special day.

Vyshyvanka Day is a wonderful occasion where Ukrainian communities all over the world wear embroidered shirts as a symbol of national unity. But vyshyvankas are much more than just beautiful garments, they are steeped in Ukrainian tradition and significance. Archeological research in Ukraine shows that this very special embroidery depicted on vyshyvankas has existed there since prehistoric times.

And today, Canada is one of 50 countries participating in Vyshyvanka Day. Madam Speaker, we know Canada shares a strong kinship with Ukraine. Canada was the first western country to recognize Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991.

And here at home, the history of Ukrainian immigration is of great significance to Manitoba, with the very first wave of Ukrainian newcomers arriving in the late 1800s. Now Manitoba is home to a large population of Ukrainian descent, including my family, Madam Speaker, who came here with a hope and a dream for a better future and immigrated here back in 1905 and 1906.

Our government is excited to support this symbolic initiative that raises awareness of the tremendous pride Ukrainians have in their community and culture. By proudly wearing vyshyvankas, we pay tribute to the contributions that the Ukrainian community has made to the development of a vibrant, multicultural Canada and Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the members of Ukrainian community for joining us here today. Dyakuyu [*thank you*]. Please extend our best wishes for continued prosperity and growth in the years to come. Thank you for joining us.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Logan): Welcome to our guests from the Ukrainian community.

Madam Speaker, here in Manitoba and around the world, Vyshyvanka Day unites Ukrainians and people of Ukrainian descent.

The third Thursday in May is about celebrating Ukrainian heritage, creating a sense of cultural pride and solidarity and promoting artistic and cultural expression.

Madam Speaker, the vyshyvanka is a very familiar sight in Manitoba. The traditional white frock covered with beautiful embroidery is a standard at many Ukrainian celebrations. Masterful hands embroider colourful patterns and designs that are specific to the different and diverse regions of Ukraine.

The artistry behind a traditional vyshyvanka was inspired by the power of protective symbols. Meanings behind the embroidered symbols and patterns range from circles that represent the sun and harmony, grape bunches that symbolize happiness and horses that symbolize aspiration.

I am particularly proud to support Manitoba's Ukrainian heritage because it has been so critical to the history of Manitoba's labour movement. The Ukrainian Labour Temple, located in the constituency of Point Douglas, is the only surviving labour hall associated with the turbulent events of the 1919 strike. It remains a continuing source of pride, as well as a site for labour organization, activism and celebration to this day.

I encourage everyone to attend the Vyshyvanka Day walk, which will start at 6:30 at the Taras Shevchenko monument, here at the Legislature. Thank you to all the organizers—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member to complete her statement? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you to all the organizers, including Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre and happy Vyshyvanka Day. Dyakuyu. *[Thank you]*.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other members speaking to the ministerial statement?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I think it is important that we recognize Vyshyvanka Day.

This is an important day for the Ukrainian community. We have many, many who have come from Ukraine to here in Canada, and we stand in strong support of people in Ukraine now and into the future as far as we can see.

We wish you all the best on Vyshyvanka Day.

Madam Speaker: Further ministerial statements?

The honourable Minister for Status of Women, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement?

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Our government is pleased to acknowledge that tomorrow, Friday, May 17th, is International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. The date of May 17th was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

May 17th is now celebrated in more than 130 countries, including 37 where same-sex acts are still illegal. Thousands of initiatives, big and small, are reported throughout the planet.

As the Manitoba government, we are pleased to support employee networks such as WAVE, which stands for We are All Valuable and Equal. WAVE was formed to help foster understanding and inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity diversity within the Manitoba civil service, and is a valuable resource to government of Manitoba employees. The network is open to all interested Manitoba government employees, including those who identify along the LGBTQ continuum, as well as allies.

Along with our government's support for WAVE, we are also very pleased to have developed training for employees of the Manitoba government on the topic of gender and sexual diversity. This training is called: Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Manitobans...a conversation. It was designed by government employees to help ensure our public service is inclusive and responsive to all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba is a beautiful province, made rich by our diverse people and our communities. We are proud to rise in support of International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. We are stronger because of our diversity, and Manitoba will always be a self—a safe and welcoming place for people who identify along the entire rainbow spectrum.

Madam Speaker, Pride week is almost upon us and, along with marching in the Pride relay with many of my colleagues from the Manitoba Legislature, I'm also looking forward to the Winnipeg FrontRunners Pride Run and walk on Saturday, June the 1st. All proceeds of this event support Reaching Out Winnipeg, which is an organization that supports the resettlement of LGBTQ refugees.

This event takes a lot of effort to plan, and I thank all the organizers and volunteers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (13:40)

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Tomorrow is the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, where we speak out against discrimination LGBTQ2S* relatives experience, and come together as allies to raise awareness and promote inclusion.

The charter—the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, alongside the Manitoba Human Rights Code, enshrines our right to live free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Tragically, prejudices still exist today.

LGBTQ2S* people and non-binary citizens experience acts of discrimination and hate daily. They face higher levels of discrimination that affects their safety, their health, their ability to get employment and their interpersonal relationships. The Canada Trans Youth Health Survey found that the risk of suicide amongst transgendered youth is 16 times higher than cisgender youth. This is simply tragic and horrible and must not be allowed to continue.

As legislators, we have to be loud in our support of our relatives in the LGBTQ2S* community and stand up against discrimination not only today but every day. Our support has to be rooted not only in our words but also in the policies that we put forward. When drafting legislation, we must examine

how we are supporting or not supporting the LGBTQ2S* community.

There are many events coming up across the province that showcase the strength and diversity of Manitoba's LGBTQ2S* community with Pride Winnipeg. And we say miigwech to our relatives for their continued courage and resiliency.

Miigwech.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): Madam Speaker, tomorrow, Friday, May 17th, 2019 marks the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.

People across Manitoba and 'acround' the world will stand tall against all forms of hate and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Pride week kicks off on Friday, May 24th, with a flag-raising at City Hall, and the following weekend, on Saturday, June 1st, the third annual Trans March will take place. The Pride festival has grown immensely since the first Pride march back in August of 1987. And a friend of mine, Jim Kane, marched in that first march. He is—he's a very well-known and actually nationally respected figure because he has been HIV positive since that time. It's an absolute miracle that he's alive today. But I remember him telling me the story that, at the time, the chief of police said that there were—that was nobody who was gay in the entire police force, and one of Jim's friends had wanted to march in the Pride Parade. He had actually walked in the Pride Parade with his head covered and the next year had hoped to march in uniform but was unable to do so because he died. He died—complications due to AIDS.

And it was the—it's important to mark and recognize that this discrimination is ongoing and what a challenge it can be, but there was a thinker and a speaker in the United States who said that when it comes to people accepting people who are LGBTQ or GSRD, as they are sometimes called, is that it's important to remember that while acceptance can be slow, that the love is always there.

Diversity is our strength. The government of Manitoba and all of us as elected officials must stand together and continue to stand up against bullying, discrimination and intolerance not just today but every day. And I'm very—I'd just like to say that I'm very proud that at our annual general meeting the Manitoba Liberal Party launched what we believe

is one of the first ever gender-sexual-relationship-diverse associations of any political party in Canada.

To all who celebrate, thank you very much for your courage in standing up.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I wonder if I could have leave to speak to this statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the statement? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Fletcher: I'd like to thank the minister for raising international homophobia, transphobia and biphobia day. It is international day, and I'd just like to take a moment just to reflect.

This year, the sultan of Brunei had made sexual orientation punishable by death—punishable by death. There's countries like Saudi Arabia where the result is the same. So emphasis on international.

Because, as we bring more awareness, the more likely people will help—share our values. My—at the Canadian Mennonite University, just a few weeks ago, I attended a very interesting presentation by the horticultural society. It was packed. They had an internationally recognized gardener and I'm proud to say that that gardener—and his partner, Brent—was my uncle, Uncle Tom, Thomas Hobbs. And he has been in one of the most committed relationships I know.

Madam Speaker, another person who's played a major role in my life is Donna Kurt. We used to go on canoe trips with the Manitoba Naturalists Society and the Manitoba Recreational Canoe Association.

When we were in the wilderness there was no social hierarchy, no stereotypes, didn't matter how much money you had and it didn't matter what your sexual orientation was.

Now, that was in the '80s. Hopefully, it doesn't matter in Canadian society anymore. And perhaps, with a little bit of a push, anyone, anywhere in the world, can love without the fear of the death penalty.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are so lucky to live in Canada and to be progressive on these types of issues. And I like to thank everyone for giving me the opportunity to speak.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Make Your Move Engineering Competition

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Madam Speaker, today I am so proud to rise to recognize three amazing individuals in my Riel constituency. Anora Knox-Suss, Feliciaa Baldner and Kaylee Clarke are junior high students at Darwin School and are here today along with their teacher, Ms. Klassen.

This team of girls were one of three teams from Darwin School that participated in the Make Your Move competition at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Engineering on March 9th. The competition is held annually to coincide with International Women's Day and helps promote and celebrate women in engineering and encourage young girls to consider pursuing a future as a professional engineer.

The competition featured 20 teams comprised of grade 7 and 8 girls representing schools across Manitoba. Each team was led by a female professional engineer who helped the girls with their tasks.

What's incredibly remarkable, Madam Speaker, is that the challenge was only revealed to the teams on the day of the competition. This year's challenge was to design a device that simulated an ocean trawler that can remove plastic debris from the ocean.

And this Darwin team of Anora, Feliciaa and Kaylee worked diligently and won first place in the competition and were the top team for Manitoba in 2019.

These three young individuals are leaders in our community and role models for other girls as they work to advance the success in—of women in STEM. They should be very proud of their achievements. And I am so pleased to honour these remarkable young girls and be able to represent them in the Manitoba Legislature.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible passion and encouragement of their teacher, Ms. Klassen, who has provided these students with confidence in themselves that will last a lifetime.

Please help me and honour and acknowledge Anora, Feliciaa and Kaylee, along with their teacher, Ms. Klassen.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Sustainable Development.

Ms. Squires: I ask for leave to have their names entered into Hansard, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: As the member has already included them in the statement, their names will be in Hansard.

Concordia ER Closure

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): It is only two weeks until June, the time when this PC government plans to close the Concordia ER. Yet the Health Minister continues to delay informing Manitobans about the state of their health care. Instead, he is hiding behind a pending report by Dr. David Peachey to avoid telling Winnipeggers if they will lose another ER.

* (13:50)

We already know this report will be flawed. Dr. Peachey has said that staff at Winnipeg hospitals are on board with the health-care 'reorganization', but this is simply not true. Front-line workers and nurses are short-staffed, forced to work long hours of overtime, while visits to emergency rooms have spiked.

In recent months, a record number of ambulances arrived at Winnipeg hospitals. Now is not the time to close those ERs.

Nurses and front-line staff are saying they aren't ready, when northeastern Winnipeggers say they don't want Concordia ER closed, and even the expert who penned the original report said he has not heard people say they are prepared for the closure.

We need this government to be transparent and to tell Manitobans about the fate of the Concordia ER.

Thank you.

Kari Klassen

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, today I rise in the House to admire the courage, compassion, kindness and determination of a young woman's efforts to help others battling cancer while she herself undergoes chemo for breast cancer. This individual is East Selkirk resident Kari Klassen.

When Kari started her chemo, she was provided with the standard list of products she would need to pick up to use during treatment, products like skin cream, since the chemo dries out the skin; nail hardener to help stiffen soft nails; Chap Stick for dry, chapped stick lips; and special soft toothbrushes that are less abrasive on bleeding gums.

Shopping for items is one of the last things those going through chemo are thinking about doing. It's one more load to an already heavy burden. Kari decided to create packages with the needed items to give out to those starting chemo.

In addition to the recommended items, Kari and her husband Dallas add a courage rock to the packages in memory of Kari's father, who recently lost his battle with cancer. Kari's father used to carry a courage rock on his journey.

They have named their effort the Hummingbird Project. In indigenous teachings, the hummingbird teaches you to appreciate and love the miracle of life while symbolizing wonder and beauty with unlimited energy. Hummingbirds are healers, bringing love, hope and good luck. This is the message Kari and Dallas want to bring to others.

The Hummingbird Project is helping bring a little bit of comfort to cancer patients as they face a very difficult and emotionally confusing time.

Kari and Dallas have distributed over 200 care packages to Manitobans.

It is truly an honour to have such caring and giving individuals in our community who help others to seek the beauty in each and every day.

Madam Speaker, Kari and her husband Dallas have joined us here today. I ask all members to rise and help acknowledge their compassion and kindness.

Filipino-Canadian Heritage Event

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I wanted to use this opportunity to share an upcoming event with everyone. So here is the whole who, what, where, when, why of it all.

Who: Our community. Whatever that may mean to you, everyone is invited.

What: It is an opportunity to celebrate and learn about Filipino-Canadian heritage. We are going to be having live performances of dancing, including Sisler's Most Wanted, singing, poetry reading, as well as short historical presentations of our Filipino community and how the community has contributed to our Canadian heritage, economy and more.

There will be many exhibits to enjoy, learn from and have fun at, as well as ongoing basketball tournaments and some good food.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm sure my colleagues are all sitting at the edges of their seats wondering,

where is this event happening? Well, let me tell you. It is going to be at Maples Collegiate; that's 1330 Jefferson Avenue, on Saturday, June 1st from 4 to 9 p.m.

Now, lastly, I wanted to share why this event happening. As everyone in this House already knows, our Filipino-Canadian heritage is being recognized at both a federal level and provincial level for the first time ever, simultaneously. We know that celebrating Filipino heritage is not new to Winnipeg, but it is new for Canada as a nation. For the first time ever, it will be celebrated and recognized from coast to coast to coast.

So, Madam Speaker, if you—well, not you specifically, but you are invited—are free on June 1st, I hope that you consider attending. The event is family friendly and is a come and go as you please, so bring your kids or just pop by and say hi.

In closing, I just want to give a big shout-out to all of our dedicated volunteers and all of their continued efforts and hard work. June 1st will be a blast, and I hope to see you there.

Arthur-Virden Constituency

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): Madam Speaker, the great constituency of Arthur-Virden has been in existence for 30 years. It was created by the distribution in 1989, combining the former constituencies of Arthur and Virden.

The Arthur-Virden constituency is in the southwest corner of the province that borders up to Riding Mountain, Spruce Woods, Saskatchewan and North Dakota, and the beautiful Turtle Mountain Provincial Park. Arthur-Virden constituency's two biggest industries are agriculture sector and the oil and gas sector.

Jim Downey was the first MLA for Arthur-Virden who served in 1977 to 1999. He was a Cabinet minister for the Progressive Conservative governments of Sterling Lyon and Gary Filmon. He was a deputy premier during the Filmon government.

Larry Maguire, the second MLA of Arthur-Virden who served from 1999 to 2013—while an MLA, Larry served as a number of critic roles in the opposition PC party.

I was elected in—as MLA in a by-election in 2014 and was re-elected in 2016. During this time, I served as Deputy Speaker, board member for the

International Peace Garden and the Fiscal Responsibility Committee.

Madam Speaker, one major thing that three of us had in common was that we loved to fundraise for the party.

During the recent boundary changes in 2018 with the Manitoba boundary commission, Arthur-Virden will no longer be a constituency in the next provincial election.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank each of the constituents of Arthur-Virden constituency for the past, current and future support as your MLA. I am now pleased to take on the candidacy for the next provincial election for Turtle Mountain which will make up 50 per cent of the old Arthur-Virden constituency.

Madam Speaker, you have to look at it this way: it is the end of a 30-year dynasty for Arthur-Virden but a beginning of a new one for Turtle Mountain.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we—*[interjection]* Order.

Prior to oral questions, we have some special guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you. They happen to be special guests of the member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux). And we'd like to welcome her mother, Cathy Lamoureux, and her two aunts, Sharon and Charmaine, who are visiting from Regina. And we'd like all of—we'd—all of us would like to welcome all of you to the Manitoba Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Concordia and Seven Oaks Hospitals Request to Retain ER Services

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, it looks like in a few minutes, residents of northeast Winnipeg will find out whether or not they'll have an emergency room in a few weeks.

This is the latest step in a bizarre saga brought about at the Premier's behest where first they're going to close the emergency room really quickly; and then they were going to close it a little less quickly; then maybe they're not so sure; but definitely, the plan's working—that's why they're

having second thoughts about closing the emergency room and so on.

The one thing that has remained consistent throughout this are the voices of the people of northeast Winnipeg, and I can still hear them loud and clear: save our ER, save our ER.

And, Madam Speaker, the seniors in that area know that they want acute care close to home, so I'd simply ask the Premier if he will now, today, finally admit that he will not close the emergency rooms at Concordia and Seven Oaks hospitals.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Of course, Concordia operated the largest and most frequently used waiting room for a long, long time, Madam Speaker, under the previous government, and they did nothing about it.

They knew that there was a problem. They knew that the waits in Concordia were the longest in Canada, but they didn't have the courage to address the problem.

We do, Madam Speaker. We'll fix the mess they created.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, it's interesting to see that the Premier no longer wants to defend his plan to close emergency rooms around the city of Winnipeg. And, certainly, we have been saying for quite some time that this plan is a disaster and the idea that you should close emergency rooms, including the emergency room at Concordia, is a mistake.

* (14:00)

Of course, we know that nurses feel the same way. They put in letter form very clearly that 97 per cent of their members said that they were concerned about these changes, did not agree. And in their letter, they said unequivocally that they are there to strongly oppose the closure of Concordia emergency and the Manitoba government's hospital reorganization.

So I would put it to the Premier again: will he now, today, admit that his plan to make cuts and closures in our health-care system is a disaster and that he's going to back off from the closures of the emergency rooms at Seven Oaks and Concordia?
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, there is an adage that I think applies at this point, which is that planning is the act of caring and caring enough to act.

The previous government commissioned a report because they knew there was a problem. They commissioned a report; they just didn't care enough to act on it. We do.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, we know that health care is getting quite a bit worse in the province of Manitoba. We have heard this repeatedly from patients. We've heard this from front-line workers. And now, of course, we have it in black and white from the nurses of Manitoba in the letter that they sent to the government, completely decrying this disaster of a plan to close emergency rooms.

The nurses said unequivocally, in a few spots, that this plan is simply not working for patients, nor is it working for nurses. And I quote here: one nurse told Dr. Peachey, I have 26 years of experience and I will honestly admit that this is the worst I have ever seen—talking, of course, about this government's record when it comes to health care in Manitoba.

Another nurse said: I worked as a nurse for 30 years. I've seen multiple changes and cut-backs, but I've never seen our unit experience the amount of stress and adversity that followed these changes.

Will the minister stand in this place and admit that his plan is failing and that he should keep the emergency rooms at Concordia and Seven Oaks open?

Mr. Pallister: It's hard work, Madam Speaker, to make a system that is so broken, better. The previous government didn't have the strength or the willingness to address that work; didn't have the courage to face the challenge. I and my colleagues have spoken to many nurses and expressed our thanks to them for their great work, to many front-line workers throughout our health-care system for their tremendous contribution to making life better for people.

But when you have a problem, Madam Speaker, as we have had, that the previous government chose to ignore, you demonstrate when you ignore it that you don't care much. We demonstrate that we care very much by not ignoring it.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, you know, the Premier cares to stand in the House and create these logical constructions that fall in upon themselves. He just doesn't care enough to walk 100 metres out to the front steps and talk to the actual nurses of Manitoba when they come down here to make their voices heard.

My colleagues—we went out and we spoke to the nurses and their message was quite clear: that the emergency rooms should stay open at Concordia and Seven Oaks hospitals, but also that the plan for health care that this government has cooked up with their high-priced consultants is an utter and abject failure. We know that this government is not getting the job done on so many areas, but most acutely, they're not getting the job done when it comes to health care.

Will the Premier now admit that his plan is failing and that the emergency rooms at Seven Oaks and Concordia hospitals should stay open?

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the fact that the member is desperate for an argument, Madam Speaker, but he should not resort to falsehoods in his preambles.

The reality is that the Canadian institute of health information has commended the Province's performance in respect of shortening waits. We have demonstrated that, in just the first two years of government, versus the last two under the previous government, there's been close to 50 years saved by Manitobans who did not have to spend that time waiting, waiting in emergency rooms without treatment, in fear and in pain. Fifty years less time spent in a waiting room, Madam Speaker, that's worth considering.

When the member speaks about compassion, I'd have to ask him, why ignore this expert consultant which they hired, whose advice, now being implemented, is resulting in such a tremendous reduction in the pain and suffering of Manitobans and their families.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, I appreciate that the leader of that party wants to ask me questions. Perhaps he'll have a chance to do more of that in the very near future, Madam Speaker.

And here's a welcome change for question period: I will provide an—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —answer, Madam Speaker. And here's the answer: we—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —reject their plan for health care because we listen to the people of Manitoba and we listen to nurses.

And what the nurses have told us quite clearly is that this plan is not right, that the decision-making is being centralized far away from the bedside and that the people who are suffering are the patients, Madam Speaker. We know that CIHI say that surgery wait times are increasing. The WRHA say that emergency room wait times are increasing. And nurses tell us mandatory overtime is increasing.

Will the Premier now admit his plan is fatally flawed and that the emergency rooms ought to stay open?

Mr. Pallister: He's just no Steve Ashton, Madam Speaker. That's the trouble.

The member is able to tear things down and destroy them, but he's not able to build anything up. He can't demonstrate that he has the capability or the support to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —actually pursue improvements in a system so desperately broken by the NDP government.

Madam Speaker, we're improving the system. We'll continue to make those improvements to the system because our front-line workers want to work in a system that doesn't just work for a political party or themselves. They want to work in a system that works for Manitoba patients.

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

Mr. Kinew: The Premier can keep attacking me, and I'll keep standing up for the No. 1 priority of the people of Manitoba, which is health care, Madam Speaker.

We know that this Premier's record when it comes to doing damage on the provincial health-care system is not a good one. Canadian Institute for Health Information tells us that surgery wait times

are increasing for hips, for knees. We know that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority says that wait times in emergency rooms are increasing, both month over month and year over year. These are the facts, Madam Speaker.

Now, at the eleventh hour before he calls an early snap election, the Premier is trying to deflate this issue and somehow emerge the victor when it comes to health care. Manitobans simply aren't buying it.

So will the Premier accept the facts of the reality of the situation that his plan is not working and finally just tell Manitobans what they've known all along: that the emergency rooms at Concordia and Seven Oaks should stay open.

Mr. Pallister: I recognize, as do his own colleagues, that the member has a tendency to make it all about him, Madam Speaker. And that's why he is so sensitive to the issue of a record—a record of damage that certainly we could debate.

That being said, in terms of being willing to face up to challenges, this government has demonstrated it is willing and able to do that. The member hasn't demonstrated that and his party hasn't demonstrated that either.

So the fact is that we have a health-care system that was in chaos and in crisis, and it no longer is. It's moving in the direction of healing and improving outcomes for Manitoba patients. Better care sooner is what we are about on this side of the House, Madam Speaker.

We inherited a mess; we're dedicated to fixing it.

Concordia and Seven Oaks Hospitals Request to Retain ER Services

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Well, speaking of chaos, the Minister of Health seems to have a hard time listening to what nurses are telling him.

Well, I'll be happy to repeat it for him. One nurse said this is the worst that they've ever seen it in 26 years of their work. That's what front-line nurses are telling that minister over there. But is he listening? No.

But according to the Minister of Health, there's broad support for his plan—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —to close ERs. Well, that might be—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —true amongst consultants, but that's not what the nurses are telling him. Is he listening? No.

Will the minister just listen to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —these nurses and keep Concordia and Seven Oaks open?

* (14:10)

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Earlier today, I was pleased to join the Premier (Mr. Pallister), the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) and the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) and to listen to Dr. David Rush, the medical director for the Adult Renal Transplant Program, discuss how the Province's investment, and that of the Health Sciences Centre Foundation, will make a tremendous difference in the lives of people waiting on the wait-time transplant list that was too long for years and years under the NDP.

A 50 per cent increase in the number of patients that will receive transplants in a year—what does it mean? Increasing capacity, reducing wait times, better patient satisfaction.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a supplementary question.

Mrs. Smith: I know the members opposite don't want to hear what Manitobans are telling them, because we're telling them exactly what they're saying to us because they don't want to listen. They want this minister to take his earplugs out and start listening to the nurses.

Here's what another nurse said: The changes that have taken place and continue to take place are not in the best interests of the nurses or the public or Manitobans.

That isn't a broad-based agreement, Madam Speaker.

This minister needs to start listening, and he actually needs to get up in this House today and apologize to those nurses for misrepresenting what they're saying.

Mr. Friesen: I did not detect a question, but I do thank the member for the opportunity—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —to help her catch up. And it might be difficult to keep up, but I want to inform her that what happened in Manitoba over the course of the last three weeks was a significant exercise by an external, independent expert in listening—listening to clinical experts, listening to system leaders, listening to front-line workers.

That work has gone on. She can continue to drone on. But that is the important work that has been happening in this jurisdiction. And we will be very pleased to update Manitobans into what that work has resulted in.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a final supplementary

Mrs. Smith: Not one person in Manitoba can trust what this minister is saying. He doesn't even have a leg to stand on when it comes to health care.

We will not cut front-line services. And what has he done since he took office? Continued to cut those very same services that Manitobans rely on.

The No. 1 priority in Manitoba, for Manitobans, is health care. Does this government listen? No. They put their earplugs in and pretend to. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: They actually put blinders on.

Will the minister stand up today and tell us that he's going to keep Concordia and Seven Oaks ERs open?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, I thank the member because she continues to make the debate very clear.

On one side, you have those who have fear. And they say go back to failed approaches. And on the other side, you have hope and you have the actual demonstration of improvement.

Let me tell the member: when it comes to the Victoria General Hospital urgent care, patient volumes are up 60 per cent, wait times are down 30 per cent, and patient experience is up to 89 per cent.

Better health care sooner for Manitobans is our plan.

Seven Oaks Hospital ER Request to Retain ER Services

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The members opposite are proud and clapping for closing ERs in Winnipeg.

In less than an hour, the Premier and his minister—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —and his minister will be making an announcement on phase 2 of their failing consolidation plan. But no matter what they say, Madam Speaker, no one, especially those that are living in north Winnipeg, believes them.

They have delayed it before. They may delay it again. But no one trusts a Premier and a minister who appear to have no confidence in their very own health-care plan.

Will the Premier stand up today and finally admit that their plan is an utter failure and commit to keeping Seven Oaks ER open?

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I thank that member for a question about utter failures.

And I would remind her that for 17 years her government presided over a system that was the most expensive in Canada, years in which the Grace Hospital and Concordia ranked among the highest wait times for emergency, not in the province, in the country, in the Dominion of Canada, in which people had to wait too long for ambulances and pay too much; they had to wait too long when they suspected something; they had to wait too long after diagnosis.

She can own fear. We will own hope. Better health care sooner for all Manitobans is our plan.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: Manitobans should feel that their government puts their best interests first, before the bottom line and before their own. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: Sadly, no matter what the Premier and his ministers say, residents of north Winnipeg have lost their trust in this Premier and his minister. That's because the Premier is only focused on numbers and not patient care, and certainly not

nurses in this province. That's why he's decided to close the ER at Seven Oaks, an ER residents of north Winnipeg fought for and demanded for decades.

Residents of north Winnipeg deserve to have the same health care as the rest of the city.

Would the Premier stop his failed plan to close Seven Oaks ER?

Mr. Friesen: I will always welcome a question from members on that side of the House when it comes to trust, Madam Speaker, because the NDP broke the trust of Manitobans.

They kept saying they would do better. They kept saying they would improve emergency room wait times. They kept saying they would shorten the wait-lists for surgeries, but—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —they didn't. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: Even today, earlier, there was a planned provincial investment: benevolent people giving their money in a partnership for more transplant capacity that will make a difference in the lives of people that are right now on wait-lists. It's one indicator of the kind of change that is possible when we put the patient at the centre.

Doing things better; doing things differently; better health care sooner for all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: Seventeen nurses representing thousands who feel the same told the minister how they feel—felt that the government was on a very dangerous path with their plan. Yet the Premier and his minister still choose and did choose not to listen.

So, instead, time and time again, they chose to listen to their consultant friends rather than those who work on the front lines on behalf of all of our families here in Manitoba.

The Premier and his minister have lost the trust of front-line workers and Manitobans.

Will the minister and the Premier start today standing up for the residents of north Winnipeg and keep—*[interjection]*

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Yes, any question from the NDP on trust is great, Madam Speaker.

Eight per cent wasn't what the NDP promised. They promised seven. They went to the doors—*[interjection]*—yes, yes, they went to front-line workers' doors—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —looked them right in the eyes and promised them they wouldn't raise their taxes, and then they jacked them up. Then they took away their right—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —to work.

Then they tried to frighten them for four years and told them they're going to get fired and they didn't. Then they tried to frighten them that they're—they tried to frighten little children across the province, told them their parents would get fired, and they didn't get fired either. Got better job security than they ever had.

* (14:20)

But they also told everybody that they'd have, in Manitoba, no more hallway medicine. They said they'd end that, Madam Speaker. And that number, the number the member doesn't concern herself with, was seven—seven hours on average, people waiting; seven hours before they could get in to get even looked at, at Concordia. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, these are the numbers that Manitobans care about. Numbers they don't like. Numbers they want changed.

And, finally, six: six Cabinet ministers who knew they were miserable failures over there and just rebelled against their own party.

They have no unity. They have no coherence. They have no trust in one another.

We trust Manitobans with their own money. Manitobans trust—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Adele Avenue Lease Agreement Status of Children in Care

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): In the middle of health-care fiascos, a meth crisis, the Premier meddling in Crown corporations, this government has brought forward a bill to break a lease on a single building at 800 Adele.

And, Madam Speaker, the government's story does not add up. They've said the building was vacant, but they also said there were programs there until early this year.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) said the facility was never appropriate for child care, but the Province had children there for nine years, including three years under this government.

If the facility was never appropriate for child care, why did this government tolerate having any children there at all? And did anyone from the government order the agency that was caring for children there to vacate the premises earlier this year?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate any question from the member that doesn't pertain to larger office space, Madam Speaker.

The fact is that the previous government, desperate to deal with a serious concern, dealt with it inappropriately, and we are correcting the issue.

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

Contract Tendering Practices

Mr. Lamont: Madam Speaker, the Premier talks a lot about his concerns about the rule of law being undermined, but it always seems to be to justify his own actions, that while his behaviour is bad, someone else's is worse.

But two wrongs don't make a right, Madam Speaker. The Premier said the lesson for businesses for his passing a law to break a contract should be: don't enter into an indefensible contract at the behest of a government that is misguided in its efforts.

Does the Premier realize that on this basis, virtually every agreement he has ever signed could be declared null and void?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, it's not a pleasant thing to have to confront a mistake that someone has made, and the previous government made a significant mistake, and we're correcting that.

But, you know, as far as keeping promises, I mean, the member is constantly telling us about how wonderful the federal government is, yet they ran on certain promises, like balancing the books. Of course, they didn't say they'd do it. They said it would happen on its own. But they did also promise democratic reform; they didn't deliver

on that one. In fact, he—it's very difficult to name a promise that was kept, Madam Speaker.

So I encourage the member to look at the record, understand that when a mess is made by a previous government, the incoming government has an option to correct it, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Second Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Lamont: This bill is part of a larger problem with NDP and PC governments that—and their policies for years because while in power, it's not just enough for them to reward their friends, but they go out of their way to punish people they see as their opponents.

The NDP passed a bill to cancel a VLT contract with Assiniboia Downs a number of years ago, and in a characteristic act of projection, the Premier described it at the time as arbitrary and belligerent. Now Assiniboia Downs, which won a lawsuit, is getting \$20 million from this government.

Does the Premier recognize that what he's doing is really no different than what the NDP did?

Mr. Pallister: I recognize that we're standing up for Manitoba taxpayers and Manitoba citizens, Madam Speaker, and I recognize the federal Liberal government knows how to punish its opponents but also its friends.

And, Madam Speaker, I recognize also that we will stand up for the rule of law and we continue to do so. And I would encourage the federal government to do the same.

And, Madam Speaker, I would say that the member has been at least clear that he wants higher PST, he wants higher carbon taxes on Manitobans, and he wants a larger subsidy for his political party. And I encourage him to go to the doors with all three positions.

Education System Review Co-Chair's Attendance of Meetings

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I've had the pleasure to join parents, teachers, community members in many meetings on education across the province. And a common theme across all of them is that they're concerned that this government's commission is, in fact, a politically driven exercise simply to justify further cuts in the education system.

And the fact that the co-chair of the education commission won't even be attending a single

consultation session reinforces that idea. Instead, we know she will be in Alberta engaging in a commission there to find cuts in that province in that Conservative government.

So I'd like to ask the minister: Why is it that he is not really interested in listening to Manitobans and their concerns about education?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, my understanding from the reports that I've seen is that upwards of 8,000 people have already submitted to the commission. I heard comments from Norm Gould, the president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —who says that he appreciates the way the hearings have—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: He appreciates the way the hearings have been conducted. So 8,000 people—we're obviously still hoping for more people, but had there even only been one person who ever presented their ideas, it would've been one more person than ever was consulted by the NDP, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Well, those 8,000 voices are saying very clearly that small class sizes are important, that adequate supports for teachers are important and that the local voice of communities is what is important in education in this province.

But the minister, of course, doesn't want to listen to that because this is a politically motivated exercise, again, designed to justify those cuts. Yesterday, even Clayton Manness appeared to be turning on the co-chair that this minister has picked, saying that he and other commissioners were attending the meetings as observers because they wanted to listen to Manitobans and he thinks it's important that commissioners be there. But of course, one commissioner is missing in action.

Why is this minister not listening to Manitobans? And why is he using this to justify further cuts in education?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I actually don't know what the 8,000 submissions say. Five thousand of them are anonymous surveys online. If the member opposite has somehow hacked into the

education review system, maybe he could advise us of that.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: Well Madam Speaker, we have real concerns that this education commission is not listening when it comes to our schools, because the message at these meetings has been absolutely crystal clear. And nothing demonstrates their lack of listening better than the absence of one of the co-chairs of this commission who, of course, is missing in action.

And it's really too bad because we're heard from hundreds of Manitobans across the province—more and more Manitobans want their voice to be heard—that small class sizes, more supports for teachers and local autonomy for communities is what is important. And yet, this minister refuses to listen to that clear message.

Will he simply listen to Manitobans, stop the cuts in education and support education in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: There are some—actually, some 30-some individuals who were missing in action during the 17 years that they held government in this province, Madam Speaker.

The NDP MLAs who sat on this side of the House for 17 years—when it comes to education, they were missing in action as the scores continue to slide for Manitoba's students, whether it was in math, or literacy, or science. Members like the member for Concordia, who has a big voice now, said absolutely nothing then. He sat silent for 17 years. He was missing in action for 17 years, and now he wants people to believe that he's been found.

Well, he was lost then and he's lost now, Madam Speaker.

Peguis First Nation LTE Mantagao Lake WMA

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake): Our government is committed to advancing meaningful reconciliation with First Nation communities across Manitoba. We've made major progress on treaty land entitlements and we've worked closely with First Nations to enhance economic development opportunities.

* (14:30)

Earlier this week, members of our government were in Peguis First Nation for two announcements that will be a major benefit to the people of

Peguis. Can the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations tell us about these meaningful announcements and what they will mean to the people of Peguis?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I was pleased to join the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and some of my colleagues as we travelled to Peguis First Nation to deliver some good news to that community this week.

Manitoba is issuing a Crown land use permit to provide Peguis with exclusive use of a quarry as part of their treaty land entitlement selection.

The Province is also working to help Peguis First Nation assume certain management responsibilities within the Mantagao Lake wildlife management area.

Unlike the former NDP government, we're working in partnership with our First Nations to grow growth and economic development in their communities.

We'd like to acknowledge the work of Chief Hudson and Peguis First Nation for all they've done to secure opportunities, and we look forward to the positive outcomes for the people of Peguis as a result.

Hip and Knee Surgery Wait Time Recommendations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I table a copy of a letter from Rhonda Grist to the Premier. She says that she agrees with the CIHI recommendations that the maximum waiting time for a hip replacement should be six months. As she says, based on her experience of waiting 11 months, more than six months causes harm to the other joints in our body. In her case, she says, after having to use a walker for 10 months before surgery and then another three to four months after surgery, her knees are no longer manageable.

She says the longer waiting time is a false economy.

When will the government make the changes so that six months is the maximum waiting time for hip replacement surgery as CIHI recommends?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, the member is quite right that there are too many people in Manitoba who have been on long wait-lists for years and years and years. It is exactly the rationale we

have in place for transforming our health-care system to be able to reduce wait times.

And while we sympathize with anyone who's waiting for those necessary surgeries, I would remind that member that only recently our government invested another \$5.3 million to purchase an additional 1,000 hip and knee surgeries and 2,000 cataract surgeries, surgeries that are right now taking place.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I table information showing that the recent wait times are among the worst in Canada.

Rhonda Grist writes, and I quote: You—she's referring to the Premier—you mentioned that your government was having some difficulty getting the doctors to work as they were away on vacation in warm places. Rhonda Grist says: Certainly your statement doesn't reflect the attitude of the orthopedic surgeons. She says at her first meeting with her surgeon, he stated he was finished his surgeries by 1 p.m. every day, and he was most unhappy about that. He wanted longer hours and although he has received them since, I ask the Premier to apologize to the many hard-working doctors who he has offended with his comments.

Mr. Friesen: The member for River Heights actually makes our point.

The purpose of the Province's clinical and preventative services plan that is going on in the province and reporting back to government this spring, is exactly for the purpose of doing system planning at a coherent level and not a site level. It is exactly our commitment to this goal that will in future help us to plan better, help us to make full use of system resources, help medical practitioners work to the fullest scope of practice.

I thank the member for making our point that a change for the better in Manitoba health care is coming and that the focus all this is better health care sooner for all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, Madam Speaker, the government has been promising that for more than three years, and not much has changed.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Harbans Singh Brar needs knee replacement surgery. He has been immobilized by his current condition and the pain. He's been told that he will have to wait a total of 15 months from the time he first got an appointment with his surgeon until his surgery, which would mean seven more months from today to December.

The wait times should be no longer than six months, as CIHI recommends. Instead, waiting times for knee surgery in Manitoba are among the longest in Canada, as a document I table showed.

Why is the Pallister government trying to blame doctors instead of acting as it should to work with doctors to reduce the waiting times?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, the member can't have it both ways. He's calling for shorter wait times but he's part of a party, federally, that has made cuts to health care across the board.

I was at the meetings, along with the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), where the federal government said there will be less of an incremental increase each year for health care. At one time, that member knows, the federal government was a 50 per cent partner in the provision of health care in the provinces; in Manitoba right now 18 per cent and going to be a hole of \$2 billion over the course of 10 years.

If he's standing up for health care, have him pick up the phone, call his federal government and tell them to reinstate the funding for Manitoba.

City of Winnipeg Review Independence of Review

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Yesterday, after I made the point that the Premier plans to conduct a partisan, political investigation for his own advantage, the Premier actually issued a rare apology in this House, and I acknowledge the Premier's apology. But, you know, an apology is really owed to the mayor and council and the people of Winnipeg.

Just a month ago, this Premier was very clear there'd be an independent investigation conducted arm's-length from government, but it's not. It's happening just a few doors down from him, overseen by his Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) and his Cabinet.

Will the Premier apologize today to the people of Winnipeg for breaking his word?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member for his considerable grace in accepting my apology, Madam Speaker. I want to be clear, though, that I didn't apologize to anyone other than to you for the use of the word dim-wit in describing the member's preamble.

Madam Speaker, that being said, the—*[interjection]*—that being said the member has—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: That being said, the member has demonstrated that he does not understand the difference between Treasury Board and the Treasury Board Secretariat.

And so he can continue to put that lack of knowledge on display if he wishes, and I frankly take no exception to that, and I don't think he needs to apologize for a thing as he makes that ignorance clear to everyone in this Chamber and everyone else.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

I would just encourage members that using the word dim-wit in the House is similar to making comments about people's mental capabilities and mental abilities, and we do not encourage those kinds of words to be used in this House as they are being viewed as being unparliamentary. So a caution to all.

The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Swan: Every day, Manitobans understand a little bit more why nothing gets done, with this Premier's attitude.

There's been a breakdown in trust between this government and the City of Winnipeg. City residents have watched as the situation's devolved into a public fight, followed by angry letters from ministers that then get copied to the media. And into this climate, the Premier, with his usual lovable style, thinks he's going to get co-operation in conducting a partisan, political investigation.

In practical terms, maybe then the Premier can stand up today and tell us how he's going to get the information he demands for this investigation.

Is he going to compel it from the City by subpoena, or is he going to threaten to withhold more money from the City, as he's already done?

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the member's preamble. A breakdown in trust is what the member has been

about throughout his entire political career and so has his party, Madam Speaker.

Now, last week they attacked our government for seeking advice—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —seeking advice from outside consultants. This week, they attack us for having internal civil servants, neutral civil servants, do work. I guess basically their solution would be that we should do nothing about the situation.

Madam Speaker, we're not going to take that kind of advice. There's a serious problem in this province with the delays in inspections getting done, with delays in permitting getting done. We're already doing an investigation into our own processes. We've added the City's processes to that investigation. We're meeting with civic officials and have successfully worked with them on this issue and will continue to do so.

* (14:40)

Where the members opposite sat back and did nothing and broke the trust of Manitobans in the process, we will build on the trust that we have already earned with the people of Manitoba and with the City of Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Daylight Saving Time

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The loss of sleep associated with the beginning of daylight saving time has serious consequences of physical and mental health and has been linked to the increases in traffic accidents and workplace injuries.

(2) According to Manitoba Public Insurance news release, collision data collected in 2014 showed that there was a 20 per cent increase in collisions on Manitoba roadways following the spring daylight savings time change when compared to all other Mondays in 2014.

(3) Daylight saving time is associated with a decrease in productivity the day after clocks are

turned forward, with no corresponding increase in productivity when the clocks are turned back.

(4) There is no conclusive evidence that daylight saving time is effective in reducing energy consumption.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to amend The Official Time Act to abolish daylight saving time in Manitoba effective November 4th, 2019, resulting in Manitoba remaining on Central Standard Time throughout the year and in perpetuity.

And this petition has been signed by Ashley Greenley, Ryan Dueck, Joey Duprapuk [*phonetic*] and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Early Learning and Child-Care Programs

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

Signed by Nicole Johnson [*phonetic*], Livia Degaldo [*phonetic*] and Rosa Annohoi [*phonetic*].

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting impact—positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

Madam Speaker, this petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibilities of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

And Madam Speaker, this petition has been signed by Kathryn Sutherland, Nikki Kollinger, Anita [*phonetic*] Kropp and many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

* (14:50)

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be accessible to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

And this is signed by Jennalisa Pavlin, Heather Deg and Leah Bartel and many other Manitobans.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Logan): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new funding—no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

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(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

Signed by many Manitobans. Thank you.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

And, Madam Speaker, this petition is signed by Alan V. Johnson, Karen Angus, Jodi Hunt and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

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(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

And this petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by Daniela Mattes, Christin Chiappetta, Stacey Hannah and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

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(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

Signed by Kristin Bazin, Charlotte McPherson, Michelle Simon and many other Manitobans.

* (15:00)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I wish to present the following petition to the Manitoba Legislature.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating

funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

This petition is signed by Sam Frederiksen, by Sofi Alvarado, by Tom Hirch and many, many others.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility

of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

This petition was signed by Patrick Harding, Tara Yevtushenko, Antonio Bergamorto and many, many more.

Thank you.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to read the petition on behalf of the member for Kewatinook (Ms. Klassen).

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for her—for the member for Burrows to read the petition for the honourable member for Kewatinook? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) Early learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed, not-for-profit early learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High-quality licensed child care has a lasting, positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed, not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

This petition is signed by Anna Sipinski, Brenda Carson and William Blackburn.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

GRIEVANCES

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I rise on a grievance and specifically that here we are with two weeks to go and we have not had very much in the way of Estimates.

I look at the Order Paper today and it says there's still 93 hours and 13 minutes left of Estimates. It is extraordinary that we are this late in the day, in the session and this government has not brought forward the Estimates except for one time.

The fact is that it is the government's responsibility and that is very clear. There may be delays by some in the opposition and the NDP but perhaps—let's get down to the basic fact of the matter is that the government is the government, and the government has the responsibility to work and bring in the Estimates. This is an extraordinary lack of accountability. This is a fundamental problem that we are now so many days after the budget being presented, after the budget being debated and we have just had one day of Estimates.

This is—let us look, Madam Speaker, at the fact that Estimates are of vital importance. They are important to review spending in detail. They are important to ask questions about the programs and the funding throughout the government. We are waiting to ask these questions in many, many different areas. There are certainly lots of things which are questionable which we need to be asking questions about on behalf of people throughout Manitoba.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Since the Estimates are a part of the budget, then what this shows is the Pallister government has no interest and no intent to fully pass the budget before we recess, expected in early June.

* (15:10)

The budget, if there is an election, say, in June, or July, or August, or even, September, what will happen is that the budget will have to be reintroduced.

We asked, on this side, is this because the government believes it has not cut enough in this recent budget that it wants to bring in a budget later this year with lots more cuts? Will the new budget have new cuts that the Pallister government didn't want to bring in before an election? They are avoiding accountability, and they are doing it in many different ways.

Last year, we note that the government deviated very far from its original budget and, indeed, in health care cut \$240 million more than they announced and put forward in their original budget. So there is already a lack of trust in this government, a lack of trust that what it puts down in paper and its budget is actually real, and that is why it is so important that we have Estimates; these are really a fundamental and very important part of the review of the government.

A number of years ago, we cut down the number of hours; I think it was about 250 hours to 100 hours. But it was never expected that there would be a government that wouldn't bring in Estimates for that 100 hours, but would try and escape accountability by not bringing in the Estimates.

We all know that there are places where government could spend wiser. Just yesterday, I was talking about the air ambulance program. Because this air ambulance program has been poorly overseen by this government, the net result is that there have been a lot of additional expenditures. Much has gone to corporations and companies in the private sector because they have not adequately made sure that the public air ambulance Lifeflight service was properly funded and was properly supported.

Indeed, as I brought up yesterday, the uncertainty that this government has created, month after month, after month, after month in the delay, in the announcement, hopefully, that they will keep the

public Lifelight Air Ambulance service. These delays have created enormous amount of uncertainty, uncertainty such that some pilots left and we had to hire new pilots; was uncertainty among doctors, uncertainty among nurses, and as I pointed out yesterday, uncertainty among aircraft maintenance engineers.

And my understanding is that the government has paid so little attention that this uncertainty among aircraft maintenance engineers could become a very serious issue if they do not act quickly. This could be a big problem, and that is why the government should very soon announce that they will restore stability to the Lifelight Air Ambulance service and make sure that it will stay as a publicly owned and operated service.

The—we know that the meth epidemic is going on and the extraordinary delays by this government in addressing the meth epidemic are actually costing the health of Manitobans and the budget dollars to an extraordinary extent. It was shown and pointed out, as I have pointed out before, but it was pointed out again that the incidence of syphilis has gone up dramatically, and other sexually transmitted infectious diseases.

These are extra costs. There are extra costs related to in-hospital care, the extra costs related to having to put in place new security procedures and new security personnel in our hospitals because the violent incidents in our hospitals and in our emergency rooms in our hospitals have gone up dramatically.

So there are lots of places where just some improvement in management could have reduced costs in health care, not just related to the meth epidemic but approaches to decrease the incidence of diabetes and to improve treatment. When I was in Opaskwayak Cree Nation, as an example, last year and again this year, what they were able to do is to bring in a program called anuka [*phonetic*] program, which shows dramatically improved success in helping people with diabetes, dramatically reduced the number of air flights for patients, saved—in a matter of months—more than a half million dollars.

And instead of picking up the opportunity and instead of saving dollars in this fashion and improving the health of people at the same time, this government has done a lot of cutbacks in areas where they should not have cut back. And this is, time and time again, a problem with this government is that they are poor managers of expenditures.

Today I raised concerns about the knee and hip replacement surgery. Rhonda Grist, who has been through the hip replacement surgery, noted that the waiting times, the long waiting times are a false economy because they end up with extra sickness and extra costs.

This government needs to learn: we need to have Estimates, Mr. Speaker. We should be doing Estimates today instead of debating a bill which was brought in at the very last minute to target one individual corporation.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further grievances?

The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a grievance.

An Honourable Member: A point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Sorry, the honourable member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher), on a point of order?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I listened to the member's statement very carefully, and I was really disappointed to see and hear the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) heckle him at the beginning and not pay attention at all throughout the entire presentation—[*interjection*]-and he heckles again. And, you know—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fletcher: —it's not conducive. If anything, he should be taking notes on what this member is saying and smarten up.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On that point of order, it's not a point of—on that point of order, the member from Assiniboia does have a point of order. We should have—respectful when it comes to anybody speaking in here, like having some kind of decorum and respect on the other person's grievance.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a grievance.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I rise today on a grievance related to the very real possibility that the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Pallister) will call a snap election possibly as early as this summer.

Let me be clear: a snap election call is in violation and contravention of Manitoba's election law which fixes the date for a general election. Should the Premier (Mr. Pallister) call a snap election, he will not merely be snubbing his nose at the law, he will be breaking it. It will be an illegal election.

The Premier's declared intention to call an illegal election not only has serious implications for the rule of law in Manitoba, but will also draw the Lieutenant Governor in Manitoba into a serious political and legal circumstance that will severely compromise the honour of the Crown and may well prompt a constitutional crisis in this province.

* (15:20)

Every member of this House needs to understand that the Premier of Manitoba does not have the ability to dissolve this parliament for the purpose of calling a general election. That responsibility, that prerogative, that duty, that right belongs to the Crown, in this take—in this case, the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. What the Premier can do is advise the Lieutenant Governor that he wants to call a snap election but the 'dission'—decision to dissolve this House resides entirely, squarely and completely with the Crown.

In considering the Premier's request, the Lieutenant Governor must consider a few things: first and foremost, she must consider if disillusion accords with the fixed election date, as set out in Manitoba's election law. Stating the obvious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it clearly does not. The next election is set, by law, for October 6th, 2020, almost 17 months from now and a mere three years in change into the government's mandate.

The election law was amended in 2008 to put an end to what the current premier is trying to do: manipulate the electoral process for partisan reasons in order to gain a political advantage to secure the government's hold on power. We know why the Premier wants to go sooner rather than later: things are only going to get worse in Manitoba under the government's austerity agenda. And the impact of his budget cuts are going to be more obvious as every day goes by.

Since the election law was amended to include a fixed election date, both the 2011 and 2016 elections were held on the prescribed dates as set out in Manitoba's election law. The Premier himself committed to respecting the fixed election date in the

last election, yet now appears intent on breaking both the law and his word. In the event that the Premier's request to dissolve the House does not fall within the fixed election date period, the Lieutenant Governor may also consider whether or not the government has lost a vote of confidence or a vote of supply in the House. That has obviously not happened. And with a massive majority, the Pallister government is in no danger of losing a vote of any kind, either now or in the next 17 months before the fixed election date.

The point is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the conditions in law under which the Lieutenant Governor can dissolve the House to make way for a general election do not currently exist in Manitoba, period—full stop. No other reason, given by the Premier—whether it's Manitoba's 150th birthday, or he has a dentist's appointment, or he has travel plans to go to Costa Rica—count. The Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) has also occasionally tried to argue that this House is dysfunctional, even though he and the Premier are in absolute and full control of the legislative agenda. If the House is dysfunctional then the House leader and the Premier have no one to blame but themselves.

At any rate, it's the government's austerity agenda that is dysfunctional, not the legislative process. Indeed, it's pretty much business-as-usual here in the House. In fact, it's even better than business-as-usual. It's only May and already the budget has passed through this House. The 'budgen'—the budget implementation bill has passed through this House and just two weeks ago this House voted to send about a dozen bills to Standing Committee for public hearings which began last week. This House isn't dysfunctional in the parliamentary sense of the term—though we think the government's agenda is dysfunctional—in fact, it's operating like a reasonably well-oiled machine.

The result of all this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that there are absolutely no conditions by law, or by convention under which the Lieutenant Governor can grant the Premier's request to dissolve the House. In fact, if the Premier does visit the Lieutenant Governor in advance of the fixed election date, he will be inviting her, at best, to ignore the law and at worst—worst, and much worse—inviting her to aid and abet the Premier in breaking the law. It's one thing for the Premier to break the election law, but it is much worse when he makes the Lieutenant Governor complicit in his law-breaking.

No one on this side of the House is surprised by the—that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) would try to get away with this kind of chicanery. It's quite obvious that he believes that laws only apply to him when he says so. Likewise, this is a premier who, since the election three years ago has sought to erode democracy at every turn. Campaigns are shorter; voting will be harder; public funding has been abandoned and campaign rebates have been chopped in half. The Premier's plan to starve democracy in Manitoba, to break the election law and to manipulate the rules of engagement are more worthy of a banana republic than a functioning democracy.

What is especially egregious about all of this, Madam Speaker, is that this is a Premier who frequently gets up on the Golden Boy every day in this House and grandstands on the rule of law. If he so cherished the rule of law as he says, then he would not be on the verge of breaking the election law in plain sight, no less, and he would also not be asking the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba to aid and abet this front—affront to the rule of law.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker—or Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is where the issue gets a little awkward. It's no secret that the Lieutenant Governor is the wife of former Premier Filmon. It's also no secret that just recently the Pallister government contracted out Air Services in Manitoba at a value of \$20 million over five years, to a private company whose chair of the board is former Premier Filmon. If the Lieutenant government—Governor—if the Lieutenant Governor agrees to the Premier's request absent of any reason to do so, the optics are obviously terrible and the honour of the Crown will be seriously compromised.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have faith in the Lieutenant Governor. I have faith in her to do the right thing. I was sitting in a more comfortable chair across the way during her installation and I remember her speech very well. I was deeply impressed when she talked about the value of leadership in difficult times and her personal commitment to uphold her constitutional responsibilities on behalf of the Crown. It was a moving and articulate speech by a person with great integrity.

So my advice to the Lieutenant Governor is this: if the Premier knocks on her door anytime in the next 17 months, don't answer it. But, if she must let him in, then I would advise her to tell the Premier, in no uncertain terms that she will not be a party to an illegal election and that if he can't

wait until October 6, 2020, then he should step aside and allow someone else who can command a majority in the House to government—govern.

That's right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The choice here is not between an election or not an election. The only choice facing the Premier of Manitoba today is to govern until the fixed election date or resign, one or the other.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, been a member of this House for eight years and I'm tired of the Premier putting a proverbial gun to the head of every MLA in this House and the people of Manitoba by threatening to call an illegal election. We are—we the people of Manitoba respect the rule of law and respect the honour of the Crown, and we fully expect our Premier to do the same.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Acting Government House Leader): Would you call a second reading debate of Bill 32, followed by second reading of Bill 31, 22, 24 and 25?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been requested by the honourable Government House Leader—Deputy Government House Leader, that it has been announced that House will now consider the second reading of bills 32 and 31 followed by resumption of second reading of debate for bills 22, 24, and 25.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 32—An Act concerning the Leasing of 800 Adele Avenue, Winnipeg

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, second by the Minister for Sustainable Development, that Bill 32, An Act concerning the Leasing of 800 Adele Avenue, Winnipeg, be now read a second time and be referred to the committee of this House.

Motion presented.

* (15:30)

Mr. Fielding: I am pleased to speak to Bill 32, an act concerning the lease at 800 Adele Ave. in Winnipeg. The objective of Bill 32 is to terminate the lease agreement between 5185603 Manitoba Ltd. and the First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority, also known as the

Southern Network, regarding the premises located at 800 Adele street in Winnipeg.

The lease and its terms were never in the public interest. It was an untendered agreement for the rental of the facility that was never sufficient for child care. The costs were one of several red flags raised by officials. The original lease cost was over twice the Winnipeg market rate. In fact, I think that's even more. I think it's close to three times, which clearly raises some questions of good judgment and prudent use of limited resources within the child-welfare system that the previous government should have asked instead of ignored.

The facility has never been fully occupied and is now empty.

The lease has wasted millions of dollars of public dollars that could have been used to care for at-risk children instead of paying for a vacant space that could not meet any government program needs according to officials.

The building is significantly limited in accommodations, accessibility and zoning, which has limited the Southern Network's ability to mitigate the financial burden of the lease. It is not—if not terminated, it will waste millions more over the next decade for taxpayers.

Given the landlord's refusal to agree to the reasonable termination agreement, we are taking the measure to terminate the lease agreement between 5185603 Manitoba Ltd. and the First Nations of southern Manitoba child and family authority regarding the premises located 800 Adele street in Winnipeg. The termination is effective November 30th, 2019.

The lease was entered into by the Southern Network in the fall of 2008, and the previous Manitoba government decided in 2015 to provide funding to the Southern Network for direct operating costs at the facility that they could no longer afford. The contract is for a lease for space that is no longer used by the authority and has not been for many years. Most of the buildings have been vacated since 2013. The space does not meet the needs of the authority or of any government entity. The premises are now completely vacant and incompatible with the government use.

The financial terms of the lease are unnecessary and crushing burden on the authority. Without this legislation, the net effect is that for another 10 years, funding will continue to be diverted from the

children who actually need services instead—paying a lease—pay for a lease for an empty building.

The previous government should have known this, that it was a bad deal. It falls in the same category as the stadium shell game that the previous government played and cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, the east-side road authority—and failed to build the roads that were promised by the NDP and numerous other boondoggles we inherited from the previous government that cost Manitobans millions of dollars and delivered no value.

As we peel back the onion, we continue to find more NDP failures at taxpayers' expense. Given the landlord's refusal to agree to a reasonable termination agreement and having exhausted all other options, we are taking this measure to terminate the lease.

Additionally, the bill provides that no person has a cause of action or claim from the termination of the lease.

We do not take these measures without reticence, but we can conclude that this is the only responsible course of action for taxpayers. The southern authority, a taxpayer-funded entity, should not have to continue to pay for incompatible building, empty building at twice or almost three times the market rent for—which is a bad deal.

I cannot say for certain why the previous government entered into the arrangement, as I have not been involved or present for it, but it is clear at the present day that the lease should not have been entered into at this time by the southern authority.

I want to emphasize that the government on a regular basis manages lease arrangements and for the most part has no issues with those leases and fully honour the commitments of the Crown. But is—but in this instinct—instance and with this lease, legislation action is necessary to acquire for—to protect taxpayers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I would like to describe this as an exceptional circumstance that the government is faced with that's historically different from the normal situation of government lease relationships. I want to assure all of our government suppliers and contractors and landlords that we do not take this step lightly and this is—that use of this legislation in this way is rare but required to address particular instances.

We are taking this action to protect taxpayers and get value for money. We are focused on helping kids in care and making pure dollars, making sure

public dollars are going where they should be, for children in care.

The lease of 100 Adele was the result of untendered process. And despite being for an unusual long period of time, 20 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the lease does not contain any provisions allowing for early termination. The southern first network—the Southern First Nations Network is left with an empty building incompatible to the necessary purposes at a cost well above Winnipeg's market rent for leases.

The Province assisted the southern authority by paying for renovations, but the building could still not be fully utilized and now sits empty. Attempts to renegotiate have not worked. There has been no willingness to have discussions about bringing an early end to the lease agreement. The government's only options to protect taxpayers at this point is to legislate the end of the situation that needs to be 'reinaided'—or to—remediated. We will act in the public interest and pass this legislation.

Madam Speaker, we saw the NDP's complete disregard for Manitoba and the taxpayers when they raised the PST in 2019. This bad lease is not different. It is what the NDP's disregard for taxpayers that led to this situation.

Our government is taking responsible steps on behalf of Manitobans to protect the tax dollars and make life more affordable by lowering tax burden. Not only are we lowering the PST in July 1st, but we are indexing the basic personal amount. We are indexing the tax brackets so that Manitobans have more at the end of the month.

Our priorities are clear. We want help with all Manitobans, and while it's clear that during the NDP years, they had little regard for Manitoba taxpayers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our PC government will not forget about Manitobans and make life more affordable for them.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed in the—to the minister by any member of the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions be asked by the critic or designate from another recognized opposition party; subsequent questions may be asked by each independent member, and

the remaining questions asked by the opposition members; and no questions or answers shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I thank the minister, his staff, for a briefing this morning.

Has the minister received a complete analysis to guarantee that this legislation is not incompatible with all the provisions of the New West Partnership?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): We review all analyses when we make decisions upon this. We consulted with our legal department. We do as such with all legislation.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the minister is this: He has said that the building was empty and not being used. How long was it empty for?

Mr. Fielding: The building was never compatible; in fact, did not suit the needs of the time when the lease was entered into. The lease, for the most part, has been vacated since 2013. Parts of that lease have never actually been utilized, so the building has been vacant for a number of years now.

Mr. Swan: Strangely enough, when I asked the minister's staff this morning if they'd considered the implications of the New West Partnership, they said they hadn't. So would the minister like to actually answer the question in an appropriate manner, and if he doesn't know the answer, taken under notice, or does he want to put incorrect information on the record?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think the—really, this legislation's fairly stark. Either you're a part of the problem of developing this lease, and we know the member that is raising this issue was part of the government of the day that signed on to this lease or let this lease go forward.

We want to stick up for taxpayers. That's exactly what this does. We've taken a number of steps. We know that the lease was over 20 years, far above and beyond what normal leases would be spent. We also know that the lease was sole sourced. We know that this cost of square foot was almost two to three times higher. We know that the tenant authority had the responsibility for operating and maintenance costs.

So, if the member opposite wants to stand up and run on this and not support the legislation, I guess that's really something that he'll have to discuss with taxpayers. We're doing everything from

taxpayers to make sure they get good value for money.

Mr. Gerrard: I understand that Marymount was in the building for a while and that the building was used for children from Marymount who were struggling. Can the minister provide a comment as to when Marymount was occupying the building?

* (15:40)

Mr. Fielding: Marymount was occupying the building after the 2013 date. I can tell you globally that, first of all, the building was not ever in a situation that would support the needs that was being provided from that, and there has never been a time in—since 2013 that the building has been fully occupied.

Mr. Swan: You know, I'm sorry that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) appears to be taking his lead from the Premier (Mr. Pallister).

I asked the minister actually a very important question. The New West Partnership provides that an aggrieved corporation can take a government to arbitration and receive up to \$5 million in compensation. The minister has contradicted what his staff told me this morning at 9 o'clock.

Would the minister like to explain that? And even better, would he apologize, take it under notice and give this House a proper answer?

Mr. Fielding: Well, first of all, it's not surprising that the member opposite was part of a government that let this lease happen that defends this. It's not surprising at all that you're defending this. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: I know it's sensitive to you because it's a perfect example of the issues that the NDP faced because you don't understand finances. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I just wanted to—*[interjection]* Order. Order. Order. Order.

I just want to remind everyone, when you're speaking to the Chair, if you're talking, not to the individual.

Mr. Swan: Well, I am absolutely shocked that the Minister of Finance, who is responsible potentially for costing taxpayers millions of dollars, cannot answer this simple question. It is a serious question. We don't know the impact of the New West

Partnership. Instead of going to Estimates, we had to debate Bill 22, which contains a bunch of new restrictions on the province.

This is a serious question, and I would like a real answer and not just invective from this Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fielding: If you want, I'll take the question under advisement and I'll get a written answer to the member.

But it's not surprising that the member opposite that was part of a government that had disrespect for taxpayers' dollars in every instance—if you look at the amount of issues that this government has to face because of the NDP government, because of their disrespect for taxpayers, this is a perfect example.

What we want to do is protect taxpayers. We don't understand why the NDP would go out in last election campaign and previous—and say that they were going to raise taxes. They were not truthful to the citizens of Manitoba. We don't think that's respectful. We're here to stick up for taxpayers to make sure they're getting good results. This is something that we think is important. So I encourage the member, if he doesn't want to support the legislation, that is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, Mr. Speaker, now, Marymount, I understand, was ordered to leave the building.

What was the date that Marymount was ordered to leave the building and who ordered Marymount to leave?

Mr. Fielding: Marymount has left the building over the last two years, in fact, over two years ago. I'll verify the exact date for the member.

I can tell you globally that this building has never been suitable for the needs that was in place. We know the deficiencies of this building, we know the fact that it's been never suitable for the type of needs that were originally divided for it or assessed for it. And so that has been a problem with this lease to begin with.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the Minister of Finance, after, unfortunately, some unpleasant exchanges, to admit he doesn't know the answer and he'll take the matter in advisement. I don't know what the answer to the question is. I've asked it, of course,

because we're concerned that this bill could be a problem and we want to protect the taxpayers.

Could the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) tell us the last time that this happened and the government moved to set aside an existing agreement?

Mr. Fielding: I can tell you, to answer the member from the second party here, that there was one child in the building in January.

To answer the previous—the member's question, legislation has been offered a number of times. In fact, the NDP government that he was a part of, of course—and he'll know, he'll remember this quite well—offered legislation to do a whole number of things, but to cancel an agreement between the Liquor & Lotteries or liquor and the Manitoba Jockey Club. That was the budget implementation bill.

As well, in 2013—and to cancel existing leases related to the taxicab—The Local Vehicles for Hire Act. So this has happened a number of occasions.

Just to answer the question further, the Liberal government did similar—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister says that there was one child there in January. I presume there was some staff as well. I don't know what the general, overall occupancy was, but I would ask, was the—was Marymount ordered to leave the building and vacate it?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I can tell you that the lease payments on a yearly basis have been \$500,000. To have spent \$500,000 of hard-earned taxpayer money on one or two children being at a building I would argue is not good taxpayers' advice.

And just to the further point that the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) brought up, it's not surprising that he's somehow trying to defend this lease. It's not surprising at all. So I'm not surprised that he is trying to use other legislative ways to defend a decision that's there because we know the NDP, what they do to support their past horrible track record in terms of finances.

Mr. Swan: I'm not sure why the Minister of Finance seems to be so angry today when he gets asked a question that we think is actually very important now that the government has chosen enter into a new

agreement that actually puts constraints on government. But I'll leave it at that.

When the minister brought in this bill, did he—and he was told about the Jockey Club case—did he have a chance to look at Hansard and see the comments that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) and the Minister of Enterprise, Growth and Trade and other members of his government put on the record at the time that the previous NDP government brought in legislation to deal with the Jockey Club agreement?

Mr. Fielding: I can tell you that our government is focused on kids in care, not spending \$500,000 on a lease that's not needed like the NDP government did. No wonder their track record in CFS was so horrible, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They had the highest number of kids in care, and I'm proud to say that our government is actually reducing that. We're taking action to protect taxpayers' needs. Every case is different. I can tell you attempts to renegotiate the lease was there, was something that was attempted. That wasn't there.

We're at the point that we want to protect taxpayers. I know the member for Minto doesn't like to hear anything about taxpayers because he's got no respect for taxpayers. It's clear from the NDP's record in terms of their approach for taxpayers where they don't respect it at all. We respect that. We want to put more money in the pockets of taxpayers.

Mr. Gerrard: I want to follow up the question: Was Marymount ordered to leave the building?

Mr. Fielding: I believe there was discussions with Marymount. When you have one or two children—in fact, I think there was one child that was left in January—to spend \$500,000 on a lease for one child we don't think is in the best needs of the centre. There was discussions that were had from Marymount. I think they probably would agree spending \$500,000 of taxpayer money for the protection of one child is not good value for taxpayers' money. And that's what this bill is about. It's about protecting taxpayers.

Mr. Swan: Well, actually, the record number of children in care is right now. And this minister should know—and I presume this minister does know—that based on the reporting of agencies, there are more children in care than there were when this government took power. The only thing that's happened is this government, for their own purposes, wants to count it differently.

Why can't we get through a 15-minute question-and-answer session without this minister putting blatantly incorrect information on the record?

Mr. Fielding: First of all, the member is completely wrong. As usual, he's completely wrong.

I can tell you that there is more children in care because of the track record. We know some of the horrible experiences that happened under the NDP government. We're not going to make the same mistakes. We're not going to make the same mistakes as what the NDP do. We think that money should be spent on prevention and early intervention, not things like this.

We want to make sure that children are reunited with their parents or have—actually don't have to go into CFS. That's why we're also proud of the fact that we've seen over a 42 per cent drop in the number of children living in care—rather, a 42 per cent drop in the child poverty rate here in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if the minister can tell us a little bit more detail of the arrangements. I understand that originally, it was—the building was used by I think the southern chiefs' child and family services. Why did they leave and when did they leave and who was paying the bill when Marymount was there?

* (15:50)

Mr. Fielding: The cost for taxpayers was \$500,000. I can tell you to say that they moved there—they moved—when they finished their renovations and moved their children back to more suitable facilities. That is the story with Marymount. I know there was discussions that were ongoing, when you're spending over \$500,000 for a place where there's one or two children in it, we don't think that's appropriate and so Marymount made the decision to move them back where there's more appropriate use for taxpayers.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): I know that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) said—perhaps it was the Finance Minister—that there were there—that this is a sort of last-ditch resort, or last—method of last resort following extensive negotiations. So what—can the minister explain what were—the nature of those negotiations were; how long they went on; were there any offers or counter-'offers'.

Mr. Fielding: The three options that we got from our legal department were, No. 1, to continue on,

extending the lease, spending \$500,000 a year for a lease that wasn't appropriate; No. 2 was try to renegotiate terms for an early termination of lease, that discussions have been held in the last number of months. And 3, there's a legislative option.

So we attempted—we didn't think, for taxpayers' purposes, No. 1 option worked. Number 2 option—there is attempts to renegotiate that. That was not supported by the landlord and so we moved to protect taxpayers by introducing legislation.

Mr. Lamont: If—could the minister just explain in a little more detail about the negotiations, how long they went on for? When they started? When they broke off? Rather than, sort of relying on what is essentially a nuclear option.

Mr. Fielding: Discussions were ongoing. I can't give you how many emails and discussions were had. I can tell you there was strong attempts by our government to get out of a lease which we didn't think made sense; what didn't wasn't supported in our opinion by taxpayers, so discussions were ongoing. That attempt was not supported by the current landlord, and so we moved to options to protect taxpayers in terms of this lease.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any other questions?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I had asked before, but I'll ask it once more time: Was there an order to Marymount to vacate the building?

Mr. Fielding: Discussions were had with Marymount. They decided to move the—one child that was left—there was one child left in January—to a more suitable, appropriate space. And so that's the nature of discussions with Marymount.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate is open. Any speakers?

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, they say that tough cases make bad law. That's something that you learn in law school and this is certainly one of those times. And I do—I want to take a few minutes, because it does tie in to this legislation, just to talk about the tone that this government is increasingly taking, which is, I think, an affront to democracy and which also, I think, gives anybody who happens to watch proceedings in this House, or listen to

proceedings in this House, to wonder just what kind of government we have.

And you know, they say the tone starts at the top. And, I guess, that's actually true. I've got to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last two days in question period, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has been—even for him—incredibly not just unparliamentary, but incredibly rude. I know—I know that the Premier doesn't like to be accountable. I know he doesn't like to answer questions when he says one thing and then goes and does another. But that's exactly what's happened.

Today, I acknowledged when he apologized to the Speaker for his unparliamentary comments yesterday, and then today, he just went right back to it. That is not the sign of someone who has control over his emotions and his words. You know, we do from time to time get upset in this House and we say things that, in retrospect, we probably shouldn't. I would submit it's far different when you're the premier; you're the first minister standing in your place and you're answering a question about your own integrity, when you say one thing and do another.

And why do I lead with that today? Well, because this bill—and, again, we're not going—I'm not going to spend time debating the merits of whether the lease was or was not good. That's, frankly, not an issue. The question is this: the government is using something very akin to an executive order, under the powers given to the Province under the Constitution Act to deal with property and civil rights, to bring to an end a lease between two parties, neither or which actually is the government.

And, yes, southern authority is an agency, and, yes, on the facts of the case, the government has been recompensing southern authority. But this government is actually using a pretty extraordinary power to go in and terminate a lease, to break a commercial arrangement between two parties that are not government.

And, when I say executive order, every day that goes by—and especially the last few days, I'm—I have—I've spent three years without saying this, even though I've thought it many times: more and more this Premier is sounding and acting like President Trump.

When he's pushed, when his inconsistencies are pointing out, what does he do? He lashes out. He lashes out, he gets angry, he doubles down. Whether

it's members of this House, whether it's with the media, whether it's with the Prime Minister, whether it's with the mayor, this Premier is acting in every way like someone who simply does not have the ability to manage complex, difficult issues which are presented before him.

And I say that because right now, of course, President Trump has threatened all kinds of executive orders of things that he's going to do. And actually even Republicans who, much like backbenchers in this government, are sort of cowed to do and to praise whatever it is the President does—even Republicans are starting to worry, saying, well, you know, if we start letting the President make these kinds of executive orders, what about when the government changes. Then what's going to happen? Then you know what's going to happen; Democrats are going to look at what we've done and they're going to do the same kinds of things—which is something, actually, that the Liberal leader put to the minister just now and put to the Premier in question period today.

It is actually a very extreme measure to go and to have the government strike out a lease, to bring a lease to an end. And the fear is not this particular fact situation, let me say that very clearly. The fear is that this increasingly seems to be the way that this Trump-like Premier is believing that he should be running things in this province.

And that is—that's not an easy thing to say, because I know—you know, there are things that people want to say about various leaders. We heard it about Greg Selinger; we heard it about this current Premier; we hear it about the Prime Minister. There is a line, and when you cross that line, it's not a good thing.

And I don't lightly stand up this afternoon and begin my debate on Bill 32 and making that analogy lightly. But, in watching this Premier and listening to this Premier, it is clear that something is very wrong. And that became readily apparent as we started a 15-minute question-answer period. This question-answer period was brought in to force to allow opposition members to ask some technical questions, some particular questions about the bill, hopefully to make things proceed more smoothly to committee, to satisfy the opposition that perhaps something that we might be suspicious of is not the case, perhaps to point out to the government there's something else that they need to do.

And that's why my question to the minister—and I'll try and paraphrase it as much as possible—say it as correctly as possible—I believe the question I asked was has the minister received a complete analysis to guarantee whether this type of legislation is consistent with all the provisions of the New West Partnership.

I didn't—maybe I'm just blinded by it, I didn't hear anything partisan in that question; I don't believe I said anything that was—should be personally insulting to the minister or to anybody else. The minister got up and, unfortunately, gave an answer that was completely at odds with what his officials told me almost exactly seven hours ago.

So, when I pointed that out to the minister, my hope is that the minister would stand up and say, well, you know, I'm going to review that with my staff, with legal counsel, and then I will provide a fulsome answer to the House.

And, as I said in one of my questions, instead of debating the budget, instead of doing many other—or, rather, going into Estimates or doing many other things, we were debating Bill 22, I believe it is, which is a bill brought forward by the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Pedersen), which he tells us has to be passed because Manitoba has obligations under the New West Partnership.

* (16:00)

We know that Manitoba already has a number of obligations under the New West Partnership, and we know that that agreement, which Manitoba is now part of, has many provisions which allow entities, private corporations, like the landlord in this case, to bring actions against governments that they believe have not treated them fairly.

I don't put this on the record to say that there is or isn't a valid claim by the corporation that's being affected, and, frankly, I'll reach out to the minister and say I hope there isn't a claim by the corporation that's being affected. But what I do think this Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) should do is to take a question like that seriously. He surely must know that he didn't have any advice of that sort from his officials, and perhaps rather than attack me personally, which seems to be the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) style of doing things—and I'll give the Minister of Finance credit; he didn't use unparliamentary language—maybe government members and ministers should start to understand why the question-and-answer procedure happens,

and they should start to actually answer questions about bills that are before this House and not simply spew invective back at the New Democrat and Liberal and independent members who may have questions with serious implications.

And, again, I don't—I'm not suggesting that there's going to be a successful claim under the New West Partnership, but if there is, it's going to be a problem, and it's going to be a great big embarrassment for this minister and this government or whoever happens to be in power when that happens.

And we know from the New West Partnership that those claims can be up to \$5 million—in other words, more than the entire amount of money that is still owing on this lease.

And what also was a great concern was the Minister of Finance, who, you know, who I've known for a long time, who's had experience in the city government and now has been in the provincial government for three years. He kind of—he took the Vic Toews's school of argument: you're either with us or you're with the child molesters. You know, that was what Vic Toews had to say. How dare you question me on this bill? You're either standing up with us or here's where you are. And that was obviously not in the—quite the same offensive manner, but in the same vein that the Minister of Finance answered the question. Either you will accept what this Premier and this government says and take it as complete gospel or you must be somehow opposed to—fill in the blank. And that's not the way that this should work.

This is a partisan building. This is a place where we have disagreements, but this is also a place where opposition members are entitled to do their job; they're entitled to ask questions of the government, and they're entitled to get answers from government. And in question period we know it's not going to be a clean answer. Sometimes it may be no answer at all, and that's a political choice. But if we ever get to Estimates, we expect the level of answers to be that much better.

And I would suggest, above all, when we get to question-and-answer period, that when a question is asked that is not partisan, that is not intended to create difficulty but, in fact, to give guidance to a minister, I would like to think that there is an obligation on government to actually step up and deal with that appropriately. And I'm hoping that the Minister of Finance will reflect on that. We may find out if we get to another bill this afternoon; we'll have

another question-and-answer period, and I'm actually hopeful, because I'm always an optimist, that those questions and those answers will go a lot better than our last session.

So this bill terminates the lease of 800 Adele Avenue, which, by the way, happens to be a building located in the Minto constituency. It actually is the old convent for St. Edwards church. St. Edward's church is a large Catholic church at Arlington and Adele of—over 100 years old; traditionally had a very—originally a large Irish Catholic and other Catholic population. Over time, as immigration carried on, a lot of Polish and Ukrainian Catholics.

And now, if you go to services there or events there or you go to St. Edward's School, located in the building next door, it is almost entirely a Filipino-Canadian population, and I always enjoy my time there. It's an old convent building, and I will acknowledge when you look at the building, you do not look at it and say, yes, this is a place where we're going to put children in care with some serious challenges.

And, frankly, I don't know, and I don't think anybody in this House knows, why the southern authority decided that this was an appropriate arrangement. I don't know why they considered it to be the appropriate building. I would say that inside and outside of this Chamber. I guess we can't go back and second guess that.

I do know that our government did its best to assist authorities to protect children, to make those decisions. And I know that there would have been a huge issue if the government had simply stood back and let southern authority be sued because presumably the southern authority would simply have gone bankrupt and the kids, then in care, would have been left without care, and other measures would have to be taken.

So I can assure the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) that I'm not standing up this afternoon to say that this lease was a good idea. I do know that the government's support for the southern authority was something which continued. And the government has now chosen, after three years, to go ahead and make this decision. And, you know, on the one hand, you would think we should be able to assume the government has done its research on this matter given that it is so unusual for a government to bring a bill like this and to try to break a commercial agreement between parties at arm's length. And that's why the question was asked.

So some points that are necessary to address before the decision to take us—such a step should be that the government's made good-faith efforts to negotiate with the owners of the building that is the subject of the lease in order to ensure that public funds are being used appropriately. And, you know, our caucus is prepared to take the minister at his word. We're prepared to accept that his officials—and, I suppose, officials from the Department of Families and others—have pursued every possible option. And we're going to take him at his word this afternoon, assuming, of course, that he is prepared to follow-up with his word and provide us with proof that the analysis of the New West Partnership has now been completed.

As well, it's up to the government, I believe, to show they couldn't find appropriate uses for the building in the several years they've had the opportunity to do so since coming to power in 2016. We hear that Marymount had some programming that was operating in that building. We understand that one of those programs has been sent back to Marymount's main facility near Scotia Street in the North End. We also hear that one of these programs has been cancelled. I hope that hasn't been because of funding cuts from this government. But in any event, again, we're prepared to take the minister at his word that he believes it's not possible to find other appropriate uses.

I think it's also very important that this government consult all of the relevant legal authorities, even including—well, including whatever counsel they think is necessary before taking this step, which is unusual. And I did put on the record question—a question that I think the Minister of Finance should consider. And that's that he is indeed correct that the previous government did have a bill which purported to end an arrangement involving the Manitoba Jockey Club. And, if you go back and look at Hansard from those times, you will hear—or you will be able to read comments by many, many members of the Progressive Conservative caucus, including, as I say, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), who could not believe that the provincial government would take such a step.

So governments have the right to do certain things. As I say, this is an extraordinary power which should only be used in extraordinary circumstances. And, again, just like President Trump's executive orders, we have great concern that this is going to be used in future, should this government persist past

this summer, in other situations to try to end contracts that they simply don't like.

And I know the minister is going to talk about the amount of money that's at stake. I would remind this minister that Manitoba Hydro entered into a \$4.1-million contract with a company called Boston Consulting. And that was for a 30-page report which the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) and I had some time to review and time to ask questions on.

And, of course, that contract was sole sourced. And I remember many times in this House, many members of our caucus asking—well, now the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), then the minister of Crown Services—how much this contract with Boston Consulting was costing Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Hydro ratepayers.

* (16:10)

And the minister dodged and weaved, and weaved and dodged and refused to answer that question. And eventually, when we got to the standing committee on Hydro, I was actually very pleased. Mr. Riley was then the chairperson. I asked him the question. We got the answer within the first three minutes of the hearing.

And the answer was \$4.1 million out the door for a report from consultants that didn't actually visit any of the communities, that didn't actually talk to any of the chiefs of the 16 First Nations on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, who didn't do anything, it appears, other than repackage information that was given to them by Manitoba Hydro.

So I can understand the member for Kirkfield Park, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) lashing out and wanting to talk about what other governments have done. But his job as a minister is to account for what his government has done and what his government is doing.

And that's why we had some questions and answers. I don't know that the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) got any answers. Or maybe right at the end there was a hint of an answer to one of the questions. I think that we can and we should do better.

So, again, we're putting the onus on the minister to be able to get the advice that he needs, to be able to certify to this House and to all of us that this law is not simply going to violate a new agreement this government has entered into. Again, I don't have

enough information and I don't have the full text of the agreement in front of me to know whether or not that is the case. I do know that there is some very smart legal counsel at Civil Legal Services, who I'm sure, from our meeting this morning, have been busy doing that analysis and I look forward to having a straight answer from the Minister of Finance, because I would think that this is very helpful.

So, again, as we learn in law school: tough cases make bad law. It is our hope—this is a tough case—we hope that the minister can convince us that this is not a bad law. Our caucus is prepared to move this bill ahead to committee. We look forward to hearing from the minister and we look forward to letting any Manitoban who has a view on this one way or the other to come forward and tell us what they think.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to hearing what the Liberal caucus has to say, and perhaps what other members of the government want to say about this. But our caucus is prepared to pass this on to a committee this afternoon. Thank you.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): There are some—we do have very serious concerns about the principles framing this bill. I know that there are, as the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) said, that hard cases make for bad law. And it's extremely—this is, as I put it earlier, a nuclear option in terms of what a government has to do, because one of the fundamental ways in which business certainty and civic society hangs together is the reliability and trust that's associated with a contract: that a contract is a promise in writing. It's legally enforceable by the courts and there are all sorts of ways in which we need to be extremely careful when we're—when a government uses its power to essentially void a contract.

There—people have often said, like, one of the fundamental challenges of dealing with China is that investing there—is that it effectively has no rule of law because the government in power can simply change the law, void contracts, seize property and so on. So—and one of the challenges of this as well is that if—or, one of the tests of whether a law is good, or whether a law is suitable, is to say, is this not just something that we as a government would like to do? But is this something that we might object, if it were to be offered by another party in power?

And that is something that happened before. The NDP government introduced a law relating to the Assiniboia Downs Jockey Club. They introduced a budget bill from a number of years ago, that—this is

from a Free Press article—would empower to rip up its VLT agreement with the Manitoba Jockey Club. And the provincial—and it would redirect millions of dollars provided annually to Assiniboia Downs with legislation to break the VLT contract between Manitoba Lotteries and the Jockey Club, allowing it to remove the VLTs at the Downs and place them elsewhere. It said the bill would also bar the Jockey Club from suing the Province over that decision, although it would not prevent civil actions, such as the one the club launched against the government, the Finance minister and Red River Exhibition last week.

The then-leader of the opposition, Progressive Conservative Leader Brian Pallister, said the government failed to consult sufficiently with the horse-racing industry about—[interjection]—oh, I apologize—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the honourable member, the Leader of the Second Opposition (Mr. Lamont) that please refer to anybody in the Chamber here as their title or as their constituency.

Mr. Lamont: Sincere apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I got carried away reading verbatim.

The then-leader of the opposition, the Progressive Conservative Leader who's now the First Minister and member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), said the government failed to consult sufficiently with the horse-racing industry about the impact of its VLT proposal before implementing it. He accused the Province of acting in a, quote, belligerent, end quote, and, quote, arbitrary, end quote, manner.

Eventually, the lawsuits that were filed by the Manitoba Jockey Club were eventually won, and I understand that there was compensation and, in fact, this government in the last year has offered \$20 million of support for the longer—for the long-term support of the Jockey Club which, of course, is the value—entire—more than the entire value—or equal to the value of the lease at this spot.

And there is—there was actually an audit three years ago into this building. This is from CBC News, April 6th, 2016.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

Southern authority leased building for \$500,000 a year, sits partly empty. And at the time—again, this was under our previous NDP government—that the Province is considering placing refugees in an—in the

underutilized facility originally leased for CFS kids. A building leased by the southern authority for \$500,000 a year hasn't been fully utilized since 2014. The southern authority signed a 20-year deal with a numbered company to rent an 18,000-square-foot facility to place high-risk kids in care as an alternative to hotels. And I just do want to note that there are enormous costs associated with higher risk kids in CFS. I understand that this was a lockdown facility because these kids needed to be kept safe.

The building at the time needed \$2.1 million in renovations, \$1.5 million of which was paid for by the numbered company. The rest was taken on by the Province. Three years after the agreement was first signed, the facility opened and was ready to take in Child and Family Services kids. The southern authority, which is also known as the Southern First Nations Network of Care, oversees 10 First Nation children and family service agencies, and gets its funding from the Province.

Quote, there are two five-bed units for high-risk, high-needs children, said Tara Petti, CEO of the southern authority. One side is for boys, which is more of a crisis stabilization unit, more of a short term, a short stay, and the other side is for girls' emergency placement. And it's because—because it's an emergency placement, the number of children housed there changes day by day. So as of Wednesday, that Wednesday three years ago, Petti said there were six kids staying in the building. So it fluctuated because of the severity, or the—because these were short-term.

The Province said there'd been a total of 250 children that have received care at the facility since the building was opened and operational in 2010. The one portion of the facility located near Arlington and Notre Dame has been sitting vacant since 2014, but that was the administrative side, which suffered two incidents of water damage that resulted in the southern authority vacating that space during repairs and insurance negotiations. The damage has been repaired and the Province is currently reviewing options for suitable use.

Now, auditors Grant Thornton, LLP were hired to look into the long-term property deal that's projected to cost the southern authority about \$10 million in lease payments for the 20-year term. A brief note on the 25—February 25th, 2016 auditor report said the original lease cost was up to twice the Winnipeg market rate, as the—which has been noted, and which may raise questions of good

judgment and prudent use of limited resources within child welfare. The cost was one of several red flags raised by the Province during the 2007 lease negotiations between the landlord and the southern authority's executives who are no longer with the organization.

Now, it also says the Province helped renegotiate the lease at a substantially lower price. Now, Allan Courchene, chair of the southern authority's newly created board of directors, said, we don't want to be stuck paying this multi-million lease—\$1-million lease there; we don't want to pay that type of rate when we are a new organization and we want to continue to service our children in care and the agencies. And the Province took over the lease payments as of April 1 and now is figuring out what to do with the building.

The former minister of Family Services said last month, there was a direction given to the government to get the lawyers looking at this lease arrangement to see what legal options are available. He said government lawyers are currently looking over the lease to try to renegotiate the terms, but the other option is that it—there are clearly other things that could be used for. The Province said it was considering using the space to house refugees or possibly creating a treatment centre, both of which in the ensuing years are even more relevant.

* (16:20)

I—one of the issues, of course—I know that when it comes to the justifications around this lease, one is that—or, and—or, as it—we've seen lower numbers of children in poverty, which again I've—which is absolutely something to celebrate, but—and when I challenged the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), he said—and I said there was not a shred of evidence, he did provide a shred of evidence that the Province had made a slight contribution to that.

The Province has also changed the way they count children in care, so we're not actually certain that there's any improvements—or many improvements—in the direction of children in care.

But, when we also consider what are the possibilities for not only renegotiating but continuing to use this space, especially when we have a meth crisis and this is a secure facility where we could be stabilizing people, that—it is literally built in order to stabilize individuals who are in crisis, that was the entire purpose of it—we've been calling for about a year and a half for the government to take action, to

create stabilization units for people who are in a—psychosis. And the other is that I understand—and I'm certainly willing to be corrected if I'm incorrect—that we're—we've been—to some extent that the Province has had to resort to housing some refugees in detention facilities in Manitoba, in Winnipeg.

And, of course, we have an ever-growing addictions problem with more and more people who are suffering from meth addiction. It has gone up by hundreds of percentage points, not just in Winnipeg, but across Manitoba, who could possibly be used—who could possibly be housed—or, this facility could be repurposed, rather than going to what is essentially a draconian measure of cancelling the contract.

And, again, it's—one of the worries is that if this is something that we would not want another—an opposition party or one of your 'opponing'—opposing political parties to do if they were in government. It's really something that needs to be reconsidered.

Now, I know that, again, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) often talks about the importance of rule of law, but this really is—this goes to the heart of rule of law and common law and the ability of both individuals and businesses to be able to rely on contracts. But not just rely on contracts, but rely on contracts by—for government which actually is in charge of writing laws. So, if you have a situation where the government is doing something like this, is that they're essentially saying, well, they're stripping individuals of their ability for recourse, that there may be genuine economic harm, that this is something obviously that private individuals and private businesses cannot do.

People sign bad leases, and they're end up stuck—they end up stuck with them. They can try to renegotiate them, they can try to apply to a court for relief, but the fact is that this is something that private individuals simply cannot say, well, we're just not going to follow this contract anymore. Or, if they do, they're in serious—they can be in very serious trouble. But, for that reason, this is an extraordinary measure.

I do just also want to say, because the Premier talks about—talks so much about, you know, his respect of the rule of law, though at the same time he's also said he doesn't believe in judge-made law, the fact is that all—almost all of contract law and property law is associated with a common law, which is associated with precedents, which all—which

fundamentally were created by judges, especially contract law.

And I know that the—some of the members opposite may lean a little more libertarian—or that some members of the Conservative Party across Canada sort of think of Canada—or sort of have talked about the idea or leaned towards what used to be called the night watchman state—a sort of an ideal situation where the government, as Grover Norquist would put it, could be shrunk 'til the size that it could be drowned in a bath tub, but also that, fundamentally, the only role of courts is in—is enforcement of the criminal law and for the protection of property and for the enforcement of contracts. But, if we don't have a situation where we can enforce contracts, even fundamental libertarians would find reasons to object to this bill.

Now there have been another examples—other examples from this government of having untendered contracts that were awarded without going through Treasury Board.

And there are all sorts of other ways in which the Premier (Mr. Pallister), I think, has in some ways struggled to stay in his lane as far as the role of Premier is concerned, because we've had interference with Crown corporations. Basically, that MLCC—or, we had Crown corporations which had to turn to legal advice to see what the role—what their role as a board was. And ultimately, it's because the board members of a corporation, including a Crown corporation, can be personally liable for the decisions that are made.

And when the Premier, or any of his staff, tried to do an—end round—end run around the board and end up directly giving direction to the executives of that Crown corporation, that is a huge problem, not just in terms of political interference, which is inappropriate, the possibility that a Crown corporation that has public obligations, that's supposed to be operating in the public interest free of political interference is being interfered with. But also because it essentially places those board members in peril: that they are ultimately responsible, accountable and liable for the decisions that are made by that corporation, and if that's not being made clear, by—through a mandate letter, if it's not being made clear from the Premier to the minister to the corporation—if there's just an end run being done, it actually puts those board members at considerable risk.

There is, of course—there's the issue of the fixed-date election, which again, I can't really understand the justification for ignoring. This government and this Premier were elected in 2016 on a fixed-date election. And essentially, deciding to ignore that, the spirit of the law is a—is sort of kicking away the ladder. And I know that the Premier said that his major interest was in being able to say—actually, he's given all sorts of different reasons for calling an election early: the Manitoba 150 is too exciting to—or too precious to be interfered with, with a—with an election. But he also expressed concern about the fact that there is a—that in a fixed election date law there is a—there's a requirement: there's a shut-down of political advertising and communications.

Now, just last week, the Premier said that for all intents and purposes, he thought that rumours and speculation counted as 90 days notice, which, again, is a sort of disturbing sign of his concept of how legal notice works. The fact is that just hearing a rumour or having speculation or getting a text about something that somebody has booked a hall or that elections Manitoba is hiring people on the radio, is not sufficient notice. Actual formal notice is something completely different, as anyone knows.

But that go—quite beyond that. It also means that—like one of the questions is that now is the Premier not only going to ignore the fixed-date election law, but because of that he can also dispense with and ignore the 90-day communications blackout.

And—which again, that was part of the reason those laws were put in place. Well, for two reasons: one, obviously, for fairness to allow all political parties an equal opportunity to recruit candidates. It's easier for candidates because they can be—they know exactly when they're going to run. So it actually allows for greater participation and because every party is both at the same disadvantage and at the same advantage. Because not just that the Premier is no longer supposed to be able to pick an election date whenever it's possible, but the fact that they are not supposed to have that challenge means that they inevitably have to face electors on a given date.

But, again, if that means that the—if, as the Premier said, we've effectively had the 90 days notice, we still don't know when that 90 days began. But it also—but this government is still continuing to make announcements, to advertise—all of which

would be—is it would be a violation of the law, of the blackout.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

I think the member has strayed quite a distance from the actual bill that is on the floor for debate and I would ask the member to bring his comments back to debate on Bill 32, an act concerning the leasing of 800 Adele Ave. So I hope the member can bring his comments back to debate on that bill.

* (16:30)

Mr. Lamont: Certainly, Madam Speaker.

So—but again, this goes—what I was saying is—what—the idea that we have that even in a night watchman state that contract law would have to be respected. And I do want to note the idea that there's the protection of—that very often, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) has been talking about taxpayers. But the fact is that the word taxpayers doesn't appear anywhere in the constitution, that, in fact, we're all citizens. Everybody pays taxes one way or another, and that we need to be concerned about the protection of citizens and not just of taxpayers.

And I would just—I mean, the one other thing I would say about this bill, which is of concern, is that—again, these are—that there's something—that this is essentially a nuclear option as far as the government acting to break a lease when every effort should be made to renegotiate it. I'm not sure. It's not entirely clear for me that it was. And from what I've heard—what I read earlier, that there was—that the government did succeed earlier in—or, the Province helped renegotiate the lease at a substantially lower price than it was.

But one of the challenges here again is simply the question of governing, as how one should govern as opposed to running a sort of permanent election campaign, is that—as a friend of mine said, il paraît, à Saint-Boniface, c'est la différence – il y a une différence entre une élection et une différence entre gouverner. C'est que pendant l'élection, ce qu'on devrait faire, c'est le – est-ce qu'il faut changer en anglais?

Translation

As a friend of mine said, it seems in St. Boniface there's a difference—there's a difference between an election and governing. The difference is, during the election, what should be done is—should I revert to English?

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Just a reminder to the member that we do not have translation at this time of day; that has to be prearranged, so I would ask the member if he could revert back to making his comments in English.

Mr. Lamont: Certainly, Madam Speaker.

So, as my friend said, is that there's a difference between campaigning and—doing an election campaign and how you govern. And one of the fundamental differences is that during an election campaign, as he put it, you know, you all—each party will colour in its own colour. It might be red or blue or orange. But once it comes time to govern, you need to set those—you actually have colour for everybody; you have to govern for everybody.

And my concern about this is that this is a—this is a bill that sort of—that quite literally singles out a single entity for consequences. It—I don't know. It was just—been suggested that this is part of a larger problem in terms of leases or untendered leases that were given out. But, fundamentally, there needs to be a difference and we need to be conscious of that, is that we have a responsibility to govern for everyone, and that the idea of governing as we—governing as if it's an election campaign—as if we should be only governing for those who support us and going out of our way to disadvantage those who don't, I think, is a disservice to democracy, it's a disservice to government and it's extremely unfortunate.

So we'll see whether this has an opportunity to make it to committee and hear from others, because I now understand that there are many individuals who are concerned about essentially this—the draconian approach that's being taken in this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, we have had this bill brought forward at the last minute in this session, essentially.

One of the big questions here because the—as I understand it, the government had discussions and moved the people from Marymount and their activities out of this building in January or possibly February—why this was—bill was not brought forward in March. I mean, there were—if this was a vitally important bill, certainly one would have expected that this would have been brought forward in March at a time when the government would have the guarantee that it would be able to get this legislation through if it had moved quickly enough.

And now we've got this legislation coming forward at a time when we should be doing Estimates, when we still have 93 hours of Estimates to do. And the government is bringing forward this bill at the last minute.

Not only that, but there's a lot of unanswered questions. This bill was just brought forward very recently for first reading, and almost immediately, it has come to second reading. I mean, it sounds like it's a really urgent, urgent bill. But if that were true, there would have been plenty of time to do this—bring it forward in March, and be—have assurance.

I mean, we have, over the last several years, and particularly just before the last election of 2016—we have made some changes. And the goal of those changes was for the government to streamline its bringing in legislation, to bring in the legislation earlier, with the result that the government would be guaranteed that that legislation would be able to pass. And also, by bringing the legislation in earlier, there would not only be time to debate the legislation, but there would be then adequate time to be able to do Estimates.

And so we are still wondering when the government is going to get to Estimates because there's only a relatively small number of days left. And, certainly, the priority that the government has put on this bill is unusual in that perspective, that it's brought forward in the last minute—we present it and we're debating it now, and we're debating it now instead of debating some other bills that the government told us in the last few days were their top priority.

So it's—you know, the priorities of this government clearly are, one might say, wandering, varied. One thing one day; one, another. But be that as it may, you know, we are here today, and we're going to try and discuss this. As I said, there are a lot of questions which have still not been properly answered.

One of the things that clearly must be a serious consideration is the fact that this is breaking a contract. And this is breaking a contract between a company and the Southern Chiefs' Organization. Now, it is not clear exactly what the relationship is between the Southern Chiefs' Organization and the government. There is some statement in one of the news reports that the government is backfilling the money, which is going to—for the cost of this building that was originally supposed to be money that the Southern Chiefs' Organization was paying.

But when I asked in question period for more details of this, the minister was very reluctant to give details of exactly what was happening, who was paying for this lease now, how much was being paid for by the Southern Chiefs, how much was being paid for by the government. And so we are left with a lot of uncertainty and unknown details with regards to the arrangements that the government has got into in regards to this building and the costs related to this building.

We are left—left with a concern unanswered as to whether this—breaking this contract, as the government is doing, is okay, as it were, under the New West Partnership or whether the New West Partnership provides limits. And this could be found to be wrong or against the terms of the New West Partnership. It's not clear to me at this juncture why it is that the government wouldn't have just been upfront and been very clear whether or not it was or was not within the boundaries of the New West Partnership Agreement.

* (16:40)

In any event, breaking a contract like this is a very serious activity and must be treated very seriously. We are not, at this juncture, clear enough to what extent the government has treated this in a serious fashion. We are not sure if the government has fully considered all the ramifications. We do know that some of the language in this bill was similar to the language which was, I think, brought in a bill by the NDP on the Jockey Club situation. And that didn't turn out very well in the long run, at least from what I know.

And so we're wondering whether, in fact, this is going to hold up or whether there's going to be problems, legally, in the long run. The owners of the building have indicated that they might sue, and notwithstanding the language in this bill, there may be some onus, some obligation, some ability of the company to sue and recoup the money from breaking this contract.

So we didn't get adequate, you know, confirmation from the government that they have looked into this really carefully. And seeing as how the Jockey Club situation was not all that long ago, we would like to have some better assurance that, in fact, this contract, if it is broken in this way, even when the government is passing this bill and saying that it would not be liable, that sometimes in law that liability still remains.

And so we want to—some assurance. I would say that we not only want some assurance that this is not going to result in legal problems and the government having to pay out a lot of money in the long run, but we also want some assurance that the government actually looked for alternate uses for this building.

And this becomes particularly relevant when we're talking about the fact that we have a meth epidemic, a meth crisis, a dramatic increase in people using meth, and it has become very apparent that one of the things that is needed is better detox and treatment and extended-stay possibilities for people who have and are addicted to meth and who are using meth. And this clearly became apparent when there was a dramatic increase in meth use in the summer of 2017, and as Liberals we raised this as a major issue in the fall of 2017. This certainly didn't settle down. There were major rallies at the Manitoba Legislature. Many people got involved, saying that there had to be much more done; this was such a crisis.

And there was an opportunity here—now that we're getting this information in front of us, there was a potential opportunity to use this building in some way to help detoxification or treatment or the extended stay for people who have meth addictions.

And, as we have found out, that one of the problems with meth is that it lasts a lot longer in the body of somebody who is taking meth, doesn't get removed or released or metabolized within the body as fast as alcohol does. And so while alcohol detoxification may occur relatively rapidly, in a day or two or three, that meth intoxication may actually take a matter not just of a day or two or three, but a matter of a week or two or three, or somebody has even told me four, but that depending on the circumstance.

And, clearly, if you have such an extended toxication period or extended detox period, you need to have a significant increase in the availability of facilities for doing the detox.

But, once you have an individual has gone through detoxification, which, as I've already said, could take much longer than for detox for alcohol, you then need a period of stabilization. And so you need not just a detox unit or a place; you need a facility for stabilizing people who have had meth addiction before they can be, you know, released back into the community in some sort of a sheltered way.

And this is very relevant to the—this particular building and this particular contract because one of the things which is now, and will continue to be, important from a legal perspective is whether the government adequately pursued alternative uses for the building. And, if the building was such a—you know, a white elephant, as the government is claiming, and the government has been there for three years, why did it take this long to look and see if there might be alternate uses? And yet the government so far has not given any indication in any of the press material that I've looked at, in the speech by the minister at first or second reading, that they actually searched for alternate uses for this building.

And that could come down, quite frankly, to if there is a legal case and a suit that if the government did not look for alternative uses for this building, then the government is much more likely to be liable and indeed in trouble and could be on the hook for a substantial amount of dollars if the government didn't do its due diligence and make sure that it looked carefully for alternative uses.

And why was this so important in terms of, for example, meth, because the meth situation emerged very quickly? The meth situation, because it was not addressed in an adequate fashion early on, has led to a big increase in sexually transmitted diseases. It's led to a big increase in crime. We have a big gathering in River Heights not very long ago because of this increase in crime. In River Heights, it has gone up last year, probably primarily related to the use of meth, very substantially. And—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Gerrard: —this problem could have been prevented. This extended problem and the extended costs related to the downstream effects of the meth epidemic, we now learn, could potentially have been prevented if this government had been thinking enough to look at the possibility of using this building as a site for detoxification, for a stabilization unit or for an extended stay. And the extended stay in terms of meth, when people are supported, looks like it's actually going to be very, very important because the relapse rate without such an extended stay for people with meth is quite significant, and with some, you know, not only significant to the individuals but tragic for individuals who relapse. And, once they have relapsed once or twice, it, you know, tragically, may

be more difficult and more extensive and more expensive in order to get them through.

So there was an opportunity. And we are not being told by the government whether, in fact, they even explored this opportunity. And, as I said, I think that this could be a particularly important issue if it comes right down to the government going to court over this, even with the protection that the government is trying to put into this piece of legislation.

So the government, I believe—I'm not a lawyer, but from what I've experienced before, it is a concern that if you don't cover all your bases and you bring in draconian legislation like this, then the government could end up being on the hook for a lot of extra costs.

* (16:50)

Now, one of the problems that the government also has is the government hasn't been clear about a number of the facts here related to this building. And some of the facts, which are obviously important—and we're only just starting to learn a little bit more—the government was saying that the building was empty since 2013. This was how it was reported, but we now found out in the question and answer period that in fact, it was not empty. It was being used by Marymound.

Now, the government has not given us an adequate perspective. They have said that in January of this year, there was only one child there. Was that just one particular day? Was the average much higher than that? Is—did the numbers all of a sudden plummet? And so there was not an adequate—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

There are so many conversations going on in this room that I'm having difficulty hearing. So I would ask members, please, if they want to have conversations to go to the loges or to bring down the level of the noise. I think we owe it to the member who is trying to debate to make sure that people are listening, but we can all hear.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you. Yes, I was talking about the fact that we have just learned that from what the minister said, in response to my questions, that the building was not empty, that it was being used by Marymound. We don't know the average occupancy rate. We don't know, except for the minister's word that this was or wasn't an adequate facility for what was being done there. Certainly, if the numbers were

really know, then the government should have been looking for alternate uses for this facility.

The government has said that this was not a suitable building for the southern chiefs' child—or the Southern Chiefs' Organization child and family service. My understanding is that, I think, at that time, Elsie Flette would have been involved, and she was with the Southern Chiefs' Organization. She's a fairly astute individual. One would have expected that she would—if she was going into this sort of a long-run arrangement for the southern chiefs' child and family services, that she would've done some homework. And that the building—and it had substantial renovations—that the owners of this building put in, I believe, something over a million dollars. And the government put in some dollars, as well, to renovate it so it would be appropriate for children in the care of child and family services.

Now, we don't know, except for what the minister has told us—we have not got sufficient background information here to really have an adequate perspective of how good or how bad this building was from the perspective of the Southern Chiefs' Organization child and family services. It was apparently used for quite a number of years by the Southern Chiefs' Organization, and they seem to have found it satisfactory early on. But, clearly, there were some issues that developed and the government made some arrangement with the former NDP government. It would've been helpful if the NDP members who were in Cabinet at that point had given us some more details about what these arrangements were, what the expectations were. But, of course, we didn't get those kind of details from the NDP members, and we certainly didn't get that kind of information from the government side of the House.

And so we're in a situation where we're trying to make judgements based on a bill which was only introduced very short time ago, and we're standing up here and debating this bill, and we're given a very, you know, complicated and difficult situation to be dealing with. And we're, as legislators, being asked to make judgments here with only partial information and some information which has been put on the record already by the government and perhaps by others which is not adequately accurate to make good judgments on.

So, Madam Speaker, I believe that the issues here have been laid out, that we are talking about a building, a contract which the former government entered into. We're—by the very nature of that

contract we don't, in the Liberal Party, have access to knowledge of precisely what was in that contract. We are trying to make a judgment in terms of whether this was a terrible contract, as the government is being put forward, or whether we are told from other sources that there was careful consideration by the Southern Chiefs' Organization of not just one site but of a number of possible sites in terms of their child and family services.

And we're not given enough detail in terms of the, you know, the nature of what was inside the building. I am hearing rumours and speculation that there were some areas that were locked and that that may have been why some of the—Marymound was in there as well. And maybe in view of what we know about meth addiction and so on, that could have worked quite well in terms of being able to help with the detoxification and the treatment or the extended stay of people who have meth addiction.

So we're trying as best we can in the time we have to look at this very carefully. We would hope and we would expect that when and where this goes to committee that we would be able to have people coming forward who would be able to provide a lot more of the answers for—in relationship to this bill.

But certainly, it being brought forward so suddenly; it, you know, replacing what we should have had today, which was Estimates; it being brought forward now, late in the day of this session instead of being brought forward in March—these all raise questions.

And certainly one of the things when you're dealing with a situation like this that is really important is that you don't make rushed decisions and that there is time, as legislators, that we have to look at this and make sure that, you know, this actually makes sense, that there is enough liability

coverage, that the government would be protected, for example, but that the government has also looked at other alternative uses for this building.

All of these things come into play, and it's not clear to us in the—as the Liberal MLAs how much of this homework was actually done, how careful this decision was in terms of it was being made. And we're hoping, Madam Speaker, that there will be some more information coming out in the next few days that can be helpful in bringing us closer to an understanding and to a decision whether or not to support this bill.

And that is why we were here and asking questions, and that is why we're exploring these issues today in the discussion and just trying to make sure that the bases have been properly covered, that this indeed was not as suitable for children as was thought initially.

It is surprising, to say the least, that an organization like the Southern Chiefs would enter into a \$20-million long-term contract without having looked very carefully at this building, and yet we have the government saying that it was totally hopeless for the purposes for which it was being used.

And so let us have a little more time to look at these issues carefully and to make sure that we're making the right decision as to whether this is a bad deal or whether the government is making a big mistake.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 16, 2019

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Oral Questions		Swan	1977
Concordia and Seven Oaks Hospitals		Lamont	1977
Kinew	1964	Gerrard	1977
Pallister	1965	T. Marcelino	1978
		Lamoureux	1978
Concordia and Seven Oaks Hospitals		Grievances	
B. Smith	1967	Gerrard	1979
Friesen	1967	Allum	1980

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Second Readings

Bill 32—An Act concerning the Leasing of
800 Adele Avenue, Winnipeg

Fielding 1982

Questions

Swan 1984

Fielding 1984

Gerrard 1984

Lamont 1987

Debate

Swan 1987

Lamont 1991

Gerrard 1995

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>