

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 18, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): I'm pleased to distribute the nutrient targets regulation Report on Nutrient Levels through 2019 and Action Underway.

Madam Speaker: And I also have a report to table in accordance with section 28 of The Auditor General Act.

I am tabling the Auditor General's report titled: Follow-up of Previously Issued Audit Recommendations, dated March 2021.

Ministerial statements?

Oh, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Is there leave of the House to just revert back to introduction of bills?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to revert back to introduction of bills? *[Agreed]*

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Madam Speaker: We will therefore move back to introduction of bills.

Bill 201—The Restricting Mandatory Overtime for Nurses Act (Various Acts Amended)

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I move, seconded by the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), that Bill 201, The Restricting Mandatory Overtime for Nurses Act, be now read a first time.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Union Station, seconded by the honourable member for St. Johns, that Bill 201, The Restricting Mandatory Overtime for Nurses Act (Various Acts Amended), be now read a first time.

MLA Asagwara: I'm proud to present to the House Bill 201, The Restricting Mandatory Overtime for Nurses Act.

Prior to the pandemic, our health-care system struggled due to lack of capacity exacerbated by the government's unwillingness to address nursing vacancies. Sadly, COVID-19 has only exposed and increased challenges where these gaps exist.

Staffing vacancies have led to employers relying on mandating overtime to levels that put both the employee and patient safety at risk. Bill 201 will end the practice of using mandatory overtime to fill vacancies and vacation and allow nurses the right to refuse overtime and not be in breach of their duty of care.

Thank you.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Journée internationale de la francophonie

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Families—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.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs): Madame la présidente, il me fait un grand plaisir de prendre la parole aujourd'hui pour souligner la Journée internationale de la francophonie. Ensemble nous sommes plus que 300 millions de francophones sur tous les continents qui célèbrent la langue et la culture françaises.

Forte de diversité, la francophonie manitobaine embrasse les nouveaux arrivants, les anglophones bilingues et les apprenants du français tout comme moi. En soulignant cette journée spéciale, il ne faut pas oublier qu'à ses origines, le Manitoba était une terre bilingue.

Le gouvernement du Manitoba continue à appuyer la vitalité de la communauté francophone, surtout grâce à la Loi sur l'appui à l'épanouissement de la francophonie manitobaine. Notre gouvernement

s'est engagé à travailler vers le progrès réel et à reconnaître l'importance de la francophonie.

En tant que ministre responsable des Affaires francophones, je suis fière de rendre hommage à la francophonie manitobaine et de célébrer ses contributions à la diversité économique et culturelle de notre province. Ensemble, nous affichons notre fierté d'être francophone, au cœur des prairies et au cœur du pays.

Madame la présidente, je demande à tous les membres de l'Assemblée de se joindre à moi pour féliciter la communauté francophone de son succès continu. Vive la francophonie.

Merci beaucoup.

Translation

Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure of rising today to acknowledge the Journée internationale de la francophonie. We join more than 300 million francophones on every continent who are celebrating French language and culture.

The Manitoban Francophonie finds strength in its diversity, embracing newcomers, bilingual Anglophones and French language learners, like me. As we celebrate this special day, let us not forget that Manitoba was a bilingual land.

The government of Manitoba continues to support the vitality of the francophone community in Manitoba, especially through the Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act. Our government is committed to working towards real progress and recognition of the importance of our francophone community.

As Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, I am proud to pay tribute to the francophone community of Manitoba and to celebrate its contributions to the cultural and economic diversity of our province. Together, we are proud to be francophone, at the heart of the prairies and the heart of our country.

Madame Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the Francophonie on its continued success. Long live the Francophonie.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Ici au Manitoba, nous sommes fiers de notre patrimoine francophone. Cela est la raison pour laquelle nous sommes excités de célébrer la Journée internationale de la francophonie ce samedi. Au Manitoba, environ 4 pour cent de notre population est francophone, une communauté vibrante, et leur impact est encore plus grand.

Chaque année, les Manitobains de n'importe quelle culture prennent plaisir d'aller au Festival du Voyageur et apprendre au sujet de la culture francophone. Beaucoup d'étudiants qui viennent des familles francophones et anglophones apprennent le français dans nos écoles, comme moi quand j'ai fréquenté Collège Jeanne-Sauvé.

Manitoba elle-même a été nommée, au fondé, en tant que province bilingue par un homme Métis et francophone, Louis Riel. Des personnes comme l'auteure Gabrielle Roy sont des noms très connus au Manitoba, mais aussi autour du monde. Encore aujourd'hui, on peut voir l'impact des francophones dans les noms des communautés comme Saint-Norbert et Saint-Boniface.

C'est absolument essentiel qu'on protège des droits linguistiques et culturels des francophones au Manitoba. Malheureusement, le gouvernement Pallister démontre clairement qu'ils ne sont pas intéressés d'investir dans la communauté francophone, ni dans les services pour les francophones.

Ils ont coupé le budget de l'Université de Saint-Boniface par plusieurs millions de dollars en même temps qu'il y a une forte demande pour les enseignants et infirmières qui parlent français. Ils ont aussi coupé les services en français, comme une réduction de 200 000 \$ pour Santé en français, 1 000 000 \$ moins pour les services de traduction, 700 000 \$ moins pour le Bureau de l'éducation française et ils ont supprimé la position de l'assistant au sous-ministre. Ils n'ont pas consulté avec la communauté francophone avant ces coupures, malgré le fait que c'est requis par la loi.

Si le gouvernement Pallister veut vraiment célébrer la Journée internationale—

Translation

Here in Manitoba, we are proud of our francophone heritage. For this reason, we are excited to celebrate the Journée internationale de la francophonie this Saturday.

Approximately 4 per cent of Manitoba's population is francophone—a vibrant community, with an even greater impact. Every year, Manitobans of every culture enjoy going to the Festival du Voyageur and learning more about francophone culture. Many students coming from French-speaking and English-speaking families learn French in our schools, as I did when I attended the Collège Jeanne-Sauvé.

Manitoba itself was founded as a bilingual province by a Métis francophone, Louis Riel. Author Gabrielle Roy is one of many Manitoba francophones renowned not only in our province, but throughout the world. Even today, the impact of francophones remains in the very names of communities like St. Norbert and St. Boniface.

It is absolutely essential that we protect the linguistic and cultural rights of francophones in Manitoba. Unfortunately, the Pallister government is clearly not interested in investing in the francophone community or in services for francophones.

They cut the Université de Saint-Boniface's budget by several millions of dollars while there is a high demand for French-speaking nurses and teachers. They also cut French language services by allocating \$200,000 less for Santé en français, \$1 million less for translation services, and \$700,000 less for the Bureau de l'éducation française—where they also eliminated the assistant deputy minister position. They did not consult the francophone community before these cuts, despite the legal requirement to do so.

If the Pallister government really wants to celebrate the Journée internationale—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

The member's time has expired.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I would just like to ask for leave again for the member for St. Boniface to be able to reply to the ministerial statement, given the fact that he represents an area with many Franco-Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member for St. Boniface to respond to the ministerial statement?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Moving, therefore, to the ministerial statement from the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with the statement.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): Madam Speaker, as part of our government's ongoing efforts to recognize and celebrate the rich cultural landscape in Manitoba, I rise today on behalf of myself, the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Ms. Cox) and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Ms. Squires), as well as the Manitoba government, to raise awareness of very important human rights observance.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as declared annually on March 21st, marks the importance of ending racial discrimination around the world. While we often look to events outside of our country with a sense of sadness, it is also important that we realize that racism and discrimination also occur right here at home.

Madam Speaker, it is our belief that diversity is our strength and that we have the moral obligation to speak out, take action and work towards a brighter future that promotes diversity and inclusion. This is why our government is—remains firmly committed to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and nations, and it's why we place great importance on taking whatever necessary steps to promote inclusivity and a sense of shared community with Manitoba's many and varied cultural communities.

Manitoba is a world-class province, home to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples as well as residents of an amazing number of different cultural backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities. These dynamic, active and engaged communities have enriched every corner of our province. Equality, freedom of religion, peace and rule of law are pillars of our democracy and are 'trinsicly' important to our identity progress and the world that we share.

As individuals, families, communities and Manitobans, we must never lose sight of the message that this day brings to us.

* (13:40)

On this important day, we ask members of the Legislative Assembly to join us in recognizing the international day of the elimination of racial discrimination, and we encourage all Manitobans to take any and all steps possible to advance reconciliation and ensure that Manitoba is a place where all individuals, families and communities can thrive in a safe and supported way, as well as healthy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Today we recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which was proclaimed by the UN in 1966 in recognition of the 69 people killed by police at a peaceful protest in Sharpeville, South Africa, in 1960. This year's theme is youth stand up against racism, and I am proud to say that here in Manitoba we have no shortage of youth willing to stand up against injustice.

Black Lives Matter has been a global movement for racial justice for years, but gained increased recognition last year after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Here in Winnipeg, thousands of Manitobans, many of them youth, came out to support the Black Lives Matter rally last June.

Discrimination against Black, Indigenous and people of colour exists here in Manitoba, both on an individual and systemic level. The recent report on ethnicity and COVID-19 exemplifies that African, Filipino, Indigenous, Latin American and South Asian communities in Manitoba have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 due to social inequalities rooted in racism.

We mourn the lives that were taken in the Georgia massacre yesterday. As my colleague for Notre Dame has said, and I quote, this tragedy brings to light the rising rates of anti-Asian racism and violence that have increased since the start of the pandemic. We know Asian women have been disproportionately impacted by pandemic job loss and higher rates of COVID-19 that come from working high-risk, low-paying jobs in the care economy. We are calling on governments at every level to combat anti-Asian racism and misogyny. End quote.

We, as legislators and leaders in Manitoba, must set an example by calling out discrimination when it happens. To that end, my colleague, the member from St. Vital, introduced Bill 212, The Mandatory Training for Provincial Employees (Systemic Racism and Human Rights) Act, which aims to combat

systemic racism through regular anti-racism training for folks in the public service.

My colleagues and I urge all Manitobans to stand against racial discrimination whenever and wherever it occurs and make it clear that it won't be tolerated here in Manitoba. I would like to conclude by thanking all Manitobans, and especially our young leaders, who speak out against all forms of racism, hate, xenophobia and bigotry. Your work is making our province a better place for all of us.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Was there an independent member wishing to seek leave?

An Honourable Member: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Yes, Madam Speaker, I'd like to ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Today is observed as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Madam Speaker, I believe that we should be doing a better job in taking action and combatting racism. Racism in all forms have such a destructive force in our society, and has personal, family, social and community impacts, which include hatred, discrimination, a more intolerant society, violence, poor family and health outcomes, including mental health. And it has major impacts in our workplaces, schools and all generations.

Madam Speaker, racism continues to be a major contributor to unsafe communities, among other things, and I believe that governments of all levels have the opportunity to make meaningful impacts on the issue of combatting racism, and we could do better by bringing together the many different stakeholders, including leadership, representatives from ethno-cultural communities, Indigenous leaders, government administrators of all levels of governance, along with representative of non-profit agencies and representatives of the private sector and other stakeholders to convene and adopt a commitment to combat racism of all forms in our communities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Sheila Olson

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): A true hero isn't measured by physical strength but by the strength of their heart. This past year there's been a significant focus on health-care providers, not just in Manitoba but throughout our entire world. They're a profession that never quits giving and we owe them our heartfelt gratitude.

Today, I want to express my appreciation for someone special in Agassiz constituency who has had a lifelong career as a nurse. Her name is Sheila Olson. She graduated as an LPN in 1968 from the St. Boniface Hospital. She lives in a very small but vibrant community of Langruth.

My earliest memory of Sheila goes back to 1972, when my husband Bob and I became owners of Hammond funeral service and ambulance service. When called for an ambulance service or unexpected death in the Langruth community, any time day or night, the call most often came from Sheila. She was already at the home attending to someone who was seriously ill, injured; or she was with the family of the deceased 'til Bob arrived. After 53 years, she is still the community nurse, by tradition, that helps anyone in need in her community.

Sheila has worked in the Gladstone hospital; in more recent years at Third Crossing Manor, as well. After her retirement in 2004, she continued to take casual shifts as a health-care aide and a home-care provider, which was so much appreciated by management, her colleagues, patients and clients. She is currently filling the position of scheduling clerk for these facilities.

Besides her commitment to health care in our province, Sheila is a proud mom of three adult daughters and a loving grandma to seven grandchildren.

She is also a lifelong volunteer to her local community. She has served on the hall, fall supper and rink committees, and—always a committed promoter and worker at all community fundraising events. She also visits, takes meals to seniors and shut-ins, and always takes time to call others who needed a friendly voice, just to know someone is there.

Thank you, Sheila. As a dedicated health worker you have gone above and beyond to serve suffering

individuals and give them a quality of life. Don't underestimate—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ms. Clarke: Leave to finish, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: There has been a request for leave to allow her to finish. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Clarke: Don't underestimate the legacy you leave behind as a nurse and a community volunteer, as you are impacting generations to come.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Today, I am proud to stand and recognize Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, or Ma Mawi for short.

Ma Mawi started as a meeting place among Indigenous leaders to find community-based solutions to the child-welfare system, but has since become a vital source of support in the community. The Ojibwe name means we all walk together to help one another, and I can't think of a better way to describe their impact in the community. Ma Mawi has distributed over 160,000 hampers to families and has worked especially hard to address food and housing insecurities during this pandemic.

Executive Director Diane Redsky was recently interviewed about an upcoming endeavour to help address the root causes of homelessness. Ma Mawi will be collaborating with other organizations to develop the Village Project, a 22-bed communal living centre that will create a safe space of culture, language and ceremony to help people along with their healing journey.

Ma Mawi is life-saving and highlights just how far this government is from ending homelessness. The 2018 Winnipeg Street Census showed that 66 per cent of Winnipeggers—experienced homelessness are Indigenous, and more than half of one-half—and over—more than half were in the care of CFS.

This government has made the homelessness crisis worse. They've sold off over 500 affordable housing units, cut Manitobans off their EIA during a pandemic, and they refuse to adequately invest in harm reduction and mental health treatment here in Manitoba. They should be deeply ashamed of the harm that they've caused Manitobans who are living in poverty or experiencing homelessness.

Ma Mawi is doing an amazing work—is doing amazing work, but they can't do it alone. They need a government that will help all Manitobans thrive, not just a select few. I will continue to call on the Pallister government to reverse their disastrous cuts and invest in affordable housing, increase EIA, access food insecurity and ensure all Manitobans have—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

* (13:50)

Jim Llewellyn

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): Madam Speaker, during this pandemic, due to the health orders that were in place for public safety, many in our community found themselves with limited activities to participate in. Certain people, however, rose to the occasion and became innovators in order to serve their fellow neighbours.

One such individual is Lagimodière constituent Jim Llewellyn, the owner and proprietor of Coronation Bowling Centre on Tache Avenue in St. Boniface. With so many recreational activities temporarily not available, his bowling lanes among them, he became innovative and came up with the idea of ice bowling.

He lives in Island Lakes, which is a very outdoor and family-oriented neighbourhood, with lakes and multiple long sidewalks and pathways. The people in the area like to be active, so setting up his five-pin ice-bowling lanes on the frozen lake by Lindsey Wilson Park was ideal for our community. He used gold-painted pins from his bowling centre and used frozen milk jugs instead of standard bowling balls.

The aptly named Island Lakes Lanes soon became the main attraction for the area for families, even becoming more popular than nearby toboggan hill. His innovative idea safely brought families together outdoors so they could participate in a fun-filled healthy activity. On February 2nd of this year, I tried my hand at ice bowling and found that to be both entertaining and challenging, something I'd highly recommend for everyone.

Madam Speaker, I ask that we acknowledge Jim Llewellyn for rising to the occasion and helping others during this pandemic. He is an example of volunteering and leadership spirit that Manitobans so proudly share.

Thank you.

West Broadway Bear Clan Patrol

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I am grateful to stand today and honour the West Broadway Bear Clan Patrol.

Bear Clan is an Indigenous-led community-based solution that provides a sense of safety, solidarity and belonging to both its members and the communities they serve. West Broadway's patrol launched in the spring of 2018 with the help of community leaders Angela Klassen Janeczko and Travis Bighetty.

Four evenings a week, volunteers gather at Broadway Neighbourhood Centre in the Wolseley constituency. Their three-hour route takes them through the streets, back lanes, parking lots and river bank. A shift usually ends over a hot cup of coffee at the nearby McDonalds while connecting with the folks seated inside, who may be there just to get warm and feel safe for a little while.

I've walked with the regular volunteers several times, helping the patrol to distribute hot food, dignity hygiene packs and kindness to those we meet, and I was struck by the empathy and dedication I witnessed and was grateful to meet community members that I might not otherwise have met.

Over the past year, our urban housing crisis has escalated and people on the margins have been deeply impacted by isolation, compulsive coping strategies and a profound lack of mental health supports.

Throughout the pandemic, these committed volunteers have found safe ways to keep serving the community. The West Broadway Bear Clan has distributed food hampers, clothing, PPE and blankets. This winter they supported a community member who was helpless and alone and had intent to end their life. Another night they were on site to call an ambulance when a community member had hypothermia and was close to death.

Whether it's picking up discarded needles, reporting safety hazards or ensuring that people sleeping outdoors have warm socks and a hot meal, this group of dedicated volunteers makes West Broadway and the Wolseley constituency a safer and more compassionate place to live.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley.

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, may I have leave to enter the names of the patrol co-ordinators and regular volunteers in Hansard?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to have those names put into Hansard? *[Agreed]*

West Broadway Bear Clan Patrol members: Lori Anderson, Travis Bighetty, Rebecca Ford, Angela Klassen Janeczko, Lara Rae, Robert Shaw, Amy Webb; Kassia Brasseur, youth member.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I table a poster: messages of hope for a world without racism. The poster, a fitting tribute on today's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, has been shared with all schools in our province, many youth groups, all MLAs, city councillors and the Winnipeg Police Service.

The message of cultural and racial equality arose from a collaboration between the St. Norbert Arts Centre, Black History Manitoba and Marymound School, with funding from Manitoba's Sport, Culture, and Heritage and support from the MLA for Seine River.

Last year, the St. Norbert Arts Centre held GerryFest to honour Gerry Atwell, an extraordinary individual, a Juno-Award-winning musician and a member of the Black community in our province. He passed away in 2019. His family has lived for several generations in St. Norbert and Jerry held numerous senior roles at the St. Norbert Arts Centre, including artistic director and chair of the board.

As a part of GerryFest, 80 visitors painted images to illustrate a world without racism. Students from Marymound School selected the two paintings used on the poster and shared their words of wisdom, which included: We will all live together in the same universe. We will all feel like we can be ourselves. We will love one another without judgment. We will stand up for others, even when they have a different skin tone. We will fit in and be okay with our sensitivities.

I thank the students and all those who are part of the effort at St. Norbert Arts Centre, including particularly Judy Williams, sister to Gerry Atwell, and Brent Bell, who helped with the design of the poster. The poster shows what Manitobans can do working together to put forward these messages of hope for a world without racism.

And one last point. I acknowledge a conflict of interest. My partner Naomi is a current board member and co-chair at the St. Norbert Arts Centre.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Education Reform Funding Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, teachers want what is best for their students. They want to see more one-on-one time with those students so that those children can succeed. But under this Premier, they're not getting that. They're not getting an answer as to why there are cuts in education happening under this government.

Yesterday, the Premier threw the very documents proving these cuts onto the ground. Now, I guess he did that because he doesn't want to face up to the fact that he cut \$4.2 million from our school system in this current academic year. So perhaps today the Premier will be ready to face the facts.

Why is the Premier trying to hurt our children's education?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): This government's dedicated to improving the quality of education. Under the previous government, it lagged and it was 10th out of 10 in the country in various measurements, Madam Speaker.

Our investment in education is higher than the NDP government ever made, by over \$427 million just this year alone, Madam Speaker, and we've added significant additional investments to education during COVID, and as a consequence of it have strengthened our commitment to public education.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it's remarkable that the Premier continues to dodge the facts, the very facts found in his Education Minister's House book. Now, these facts tell us that this government, the very same government that just dodged that question, actually cut \$4.2 million from schools in Manitoba in the current academic year.

You know what else these documents reveal, Madam Speaker? They also show that prior to that \$4.2-million cut they also cut \$3 million of money that was going to teachers and going to clinicians. They've cut money from the educators and the educational assistants who help children with additional needs succeed.

Will the Premier please explain today how the 8,000 more students in Manitoba schools today are

going to get a better education with less education funding?

Mr. Pallister: A larger investment, more significant investment and a more significant commitment, of course, Madam Speaker, in the future to reform public education and improve the quality of education for our children has never been made than the one made by this government.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the Premier has had a day to come up with a response, and he still cannot accept the fact that he's cut \$4.2 million from the education system. I'll table the documents so that his staff can help him to get ready with a new answer for next week because right now we're not seeing anything in the way of accountability to the people of Manitoba.

But perhaps it's not surprising because what was—been missing from all the talk about education plans this week, there's been no talk of how many more teachers are going to be hired in Manitoba. There's been no talk of how they are going to make sure that class sizes get reduced in Manitoba, and certainly there's been no admission that their cuts are harming schools in Manitoba.

Will the Premier simply admit that his Bill 64 power grab is all about cuts and not about kids?

* (14:00)

Mr. Pallister: It's sad, Madam Speaker, for the NDP, that their leader can't come up with original questions based on fact and has to invent things instead.

We've made a commitment to redirect \$40 million, that the NDP used to put into trustees, to the front line to help teachers. That could actually employ an additional 250 educational assistants, Madam Speaker. They're against it. They want more trustees. They want more superintendents. We want more money at the front line for our students.

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

Manitoba Public Insurance Political Interference Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, Manitobans are getting used to the sight of the Premier interfering with our Crown corporations. When it comes to Manitoba Public Insurance, it's costing Manitobans

an extra \$23.5 million. And when it comes to the Premier's interference with Manitoba Public Insurance, we see that he's set a bad precedent. He's set a bad precedent by indicating that he will remove the ability of MPI to negotiate freely by ordering everything to conciliation.

Now, we saw what happened when the brokers arrived at a new deal, so you can't blame auto repair folks for wanting a new deal as well. However, what MPI is being asked to do would cost Manitobans millions more each year and it will raise rates on everyday families.

Does the Premier recognize that his interference with Manitoba Public Insurance is costing Manitobans more money?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member for a question on interfering, because he has taken sides in labour dispute, and that is unprecedented. Gary Doer would never have done that, Madam Speaker. Greg Selinger wouldn't have done it. And the fact of the matter is—[interjection]—the fact of the matter is that—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —Madam Speaker, that previous NDP premiers had the intelligence and the wisdom to know that you let the negotiators negotiate. That's exactly what we're doing.

But the member took a radical position. He broke the public health rules, decided to get out on the line, out in front and disrespect the public health rules, Madam Speaker, and he did it while taking sides in a labour dispute. And he never told anybody that the NDP stole \$10 billion from the people of Manitoba and used it for Americanization of Manitoba Hydro.

If there is going to be one thing that puts pressure on rates in an upward direction, it's going to be that kind of leadership over there, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Madam Speaker, it seems like we're onto something because the Premier absolutely refused to use the words Manitoba Public Insurance in his answer.

Now why, perchance, would the Premier refuse to say the words MPI when he is posed a simple question about our auto insurer? Perhaps he has some conflicts that he would like to declare on these matters. I will leave that up to him to address.

However, what is very clear is that his interference with our public auto insurer is costing Manitobans money. What he has done is he has set a clear precedent and he's sent a message to people across the province that he is willing to interfere and tie MPI's hands so that they can't negotiate a fair deal on behalf of the people of Manitoba. What he will do is interfere and appoint a conciliator.

We're seeing now the domino effect of this. It's going to cost Manitobans much more money for many years to come.

What will the Premier do to undo the damage his interference has caused at MPI? *[interjection]*

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, I was just so excited to get a response in.

So the member opposite asserts that there's a conflict of interest without any evidence. And he asserts that we're interfering because we appointed a conciliator. Madam Speaker, this is the best he can come up with, seriously.

Lookit, the NDP, when they were in government, couldn't improve on available electronic MPI service availability. In fact, they were so far away from it they actually paid a million dollars to the brokers so that they wouldn't complain about it.

An Honourable Member: k.d. lang.

Mr. Pallister: Yes.

They did, Madam Speaker. They took a million dollars plus from Manitoba ratepayers and said hey, don't make any noise about this issue and we won't deal with it at all.

Well, we've dealt with it, Madam Speaker, to the satisfaction of both sides with a conciliator's help. And now we can expand on available Autopac services for all Manitobans, which after 17 years, the NDP only achieved in—well, getting k.d. lang to a concert for the insurance brokers. Unbelievable.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the Premier is so desperate to change the topic away from his mismanagement and interference with MPI that he now resorts to attacking brokers.

What the question is actually about, Madam Speaker, is the bad precedent that his mismanagement has sent. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: In very clear terms, the Premier has sent a message to people across Manitoba that he will not allow—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —MPI to drive a hard bargain. He will tie Manitoba Public Insurance's hands when it comes to the negotiating table. And if it ever comes to a situation where MPI were to drive a hard bargain, the Premier has sent the clear message he will interfere, put his fingers on the scale, by asserting a conciliator into the equation.

We are already seeing that this is costing Manitobans tens of millions dollars more each year.

How much will his continued interference with MPI cost Manitobans for the years to come?

Mr. Pallister: I love these questions, Madam Speaker, because the member's just raised the issue of MPI interference. And I appreciate him raising it, because I know, and he knows, that the NDP actually interfered with MPI, and they gave rebates out—but just a couple of times, and always just before an election.

However, when we get into government, we give rebates out after elections instead, Madam Speaker. That's the kind of non-interference we demonstrate.

Madam Speaker, the member talks about interference. He, in an unprecedented manner, interfered with the negotiations at Manitoba Hydro, okay, and then he went over to the Hydro building and he said, let me throw a press conference and break all the public health rules I can. That's disrespectful.

But when he was caught having done it, Madam Speaker, he had a way out. He blamed the I-D—IBEW members for showing up. And he said, it's their fault. They shouldn't have showed up and broke those health rules.

He can't stand here and talk about respect, Madam Speaker, because he doesn't demonstrate the respect for Manitoba working people that this government stands for.

Seizure Clinics Neurologist Vacancies

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Madam Speaker, 10 per cent of Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and this percentage doubles in Indigenous populations.

Unfortunately for Manitobans, they're simply waiting too long for care.

Last summer, we saw the resignation of multiple neurologists, all because this government refused to invest in these services. Despite the minister's commitment to fill the vacancies, we know that the vacancy rate is still at 36 per cent, months after the commitment was made.

And I'll table a copy of the document which shows the vacancies. This is also terribly unacceptable for such a critical service.

Will the minister tell us today when they will fill the vacancies her government has caused?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): The member opposite will know that there was a halt in surgical procedures during the COVID pandemic. Obviously, that is to look at the best interest and the safety of all Manitobans.

I can inform the House that those surgical procedures have begun again, and we will continue to work. But, obviously, it causes some backlog in the system, and I'm working very, very closely with officials to ensure that we expedite those surgeries as quickly as possible so that Manitobans can get the surgical procedures that they need, want and deserve.

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

Mr. Wasyliv: Madam Speaker, we can see the direct impact of these losses in the care that's given to Manitobans.

Tom Trottier is a Manitoban who's suffered from seizures since childhood. After an important surgery, he had to wait 10 weeks to be seen at a seizure clinic. He was supposed to be seen in four. This is a direct result of this government's failure to invest in the seizure clinic and fill these massive staffing vacancies.

Will the minister commit today to release a public plan for the prompt hiring of qualified neurologists so that our seizure clinics have staff it needs to succeed?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member very much for the question. And, certainly, if there's an individual that he wants us to look into their specifics of the matter, that we are happy in our office to take that away and to ensure we get to the bottom of that specific case, Madam Speaker.

What I will say is what I've said before: obviously, this is—it's nothing that's unique to

Manitoba. It's something that we're facing—provinces are facing across the country. I know our premiers have spoken about this.

* (14:10)

The significant surgical backlogs and other backlogs that have taken place as a result of COVID-19, Madam Speaker, it's not unique to Manitoba. We'll look at a pan-Canadian approach to this, but we're also at the same time looking at how we will deal with this locally as well.

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

Mr. Wasyliv: Well, that's going to be cold comfort to Tom Trottier.

This government is reducing the quality of care at seizure clinics. They've made no effort to fill important staffing vacancies and have not invested in updating old equipment.

Tom and his family started a petition calling for the restoration of care at the seizure clinic. The petition has already received over 500 signatures in just a couple of weeks, and I will table it for the minister so that she can see how many families are calling for more support.

So will the minister commit to investing in our seizure clinic and increasing capacity today?

Mrs. Stefanson: We have been in touch with all of our clinical leads in the province, Madam Speaker, including those in neurology. We're working very closely with our health-care officials to ensure that we appropriately deal with these backlogs.

Again, it is not something that is unique to Manitoba. It's happening across the country. We needed to take a time and halt those surgical procedures because we're in the middle of a pandemic, Madam Speaker, and we needed to ensure the safety of all Manitobans.

But we do take this issue very seriously. And to the member opposite's constituent, you know, Madam Speaker, if he wants to bring that to my office, we're happy to reach out and deal with him directly on his very important matter.

Private Personal-Care Homes Request to Revoke Licences

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Recent analysis affirms that for-profit care homes was the worst outcomes during this pandemic.

At yet another Revera property, Charleswood Care Centre, 70 per cent of the residents became infected, and one third died.

One family member explains that when COVID hit, and I quote, the care deteriorated. There weren't people to check to be sure if her loved one was eating. End quote.

A shameful repeat of what we saw at other Revera properties. The previous minister said that this was unavoidable, Madam Speaker. On this side of the House, we disagree.

I ask the minister again: Will she revoke the licence for Revera properties and commit a plan to get for-profit-seeking out of seniors care?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): The member opposite is referring to individuals that are the most vulnerable citizens, Madam Speaker, when it comes to COVID-19, and there have been some obviously tragic consequences as a result of this, not just here in Manitoba, but across Canada. And that's regardless of the ownership of those facilities.

And it's incumbent upon us, regardless if you're in a public facility or a private facility, to ensure the well-being of those individuals. So we won't take an ideological approach to it. We will ensure the safety of all Manitobans, Madam Speaker, regardless of where they live.

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

MLA Asagwara: Richard Zimmerman was 66 years old. His family recall him as vibrant and full of life. He was one of the 45 people who lost their life at the Revera-operated Charleswood Care Centre.

The care of loved ones at the centre simply fell apart, but it's been challenged since before the pandemic. The previous minister thought these tragedies were unavoidable. We fundamentally disagree with that.

Mr. Zimmerman's mother, Renatta, suggests, and I quote, maybe the Premier (Mr. Pallister) should go into these nursing homes and see what's going on. End quote.

We agree with her, and we urge the Pallister government to revoke Revera's licence and call an inquest into Revera and for-profit care homes in Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: We are making significant investments, more than the NDP ever did when they were in office, in personal-care homes in Manitoba, more than \$50 million, Madam Speaker, and we announced last year more than \$250 million going in towards the safety within those facilities as well.

So, Madam Speaker, we will continue to make those investments to ensure the safety of Manitobans living within those facilities.

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

COVID-19 Contact Tracing Public Health Reporting

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): After nearly a year of this pandemic, we're still hearing of troubling problems in contact tracing and public health reporting. Even after today's announcement, we continue to be concerned with the delay in reporting potential exposures and the lack of transparency in appropriately informing the public.

Businesses are keeping detailed records of their clients, yet we see several businesses with exposures but no case investigation to determine close contacts.

Why are businesses being asked to keep these records if the Pallister government isn't going to do public health investigations?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Madam Speaker, again, we are making significant investments in these areas. It's obvious that we are in the middle of a pandemic where there's some very seriously vulnerable people who are living in our personal-care homes, and our condolences go out to all of those who lost their loved ones during this pandemic.

But it's very important, we have learned from some of the challenges that took place at Maples Personal Care Home, Madam Speaker. We investigated those.

Dr. Lynn Stevenson came up with her report; there were 17 recommendations. We're committed to making those investigations—those recommendations, not just for Maples Personal Care Home, Madam Speaker, but for all 125 personal-care homes across the province of Manitoba.

Child-Care Centres Operating Funding

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Earlier this week, I asked the Families Minister about promised funding

announcements for child-care centres. Not only did she dismiss my question, but she still has not updated the child-care centres on this important issue.

The Manitoba Child Care Association says that a funding increase for Manitoba–child care is essential for their continued survival.

Why hasn't the minister provided this funding update as promised, and will she commit to increasing their operating funding today?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Our government is very proud to have worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the child-care sector. That is why we have increased their budget by \$20 million since we formed office, more money—\$20 million more than the NDP ever invested in child care, for a grand total of \$181 million this year. And we also have created 4,000 new spaces.

I've talked to many parents who have told me about their need to get into child care and more flexible, adaptive child care. That is why we've created 4,000 fully funded spaces since we formed government.

And we know that more work needs to be done and we're committed to doing that work.

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

Ms. Adams: Not only is the minister refusing to deliver on her promise to update the child-care centres about funding, but the lack of transparency and the push towards privatization in our child-care sector is causing anxiety with Manitobans.

The proposed legislation has no increase for ECEs and no direct investment for early-childhood–child-care centres. Instead, the primary goal of Bill 47 is to give public dollars to private, for-profit child-care centres.

Why is the minister trying to give away public dollars for for-profit centres and not investing in our non-profit sector?

Ms. Squires: It's really unfortunate to see that member follow in the footsteps of her colleague, the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), fear mongering and spreading incorrect information.

Earlier this week, the member for St. James talked about the parent-child coalitions and their cuts. They are not receiving any cuts, I was very pleased to contact all the parent-child coalitions and spread accurate information after that member spread misinformation.

I wish the NDP would stop fear mongering amongst the child-care sector and get on board with helping us support the sector and grow child care in the province of Manitoba.

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

Ms. Adams: Manitobans see right through the minister's plan for child care. Despite what the minister says about Bill 47, we know the real details are in the regulations, and she is trying to push the bill through before releasing the KPMG report.

Manitobans want to know what's in the KPMG report because they know what that means when this government hires KPMG: it means cuts. And she has still not provided the funding announcement as promised. The lack of transparency on this important issue is unacceptable, Madam Speaker.

* (14:20)

Will the minister get up today and commit to directly funding for–increased funding for child-care centres? Yes or no?

Ms. Squires: It's really unfortunate to see this member continue on with her fear mongering.

I had welcomed her into a briefing with my officials on Bill 47. I thought that it was—I thought she was well informed into how we're transforming the child-care sector, modernizing it, making it more flexible and adaptive to a variety of Manitoban's needs.

But to keep it simple for her, I would like to—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: –just say that we have increased more. Budget 2020 put \$181 million in the child-care sector, which is \$20 million more than the NDP ever did.

Madam Speaker, we know that more work needs to be done and we're up for the job. We're going to work with parents, families and the child-care sector, to make sure that all families have child care in the province of Manitoba.

AgriStability Program Funding Increase

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, during this time of a global economic uncertainty, producers deserve a provincial partner at the table to ensure that they can make ends meet when times get tough.

Unfortunately, the Pallister government refuses to play ball and enhance programs like the AgriStability program, which producers help to manage to pay the bills.

The minister's own department says AgriStability compensation is too low. KAP urges the minister to enhance supports and the majority federally funded proposal is on the table for this minister to sign, but the government is refusing—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —to co-operate and standing in the way of making this program fairer for producers. Time is up and producers need an answer today.

Will the minister enhance the AgriStability program? Yes or no?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): I would certainly encourage the member to get outside the Perimeter and to actually talk to producers.

A couple of weeks ago, he asked a question about our office modernization and I just want to—I'd just like to remind the member that there hasn't been ag reps in rural Manitoba for 17 years. So, perhaps he can do the math and figure out who cut the ag reps. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

I'm having difficulty hearing, so I would ask for everybody's co-operation, please. I need to be able to hear what is being said.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

North End Sewage Treatment Plant Federal/Municipal Funding

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): It's this minister's refusal to act on AgriStability that will mean Manitoba farms will struggle, but it's not only rural Manitoba where the province has refused to work with other governments to get results.

In the—in Winnipeg, the City has asked the provincial and federal governments to split the tab on crucial upgrades to the North End treatment sewage plant.

Once again, despite the federal government contributing the majority of the cash, the Pallister government's insistence on pushing an ideological and expensive privatized P3 model is holding these crucial upgrades back.

Why won't the minister simply get out of the way and partner up with the feds and municipal governments to get this important infrastructure built?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): Well, it's interesting to see questions from the NDP, who'd ignored the sewage treatment plant and the lake for years and years and years—it was the most endangered lake in 2013 and they did nothing about it, Madam Speaker.

We're working with the City of Winnipeg. And we don't negotiate in the media, unlike the opposition, but we're working very closely to the administration. We've already advanced \$182.6 million, that's flowed to the City of Winnipeg for the first and second phase, and we're ready to go with further consultations.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, whether it's producers and farmers or families in Winnipeg, everyone is paying the price for the Pallister government's refusal to co-operate with municipalities and the federal government.

Keystone Agricultural Producers called the minister's failure to act on AgriStability, quote, discouraging and disappointing. The federal minister said inaction would be, quote, very unfortunate. And Mayor Brian Bowman said delays on the sewage treatment plant are of, quote, tremendous concern.

No matter what the project, there's no answers and no action from this government, just more delays, more studies, more privatization.

Will the—will it be a yes or no from this minister to get to work with municipalities, get to work with the federal government and get these important programs moving?

Mr. Helwer: Well, you know, it's—the inaction from the NDP was obvious through their 17 years in government. They belittled the RMs. They called them, let me think now, howling coyotes.

We're working with our partners in the municipal realm. We're working in—our partners in the federal realm. When we all work together and we do very well, we can have success.

But the member opposite wants to—seem to defy. That's not the plan of this government.

Education Reform Rural School Boards

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I heard from a retired teacher and legislator who read this government's education proposals and described it—excuse me—as an enormous power grab.

Now, I don't want to give the Premier any ideas, but she said, why not just abolish the MLAs, elect a premier and he appoints Cabinet and runs the whole thing. That's what he's proposing for schools.

But she's not the only one who's critical. The chair of the Hanover School Division told the Steinbach Carillon today, which I table, that it's a punch in the gut, and it looks like they're blowing everything up and they don't know how they're going to glue it back together. That's Ron Falk, whose brother, Ted Falk, is the Conservative MP.

Now, why is this government going to take away local input from every single rural school board in Manitoba over the objections of their own supporters?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the fact that education matters to people, and I'm glad that it matters to people. It certainly matters to this government, and that's why we're reforming it to get better results for our kids.

I don't expect everyone to agree. Change is hard. The member knows it's hard. He's had a hard time changing. We all do.

But the fact remains, Madam Speaker, we're going to change. We're going to move more resources to front lines. We're going to move those resources there because we get better results for our children. That's this government's priority.

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

Mr. Lamont: Five years ago today, in an election forum in Winnipeg, a PC MLA told a crowd that, quote, we as elected officials on Broadway need to do a better job of promoting the work that school trustees do and ensuring that people understand that. That also comes with giving them the autonomy and giving them local decision-making powers. When we are sitting on Broadway, we don't always know what is going on in every part of the province. The best decisions are made at the local level because you know what is—specifically is happening in your area. The Province giving directives to school boards has made it difficult for school boards to manage, and it's put costs on you that has made it difficult to budget.

But it's more about funding; it's also about respect. You are elected to do your job, and you need the power to do that job. End quote.

That was—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

What changed between now and then?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I guess another shuffle's in order, Madam Speaker.

Lookit, you know, I want to say to the member that things have changed, and they've changed for the better and they're going to change even more for the better.

But I do—I've been a little hard on him this week, so I want to thank him for not organizing a rail blockade. I appreciate him not being part of that. I want to thank him for not organizing a blockade in the Legislative Assembly too. And I want to thank him for not encouraging harassment of civil servants, and I want to thank him for making sure that he's never part of organizing a rally that breaks the public health orders and shows complete disrespect for the people of Manitoba and their safety.

So, there, now we have some balanced, positive comments about the member for St. Boniface.

* (14:30)

School Community Councils Replacement of School Boards

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, the Premier has said that the 794 school community councils will be responsible for analyzing student achievement and learning, for assessing effectiveness of school programming, for holding the principal accountable and for evaluating the performance of any person employed in the school, and other functions.

These were important functions of school boards previously. The Premier is replacing the current 33 school boards with 794 mini school boards—but, they won't have any formal authority.

Why is the Premier taking this approach, which was found not to work very well in Nova Scotia?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Because, Madam Speaker, we like to take approaches here in Manitoba that work, and that's an approach that will work.

It'll work because we trust the parents, we trust the families. We know they'll get involved, we know they want to be involved in the education of their children, and they'll have more opportunity to do that than ever before with these reforms.

Provincial Economic Update Hospitality Sector Support

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Over the past year, the COVID-19 has made a significant impact on Manitoba's economy. Our government has been working side-by-side with businesses, ensuring they're able to weather this pandemic.

Can the minister update the House on some of the Province's current economic information in this regard?

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Jobs): I thank the member for the question and the opportunity to talk about what our government's doing to support businesses and Manitobans.

I'm proud to say employment numbers in Manitoba rose by 16,200 jobs in Manitoba labour force—8,300, making Manitoba's unemployment rate the second-lowest in the country.

I'm also pleased to say our government announced investing \$8 million in our creation of the hospitality sector relief program, will be administered by the Hotel Association, Manitoba lodge and outfitters, making Manitoba one of the most generous in supports for all businesses in Manitoba—in Canada.

Education System Funding Release of FRAME Report

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): The Pallister government wants to give itself unchecked power to do what they want with the education system, just like with health care. Bill 64 allows all decisions to be made at the Premier's desk and at a hand-picked education authority with zero accountability to the public.

Financial reporting for the Pallister government's cuts is now three years out of date. The last FRAME report on what this government actually did is three years old. As we showed yesterday, the budget this year included a \$3-million reduction for teachers, clinicians and the system.

Their plan is already less support for the front lines—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable minister of—*[interjection]* Order.
Order.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): I'll tell you what our government has done. In the year '20 and '21, we increased school funding \$6.6 million. Going into this year, we've increased the budget by over \$20 million—one point five per—six per cent.

We also saved local taxpayers \$23 million. We've increased our capital this year \$50 million. We've set aside \$185 million for safe schools, and we're also going to commit one point—

Madam Speaker: And the member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: The last report on education funding from this government was produced in a 2017-18 fiscal year—three years ago. Just like everything else, they've hidden just how badly they've treated our classrooms, but they can't hide the obvious: funding is below the rate of inflation, completely inappropriate for an additional 8,000 students since 2015.

And, as we showed this week, from the minister's own briefing notes, total provincial funding support is negative—an absolute cut.

In the last two months, schools have presented deficit budgets, their source of funds inadequate to meet the needs.

Why is the minister making such a mess and creating this confusion in Manitoba education?
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, here's the NDP way. We've—they've spent—3.1 per cent of all money on Education goes to administration—3.1 per cent. Ontario, 2.1 per cent; 48 per cent higher administration here in Manitoba versus Ontario.

That money should be used for front-line services for Manitoba students. That is our plan, and that's what's going to happen.

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

Mr. Altomare: Here's the budget cuts for teachers out of the last two years that is publicly available: teachers cut in Beautiful Plains, in Border Land, in Lakeshore, in Lord Selkirk, in Mountain View, in Mystery Lake, in Park West, in Rolling River—and I can go on.

And that's just the old information the minister has bothered to make available. His own documents show much deeper cuts, as a matter of fact: \$3 million to salaries for teachers in just the last year alone.

If the minister is so confident, why won't he release the required financial information, release the FRAME report, so we know what's really going on? Will the minister do that today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The NDP has made it clear this week, and I thank them for doing so, that they believe that the solution to better education is more administrative expense on trustees, greater salaries and increased junkets for superintendents.

But we don't, Madam Speaker. We think that moving \$40 million to front lines is where we're going to get a better result.

So, Madam Speaker, I appreciate and thank the NDP leader for taking that position, for making it public and for also stating that, if you ever have a problem with your child in school, that you're going to, with these reforms, have to take it to me. I don't mind, but I think the member's forgotten every single teacher in Manitoba when he says that, because if you have a problem with your child, you know you'll go and you'll talk to a teacher about it.

We've got respect for teachers on this side of the House. Apparently the members opposite forgot them, like they always do, Madam Speaker. They forgot about getting better results for our children and they forgot about the teachers that teach our children, too.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare), on a petition? No?

The honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), on a petition?

The honourable member for River Heights.

Cochlear Implant Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

People who suffer hearing loss due to aging, illness, employment or accident not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, relatives or colleagues; they also can experience

unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

A cochlear implant is a life-changing electronic device that allows deaf people to receive and process sounds and speech, and also can partially restore hearing in people who have severe hearing loss and who do not benefit from conventional hearing aids. A processor behind the ear captures and processes sound signals which are transmitted to a receiver implanted into the skull that relays the information to the inner ear, the cochlea.

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic, founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant program began implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implanted about 60 devices since the summer of 2018, as it is only able to implant about 40 to 45 devices per year.

There are no upfront costs to Manitoba residents who proceed with cochlear implant surgery, as Manitoba Health covers the surgical procedure, internal implant and the first external sound processor. Newfoundland and Manitoba have the highest estimated implantation costs of all provinces.

* (14:40)

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket. Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of \$5,444, for a cochlear implant replacement speech processor. The BC Adult Cochlear Implant Program offers subsidized replacements to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years old.

The cochlear implant is a lifelong commitment. However, as the technology changes over time, parts and software become no longer functional or available. The cost of upgrading a cochlear implant in Manitoba of approximately \$11,000 is much more expensive than in other provinces, as adult patients are responsible for the upgrade costs of their sound processor.

In Manitoba, pediatric patients, under 18 years of age, are eligible for funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement

Program, which provides up to 80 per cent of the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

It is unreasonable that this technology is inaccessible to many citizens of Manitoba who must choose between hearing and deafness due to financial constraints because the costs of maintaining the equipment are prohibitive for low-income earners or those on a fixed income, such as old age pension or Employment and Income Assistance.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide financing for upgrades to the cochlear implant covered under medicare, or provide funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program to assist with the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

Signed by Jackie Sullivan, Lenny *[phonetic]* Sullivan, Kalila Sullivan and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

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

Menstrual Product Availability

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Many individuals have faced challenges in obtaining and affording period necessities.

In Manitoba, women, non-binary individuals and trans people have been denied free access to essential period necessities, such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups and reusable options.

The lack of free access to period items results in the perpetuation of poverty and deprives individuals of reasonable access to a basic health necessity.

This petition aims to ensure that these items are free to access in public schools and within Manitoba's health-care system, and that no individual who requests them can be denied on the basis of gender or sex identity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to implement free access to period necessities within public schools and Manitoba's health-care system.

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to acknowledge the prevalence of people within Manitoba who are unable to afford essential period items.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, 35 years ago today was the March 18, 1986 general election, when I was first elected to this House. So to begin the next 35 years, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Until recently, diagnostic medical tests, including for blood and fluid samples, were available and accessible in most medical clinics.

(2) Dynacare blood test labs have consolidated their blood and fluid testing services by closing 25 of its labs.

(3) The provincial government has cut diagnostic testing at many clinic sites, and residents now have to travel to different locations to get their testing done, even for a simple blood test or urine sample.

(4) Further, travel challenges for vulnerable and elderly residents of northeast Winnipeg may result in fewer tests being done or delays in testing, with the attendant effects of increased health-care costs and poorer individual patient outcomes.

(5) COVID-19 emergency rules have resulted in long outdoor lineups, putting vulnerable residents at further risk in extreme weather, be it hot or cold. Moreover, these long lineups have resulted in longer wait times for services and poorer service in general.

(6) Manitoba residents value the convenience and efficiency of the health-care system when they are able to give their samples at the time of the doctor visit.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately demand Dynacare maintain all of the phlebotomy, blood sample sites existing prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, and allow all Manitobans to get their blood and urine tests done

when visiting their doctor, thereby facilitating local access to blood testing services.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: I would just indicate to the member—first of all, happy anniversary—but also to indicate to him that there are to be no words, extra words, added to petitions. And that's a long-standing rule that the members are just to read their petitions and not add extra flourish to them, as the member just did. So—but happy anniversary.

The honourable member for St. Vital?

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): No petition today, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay. The honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala).

Does the honourable member for St. James have a petition?

Okay, the honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Brar)?

An Honourable Member: No.

Public Child-Care Grants

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable, accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba's children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with the lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18 million temporary child-care grant and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for the private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

Urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and end the freeze on child-care operating grants while committing to keep public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoban families.

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Grievances? He said no.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, could you please call for second reading this afternoon of Bill 19, Bill 26 and Bill 12?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider the following second reading bills this afternoon: Bill 19, Bill 26 and Bill 12.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 19—The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020 (2)

Madam Speaker: I will start, therefore, by calling second reading of Bill 19, The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020 (2).

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Johnson), that Bill 19, the minor amendments and corrections act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

* (14:50)

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Families, seconded by the honourable Minister of Municipal Relations, that Bill 19, The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020 (2), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Ms. Squires: I'm pleased to speak on Bill 19, the minor amendments and corrections act, 2020. Part 1 of Bill 19 is primarily concerned with correcting typographical, numbering and minor drafting and translation errors. This bill also contains minor amendments to several acts and repeals several statutes that no longer serve a useful purpose. I would like to bring a few matters in the bill to the attention of honourable members.

In our continued effort to modernize legislation, we are updating The Domestic Violence and Stalking Act terminology to make it gender neutral and to update the definition of domestic violence. In this bill, we are also repealing the legislative requirements to indicate the sex of individuals on birth certificates, death certificates and certificates of birth registration search forms. Going forward, this information can now be collected in a way that does not discriminate against Manitobans who do not identify with male or female genders.

The bill also repeals several statutes that formed new government agencies that were announced but never established by the previous government. The bill also repeals the private statute La Communauté des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de la Croix Incorporation Act that the local community asked government to remove as the local organization is no longer functional.

Part 2 of the bill updates nine acts to clarify ministerial responsibilities for the administration of the statute. These changes remove specific reference to defunct ministerial titles and replaces them with the term minister responsible for the act, to reduce the need to make legislative changes when authority for a statute moves from one minister to another.

That concludes my remarks on Bill 19 and would be pleased to discuss this bill further at committee stage.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Does the honourable member for Notre Dame have a question?

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Yes.

In the absence of The Churchill Arctic Port Canada Act, what is this government's plan to promote economic growth in Churchill?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): That's an excellent question because our government did not need an act, as the NDP did, to do something—to take action on economic development in the North.

And so instead of having an act that we have no intentions to proclaim, such as the former administration, what we've done is we've created a Look North strategy, and we've got other mineral protocols in place and collaboration with our stakeholders and other leadership groups to ensure that we've got economic development and activity happening in Churchill as well as all of the North.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have a question?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I do have a question.

My question is regard to The Churchill Arctic Port Canada Act and The Thompson Nickel Belt Sustainability Act. When were these initially introduced? Their intention presumably was to promote northern development. Were these just sort of pie-in-the-sky visions which were not really feasible, or what happened?

Ms. Squires: Well, this certainly isn't the last time that I'll be in agreement with something that the member for River Heights said. He's exactly right when he says it was a pie-in-the-sky vision. The Thompson Nickel Belt Sustainability Act I believe was—received royal assent in 2011 and was never proclaimed. They were going to create an economic development corporation, but they never did.

Instead, what our government is doing is we don't need an economic development corporation with an act to go ahead with that work. We're just actually working on development.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, can you hear me?

Madam Speaker: Yes, we can.

Ms. Marcelino: Okay, thanks. If the tip—to the honourable minister, if The Thompson Nickel Belt Sustainability Act is repealed, will the City of Thompson, the school district of Mystery Lake and the local government district receive their respective payments from Vale Canada Ltd?

Ms. Squires: Well, I'd like to just draw to the member's attention that since this was never proclaimed, there was never any economic activity or any associated works that went along to support this act. So repealing this has absolutely no consequence because it never did anything in the first place.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I've no more questions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Marcelino: Just one last question, honourable minister.

In the absence of the Thompson Nickel Belt Sustainability Act and the Thompson Nickel Belt Economic Development Fund, what is this government's plan to promote economic growth in Thompson?

Ms. Squires: That's a great question and I thank the member for that question.

Our government has—and I appreciate that the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) has a lot to say about this. I wish he had a lot of activity to go along with his hollow words.

But we have developed a mineral development protocol, as well as a Look North strategy to continue working with our partners in the North. We know a lot of work needs to be done. We know that the NDP never accomplished economic development in the North, in the 17 years that they held office and when we formed government, we had a lot of work to do, with working with partners and stakeholders throughout the North in providing economic development, and that is what our government is intending to do.

We don't need an act that we have no intention of proclaiming, to do the work. We're just going to do the work.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: If not, the floor is open for debate.

Does the member for Notre Dame have any comments in debate?

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Not at this time, thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), any comments in debate?

The honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, just a few brief comments.

We're in approval with this, which makes, in a number of circumstances, pretty minor amendments and corrections.

I wouldn't call the repealing of the Churchill Arctic Port Canada Act and the Thompson Nickel Belt Sustainability Act minor amendments and corrections. These were ideas which were put forward in a previous government. They were never carried to fruition by the previous government and the result was that, you know, we wasted a lot of time debating and putting forward—discussing these acts a number of years ago.

And so it is appropriate, quite frankly, that they be repealed because they were never—they were what appears to be empty vessels and—to start with, and without any substance or intent for the NDP to actually carry through on their ideas.

So I thank the Speaker for the opportunity to say a few words and I look forward to this moving on to the next stage, to committee stage.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further members wishing to speak in debate?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 19, The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020 (2).

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

I declare the motion carried.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Acting Government House Leader?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Acting Government House Leader): Yes, Madam Speaker, apparently we're going to move to Bill 12 next.

Madam Speaker: The—it has been indicated to me that the House will now move to second reading of Bill 12, The Crown Land Dispositions Act (Various Acts Amended).

**Bill 12—The Crown Land Dispositions Act
(Various Acts Amended)**

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler) that Bill 12, The Crown Land Dispositions Act (Various Acts Amended); Loi sur les aliénations de terres domaniales (modification de diverses dispositions législatives), be now read a second time be referred to a committee of this House.

* (15:00)

Madam Speaker: The—hang on one second, I'll recognise the member for the last statement again.

The honourable Minister of Central Services, to read the recommendation.

Mr. Helwer: Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and I table the message.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Central Services, seconded by the honourable Minister of Infrastructure, that Bill 12, The Crown Land Dispositions Act (Various Acts Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and the message was tabled.

Mr. Helwer: Madam Speaker, this bill amends The Crown Lands Act, The Expropriation Act, The Land Acquisition Act, The Public Works Act and The Water Resources Administration Act, to make overall—the overall process of land dispositions more efficient, effective and transparent.

The changes proposed in this bill are a part of a new governance model that will allow routine land transactions to go forward in a timely manner, which will benefit Manitobans who want to purchase Crown land from the Province for economic, recreational or other beneficial purposes.

This bill will create new delegated authorities for land sales approvals. Sales up to \$200,000 can be approved by department ministers, sales between \$200,000 and \$1 million for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), and sales valued at over \$1 million require Cabinet approval. It will also require that land dispositions to designated provincial employees to be improved by their minister and that sales to ministers and senior public servants be approved by Cabinet.

This bill is part of our government's efforts to streamline land sales processes and it will support a new governance model and red tape reduction that is being undertaken by the Manitoba government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Thank you.

A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The member from St. Johns?

Oh, let's try the member from River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the minister is this: will certain lands, for example, which are in provincial parks, would they be under the classification of Crown lands and could they be sold under this—the terms of this act?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): Our parks are not for sale.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Okay, thank you, and sorry for that.

We've got it cleared now, so we'll go to the member from Burrows.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I would like to ask this: we have also concerned that the bill makes it easier to sell off structures such as Hydro infrastructure. What assurance can the minister provide to concerned Manitobans? Does his government intend to sell off Hydro assets?

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The member for Central Services—pardon me, Minister of Central Services.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you for the question. I am not responsible for the sale of any Hydro assets that they deem to be surplus. That is the—Manitoba Hydro that determines that.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes—to the minister: the minister said that parks are not for sale now, but could any future government use the terms of this bill to sell off park land, which is Crown land?

Mr. Helwer: Again, the parks are not for sale. I don't know how I can be any more clear. When I was—

were first elected into government I was given the role to look at some of our Crown lands, not including parks, and found that at that time we had made some most recent sales and the first land sale had been in process for 20 years. I don't think that any one of us would accept that it takes 20 years for somebody to purchase land from the Crown.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Are there any further questions?

An Honourable Member: Yes, I have a further question.

My question—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Hold—one moment, please.

Sorry about that. We'll go with the member from Burrows.

Mr. Brar: We have heard a lot of concern from concerned Manitobans. Would the minister accept a meeting with concerned groups to brief them on the bill's contents and address their concerns?

Mr. Helwer: The public has a fabulous opportunity, and I'm—I believe we're the only Legislature in Canada that does this—that they can come to committee and express their concerns and ask questions. But I don't—I tend to accept meetings from a lot of groups to hear their concerns, and we can have those discussions. But I would encourage the member to encourage the public to come to committee should it go to committee.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. To the minister: the minister says that sales to senior civil servants will have to be approved by Cabinet. Will this 'apply' to all civil servants? Would this apply to close relatives of the senior civil servants so that the senior civil servant couldn't get around this by having a partner or a son purchase the property? What is the situation and what will the government do in these cases?

Mr. Helwer: Well, not everybody thinks about things in a sordid manner like some of the members in this Legislature; we do tend to trust our civil servants. But, of course, there was an Auditor General's report on the Hecla land sales.

And we want to make sure that those types of things do not become replicated and that there is an oversight to make sure that the sales are arm's length and that they are correct and they're—that they're well done in a timely fashion.

Mr. Brar: How does the government plan to ensure that young cattle farmers are not priced out of the market by large corporations?

* (15:10)

Mr. Helwer: You know, I've had many years of experience in the agricultural sector and met a lot of great young farmers, met a lot of aged farmers, made a lot—met a lot of farmers all over North America.

And they are some of the most competitive people that I have ever met, and they know that they manage their own operations very, very well. They're very efficient. In fact, when we see European farmers come over to Canada, they say, if you can make money in this environment—in North America and in Canada—you're a really efficient, well, productive farmer.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm trying to get an understanding how this relates to the policies that the government has done in terms of affecting Crown lands, which are being farmed by ranchers and—at the moment. And a number of them are having leases coming up very shortly—and will this affect, in any way, the position of such ranchers?

Mr. Helwer: So this concerns sale of Crown lands that are to be declared surplus, not leased land.

Mr. Brar: Just wondering, what's the government's plan to reverse the trend of a select few owning more and more of Manitoba's land, which is consolidation?

Mr. Helwer: You know, as I mentioned, I have been in agriculture for a number of years and I've seen trends come and go. I've seen large farms be created. I have seen large farms fall apart. I've seen models where corporations or large entities purchase the land from the owner and then hire the owner to farm the land, because the person that—who farms the land and owns the land often knows best how to make that land most productive.

And that's a model that's worked in some circumstances. In others, we have a father-son, father-daughter, grandson-granddaughter that are all working on the farm, sometimes with hired hands and sometimes they can do it all themselves. We were very fortunate—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Member's time has expired.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. My question is, again, on the—who will be classified as a senior civil servant? Is there a clear—what level of civil servant would have to have a sale or purchase go through Cabinet?

Mr. Helwer: So the definitions of who is a civil servant, who is a senior civil servant and who will be subject to this is all in the act, and it's part of the other side of the department, which is the Civil Service Commission, on levels of the civil service. So, I think those designations are fairly obvious, but most senior civil servants know who they are and what their level of classification is. I think all of them do, actually.

Mr. Brar: What consultations were made with communities with regard to the changes indicated in the bill?

Mr. Helwer: So, we did quite a bit of work preparing this bill, and as I said when I—when we were first elected into government, I spent quite a time—bit of time with various departments looking at how land sales worked or didn't work, and what we found was that most of the time, it took five years to get to know, and that was 95 per cent of the time.

The other 5 per cent was straggled out into longer years—as I mentioned, the sale that took 20 years and another one that took 15 years. So we want to make sure that if there's surplus land, that it can be used and done efficiently.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. To the minister, I'm just interested to know whether there are any special situations with regard to First Nations, Inuit or Métis people with regard to the disposal of Crown lands?

Mr. Helwer: Absolutely, we are bound by treaty land entitlement, and we're very cognizant of that fact and we've done, I think, a very outstanding job in this government in making sure that if a land is—a Crown land is declared a surplus that goes through that procedure, that it can be selected for TLE.

And the communication with First Nations communities for that is—has been working quite well, and we—the minister responsible for that would know much better than I how many acres of land has—have been transferred, but far more in the first couple of years we were in government than the previous government ever did in 17 years.

Mr. Brar: The minister mentioned that they did do consultations, but my question is: who did the government consult when drafting the bill? I mean, were they consulted before or after this bill was put on notice?

Mr. Helwer: Well, as the member well knows, the first people that need to see the bill are the MLAs in the Chamber here, and we can't do—we can't disclose the contents of the bills until the MLAs have seen that. The opportunity—the biggest opportunity for the public to engage is, of course, in committee should the

bill pass to committee, and we greatly encourage members of the public to come to committee to ask their questions, make their presentations and be heard.

Mr. Gerrard: I would ask the minister, what sort of extent of sale of surplus Crown lands would he expect to occur in the next year, two years and five years?

Mr. Helwer: Well, it's an excellent question, and we know what we have as an inventory of Crown land. We know that there are people that are interested in it. Those expressions of interest have been piling up as we've been moving through this process to make sure that it can be enabled and work in a timely manner. And we want to make sure that we get back to those individuals quickly with a good response so that they can determine how and when they can move ahead purchasing that land.

The declaration of when something is surplus usually comes to the department that might be using that land, that may no longer feel the need for—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Member's time has expired.

Mr. Brar: What was this government—what has this government done to protect Manitoba's pasture lands; they're very important. Does this government intend to sell off any of Manitoba's community pastures?

Mr. Helwer: So, no, the community pastures have been a long-standing part of our agricultural landscape, and like the leased land, we work with the Minister of Agriculture to make sure that they are accessible, and some, again, are owned by municipalities, but those are areas that have been in long standing in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Gerrard: Just a follow-up on the—one question which I had earlier on. I asked about senior civil servants. Are close relatives affected in any way?

Mr. Helwer: That's an excellent question, and I think those types of things, the specifications, we need to be further into the bill and working with the department to make sure that we can make the member comfortable with how we make sure that our land sales are above board, that we don't have any Hecla issues, if you want to look at it that way, and that it's fully public and disclosed.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Floor is open for debate.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): We—before I start, today is International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and I want to say a few words about it.

* (15:20)

As we all know, that—intolerance is a great problem. Racism is a great problem in almost all parts of the world.

I would just want to share this story. In 2008, I was—during my work break in Australia, I was sitting with one of my co-workers and—who was a coloured person like me. And I asked him a simple question: what's your mother tongue?

And he goes, mother language, what's that? I said, the language that you speak at home. He said we speak multiple languages at home; so my dad speaks something else, my mom speaks something else, and they both have different skin colours. And I love all languages equally. I love all skin colours equally. So that was interesting and that was pleasant.

So racial discrimination comes when we think that there are too many races around. But actually, if we understand this, that all human race is one, that's where we start our fight against racial discrimination.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Coming to Bill 12, which is crown land dispositions amendment act, what this bill offers is that—it talks about the minister's followers. It says that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) must authorize lands that value between 200 thousand and 1 million, and if the value of the land is over 1 million, that requires Cabinet's authorization before it's sold.

What that means is that the lands that value under \$200 thousand could be sold by the minister, even without authorization from the Finance Minister. To me, it means reducing the accountability on Crown land sale. And I fail to understand how the minister came up with these values.

Where the number \$200,000 came from? And where this range, \$200,000 to \$1 million came from?

And I think, because this bill has a provision for further changes, who knows when this number changes to 5 million or even 10 million. What I think is it gives more powers to the minister. It excludes all the other 56 MLAs' voices while deciding selling lands that value less than \$200 thousand.

To me, it feels like it's less democratic than before because there's only one person involved in this

decision. What that means is it's inclined towards an authoritative approach. It indicates the powers are being centralized. When you centralize powers, that means it's less of a democracy, more of a dictatorship. We have strict controls around these rules about selling these Crown lands. Why is that? To avoid something that has happened in the past and as the minister mentioned today, about the Hecla land scandal.

In the year 2003, RCMP probe, it indicated that some irregularities or conflicts of interest happened while providing the land—Crown land to some people around Hecla Island, possibly fraudulent activities had happened around it. And when did it happen? It happened in 1997 under the Tory minister of Natural Resources.

So when we centralize things, when we loosen the rules, when we leave it to a single person to decide about something important—our Crown assets, our Crown corporations, our Crown lands—there are possibilities of favouritism, and that has happened in the past. It's well-documented. That means that people—when I say people, Manitobans—they lose control over the decisions about the assets that they own.

So after this investigation by the provincial auditor, rules were tightened to avoid these things happen in future. And now what we are doing is we are going back there. We are providing opportunities for such things to happen.

And when something is for sale—for example, Crown lands are for sale—and the minister is deciding to sell X number of acres of Crown land in Manitoba, who would buy that? That's the first question. Wealthier people—and the decision would be taken by a single person—wealthier people, their friends, the people who are putting that land on sale, their friends.

Because we just—a few minutes back we just discussed that there has to be Cabinet authorization for the senior civil servants, but this bill lacks clarity, as indicated by the question-answer session, about the interest of people who are not civil servants themselves but they are somewhat related. They might have some party affiliations, friendships, and these things have happened.

* (15:30)

And, I am at least sure about one thing: that if the land—so much valued land—comes up for sale, it would not be handed over to the young producers. It would be handed over to the people with big pockets. So that's the threat.

I don't know how the minister is going to address this issue. I don't think—even if the minister is interested to address this issue at all. This centralization of power is for sure going to impact common ventures disproportionately.

Because it's a money game. Those ranchers are not wealthy Manitobans. They do not have purchasing power. We need to bring in the legislations that address interest of Manitobans. We need to work on something that supports family farms, that builds communities, that takes into consideration how we can save small towns.

It's not just about the ranchers. It's about that small community. It's about the corner stores. It's about the local gas station. It's about the car wash stations. It's about small shops, pharmacies, shoe repairs, local restaurants. Because if we start following this route of handing over our Crown assets to the wealthy people, that means there would be bigger and bigger and bigger farms around in rural Manitoba.

And the owners, once they buy that land, they could be operating it remotely. What that means is, if there were 10 or 20 or 25 families surviving on a particular piece of land, they would be replaced by one single owner. And I know that someone would argue that those people would be employed on the same piece of land, but it not—might not be true in 100 per cent of the cases.

There could be absentee ownerships. There could be people who can afford to buy big pieces of land and not use it. In that situation, those small ranchers, workers, livestock producers—they would be kicked out. And them being kicked out means there would be less cars at the car washing station. There would be less people buying groceries in that town. There would be less people accessing the services of a shoe repair shop.

That means we are disproportionately impacting small guys—not just small ranchers, small businesses as well. And you know, I have lived in rural areas many years of my life. I have worked in Canada, in Manitoba, in rural Manitoba with Manitoba Agriculture for so many years. And I know how much these people are connected to the land. For them, land is not just their business. It's their way of life.

And we should bring in the legislation that supports their way of life, that encourages them to stay right there. What I am trying to say is, it's not all about money. It's about people. It's about their values. It's about their families. It's about their peace of mind. It's

about their priorities. It's about their connection to the land.

Since I was elected in September 2019, I have been in touch with Crown land leaseholders, and they are so much upset about the latest regulations that this PC government changed. And it's very clear that they planned to bring in these changes well before the 2019 provincial elections, but, you know Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, what they did, they did not disclose that to Manitobans, to ranchers, to Crown land leaseholders. They did not. They concealed that information until the election was over.

So what they did was, instead of the previous point system that is still being followed in Saskatchewan, they changed that system to an auction system, bidding system. Bidding system attracts the powerful people to buy that land. And I still wonder how this government states that our new regulations around Crown lands, it supports young farmers. And when—after these changes, when auctions were held, our Agriculture Minister was proudly saying that there have been recent auctions and it attracted young farmers.

Let me share. I was told that the young farmer that day who was a successful bidder was 76 years old. There have been instances where the young people have been bid out by their own relatives, uncles, because of purchasing power.

It's very clear that a 20-year-old person, if interested to start a livestock operation, where would the money come from? And if you look at the criteria, it's just money, how deep your pocket is. But the old system, it allowed to consider proximity.

We need to understand. I don't think that this government does not understand how livestock operations are run. They do, but they ignore.

*(15:40)

If you start ignoring proximity of a parcel in question, which is very near, for example, to my ranch and I'm interested in that parcel, that proximity is no more considered in awarding that land to me or people like me. And, practically, livestock is not like a combine or like a tractor that you can drive to seven different parcels in a day and cultivate the land or follow your operations on crops.

How would you haul 257 cattle from this parcel to the other, then to the other, and then to the next one? It's not easy. We need to consider these things. But why—but why we're not considering these things is

because this government, they care less about people but more about money.

If you look at the figures, since 1991, the number of young farmers in the Prairies declined by 70 per cent and the land consolidation is happening at a fast pace. Land ownership trends, we need to look at that. Our province, Manitoba, we lost 54 per cent of farms between 1966 and 2016. In 1966, we used to have over 39,000 farms. And, you know, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, how many farms we have in Manitoba now? Fourteen hundred—14,791 farms. That's a figure from 2016, and it's 2021 now. I'm sure the number would be still lower.

Four per cent of the farms in Manitoba, they own 24 per cent of the land. It's all about consolidation. I am trying to relate it. Why is this happening is because we are letting money rule over people. We have started putting more value to the dollars than people themselves.

Let's talk about the gross income. I was looking at a graph that ranged between 1926 to 2016. From 1926 to 1986, the farmers kept 35 cents from a dollar. And in 2016—between '86 and 2016, just under 5 cents. No doubt, the productivity, even the production that we are focused on, has increased because, again, we care about money. We do not care about communities. We are pumping in more and more and more inputs. Put more nitrogen, get more yield, ship it out, bring the money in, and we clearly understand what harm this is doing to our environment.

If we have more people on the land, and if we focus that out of the 95 cents that are going to the—towards the inputs to the big companies, big data people, big tractor companies, combine companies, fertilizer companies—can we think of something that at least 15, 17, 20 per cent of the income—of the revenue, I would say, rather, stays at the farm? Would you think the standard of living of our producers could be raised? Do you think that if we bring young farmers into the land that would be better for our economy? For our environment? For our land? I think it would.

Are there any policies that attract young farmers to the land? There are too many interested, but what they end up, you know, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, they end up going into direct farming, small plots of land, and I appreciate them. They care for the land. They value local food production. I think we should work towards the direction, towards the goals that, again, populates rural Manitoba, that brings in more families to the land.

I was attending a seminar two days back—yesterday, rather, yesterday—and there was a discussion about a public extension system. Everybody knows that a public extension system is an unbiased system of technology transfer, information dissemination. Everybody knows that.

After closing more than 21 ag offices, what would the scenario be? Do you think, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that those information needs of those farmers would change? Would they not require any education about plant diseases, soil sampling, nutrition? They will. Where would that information come from? That information would come from the input dealers.

I am an agronomist. For example, working at an input dealer, working with them, I am being paid by the person for recommending the dose of fertilizer and my employer is selling fertilizer at the same time. Isn't that a conflict of interest? It is for sure. While I appreciate all the agronomists working in the private sector and I don't suspect their credibility, but still there is a conflict of interest. We need to take these things into consideration.

When the PC government uses the word modernization, that means—to me that means cuts. It's not modernization. Everything cannot be disseminated. Every knowledge, every piece of knowledge, cannot be disseminated by the Internet or via phone.

I think I have a few seconds left, and I would say that this government needs to think about people first and then think about the wealthy people, their clients, their friends who they want to hand over our Crown assets.

I would end here, and I would say I stand against this bill.

Thank you so much, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

* (15:50)

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I just want to put a few words on the record for Bill 12.

This bill is about privatization, full stop. That's the purpose of it, and, you know, the government is attempting through this bill to make it easier to sell off our common wealth, our collective assets, our birth rite, the valuable assets of Manitoba that we all share, that they want to, obviously, sell off to their insider friends, generally at a low price at the detriment for Manitobans.

And, you know, what's different about this bill is they've actually been honest about it, that they have

come out and said that they wanted to sell off Manitoba's collective wealth to the tune of \$200 million. And they actually even have a goal in mind of how much they want to sell out Manitoba. And that's refreshing because in almost every other aspect of government they are attempting to do the same thing and gaslighting Manitobans at oh, no, no, we're not trying to privatize, but of course they are.

And certainly, when I met with the minister and we had a bill briefing, he said that's exactly what they're trying to do. They want to sell land more quickly. This is the sell-land-more-quickly act. And what is the impediment here that they need to remove to, you know, sell out Manitoba? Well, what's in place of course is safeguards, protections, things to prevent Manitobans from being harmed by these sales. What is being removed are accountability measures.

And sort of the main one here, big change, is they're lowering the level of government scrutiny in the sale of public lands. So the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) now, on his own—and we certainly have witnessed his level of discretion—can now sell land between \$200,000 and \$1 million without any Cabinet approval. And that's up from the existing act, which was \$25,000 that had to go to Cabinet.

Well, why should that be of concern? Well, that means 93 per cent of land transactions between the Province of Manitoba will now fall under his exclusive scrutiny without having Cabinet look over his shoulder and make sure that it's okay. So we're relying on the judgment of one individual as opposed to an entire Cabinet, which, you know, I appreciate it's a Conservative government. So it's not particularly diverse or representative of Manitoba, but ideally, say, a New Democratic Cabinet would be. And so you would have many voices around the table with many different perspectives making sure that this transaction's actually in the public interest, and it's not just meant to pad the pockets of well-heeled Conservative insiders. And so that's obviously of concern, that that level of scrutiny is not going to be there. And that level of oversight is not going to be there.

The second really concerning aspect of this bill is that there is an element of stealth involved because there are regulations that are going to come later. And these regulations, they will be allowed to increase the Finance Minister's discretion even though this bill is currently going to affect 93 per cent of the current sales. There is nothing preventing them in regulations that the minister could have easy access to

100 per cent of sales. And, of course, Manitobans will not be protected from such a scheme.

And, of course, one of the other changes that needs to be talked about here is that under the current system—and this, they don't like this—when you are selling a piece of Manitoba land, property that's owned by all of us, that is the birthright of our children, you are required—and it shouldn't be an easy thing.

It shouldn't be a quick thing. It shouldn't be an easy thing. This is a serious decision. It's selling off the family jewellery, and you don't do it on a whim. And it should be tough, and there should be scrutiny, and there should be accountability. But, of course, this government doesn't value that, right? It's the—you know, they know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. I'm sure that's etched, you know, above the door to their caucus room.

But what the issue is now is that when you want to sell a piece of Manitoba land, you have to send it around to all the different government departments to allow them to have a say. And the reason we do that is that every single department has various responsibilities, including various environmental or safety or regulatory concerns, or they may have some issues with transportation.

And it allows every single department to basically do a review, and to make sure that the sale is in the public interest and it won't 'contravene' anything that that department is trying to do. Well, this government's getting rid of all that.

And, of course, that will affect environment. That certainly will affect, you know, rural economic development. And again, they don't value that. That's red tape. They don't care that these departments are basically prevented from doing their job and that mistakes will be made and we will have environmental issues and other issues that will go through unchallenged.

And then there's another aspect of this law, which is another concerning—because right now there are rights of first refusal. And when you sell, you actually have to give certain groups in Manitoba the right of first refusal including, you know, does this land meet—you know, treaty land agreements, then it goes to municipalities to see if they need this land, and then First Nations. And only after all that has happened, this goes to the open market.

Well, they're getting rid of all that. And what's concerning, especially—because again, this government doesn't value other levels of government. They don't see it as a partnership; they don't understand that there's one taxpayer and that they don't want to work in collaboration with others.

And what's troubling here is that these assets were bought by taxpayer dollars. And what they want is our municipalities to go into the open market, in an auction, where the prices will skyrocket, and they want more taxpayer dollars to purchase an asset that the people already own.

So when they, you know, talk about, you know, respecting taxpayers—that doesn't respect taxpayers, and it doesn't respect us as a community members that one level of government has to outbid for another one.

It's ridiculous, you know. It doesn't recognize that we already own this land, and if a municipality can use it, we should be transferring it free of charge. We shouldn't be charging anything, or if we do, it should be nominal or based on a cost-recovery basis, not trying to profit off of a land transaction for another democratically elected government.

But that's where this bill is going to take us. And again, it's another erosion of Manitobans, you know, working together and building a stronger Manitoba together.

So we know that this government has a history of selling off our common wealth—to their donors, to their wealthy insiders—at fire-sale prices. You don't have to look further than MTS and the sale of that. That was sold at a fraction of what it actually was worth. It was an absolute scandalous handout and sellout to Manitobans.

And there's nothing in this bill that won't prevent that from happening again and again and again, and there's nothing to protect Manitobans.

And of course, you know, it's not like we haven't seen this picture before. It's not like this government hasn't gotten in trouble on this issue before. The reason why we currently have these rules is because of the last Conservative government's land scandal involving Hecla Island.

So it's not like they didn't know this can't happen or what the consequences are of concentrating power into one individual's decision making, or that you take away the checks and balances—you are setting up the possibility that these things will be abused, that they will be subject to fraud and the taxpayer is going to be left on the hook; Manitobans are going to be sold out

from this, and really, this is not in the public interest and this needs a huge rethink, so.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (16:00)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I have a few comments. I think my colleague from St. Boniface would also like to put on a few words, so I won't take too long.

First of all, the minister has said during question period that the parks are not for sale. I raised the concern about future—whether they could be for sale under these provisions in the future. I didn't get a clear answer for that, and that would have certainly been helpful.

I asked the minister whether there would be any implications of this bill for the Crown land leases for agricultural purposes, which are causing a lot of stress for farmers at the moment, for producers in a number of parts of Manitoba. And the minister said, no, there would not. I await committee stage for further discussion of that. I think that's something that we are concerned about and would want to know exactly what any implications were, if there were some.

Third, I asked the minister about sales to close relatives in the document. In the bill itself it refers to senior civil servants. There is not a mention of close relatives, and I think that is something which we'd like to know more about.

We do feel that it's really important to have—if you're going to sell Crown land—a really good process for valuation of that land, a fair valuation, that we don't have giveaways of land, that we have fair valuation of that land before decisions are made. This is important and, quite frankly, this presumably would be in regulation, but we'd like to have better assurance on that. We want to ensure that the process for any sale of Crown land is fair, that there's not queue-jumping, as it were, but that there's a reasonable process to make sure that Manitobans are treated fairly.

Next, we're concerned about the stewardship of the land. We live in a world where we're very conscious of things like climate change. We're very conscious of floods. We want and feel that there needs to be some sort of process incorporated—for example, sale of a land which has a small body of water on it—you know, what is—should there be requirements in terms of stewardship of the land so that a large slough, for example, is not a large permanent water body, is

not drained, and to the detriment of landowners downstream.

What about peatlands? We know that there's tremendous amounts of carbon in peatlands. Will there be requirements to ensure that there's reasonable stewardship of land? Whether there are trees on the land—we know that if you completely remove trees from land, you remove a lot of stored carbon, but you also have an impact on the way that the water comes off the land, because there's no longer the trees to absorb the water that they need, and that can have a big impact. So we have some questions about stewardship of the land.

There is a lot about sale of the land, but it's not clear what happens in the case of transfer of Crown land to a rural municipality or a local government district, how that process will work in the context of this bill. This bill appears to remove the requirement for review by the department. We'd like to be a little bit more sure that there—potential future government needs for land are taken into account, or potential needs for not just other departments but potential for the benefit of all Manitobans.

So, with those few comments, the concerns raised, I will close my remarks at this point and look forward to what's being said at the committee stage.

Thank you. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The member from Wolseley?

Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I move, seconded by the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), that the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 26—The Human Rights Code Amendment Act

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): So now we move on to Bill 26.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Acting Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Agriculture and Resource Development, that Bill 26, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act; Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Friesen: I am pleased to have the opportunity to present this bill to the Manitoba Legislature, to speak

this afternoon on Bill 26, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act.

Manitoba has a long tradition as a leader in human rights, beginning with the human rights act in 1970 and The Human Rights Code in 1987. For a long time in this province we have enjoyed protection of fundamental rights to equality, to freedom from discrimination in the key activities of daily life in this province.

Our government recognizes that maintaining these vital protections requires improvements in the administration of our human rights complaint system. Manitobans may remember that there was a review undertaken in this province of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission a few years ago and of the Manitoba human rights—the MHRAP, as well—so both the adjudication function and the commission itself.

That report was undertaken by Mr. Allan Fineblit. There was a report that was presented back to government in 2019. This report was published. It is there, disclosed for all Manitobans. I would encourage all the members of this House to read that report. And what that report essentially did was discuss ways that we could enhance service, enhance access to justice, make changes based on the experience of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and of the adjudication panel to be able to improve services to Manitobans.

Essentially, in this province, for a long time, there's been a long set of wait times that have gone along with someone seeking a remedy through the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. And this bill seeks to bring a remedy in a number of different ways, essentially, to that issue of wait times.

Yes, there are some other components of these legislative amendments, but, principally, if we had to see these changes through a lens, it would be through the lens of reducing wait time, increasing responsiveness, increasing effectiveness, increasing the efficiency of the operation of the MHRC here in Manitoba.

So currently, right now, delays in investigation and adjudication of human rights complaints are resulting in Manitoba citizens and Manitoba businesses waiting. In some cases, this has meant that people have had to wait upwards of four to five years to have a concern addressed.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

* (16:10)

These inordinately long delays have created a backlog of cases. That backlog of cases undermines the administration of our justice system. It undermines the integrity of those human rights protections.

Madam Speaker, we thank the Acting Speaker for his service, and now I have to change and acknowledge the Speaker is back in her chair. I wonder if sometimes in debate that some people must hear us and wonder what's going on over there.

And we know that—well, I always tell the farmers in my constituency sometimes they like to say that a legislator is only working if they're in QP. And I always tell them we all know that a farmer is not just working when he's sitting on a combine. And in the same way, Madam Speaker, we all know that a Speaker's work is much more than the work that goes on just in that chair. So I thank you for your service this afternoon, and I thank the Acting Speaker for his service as well in that new role of his, and we congratulate him on that.

Justice officials in Manitoba have been resolute in addressing challenges. In 2008, as I said, that review was undertaken of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and of the Manitoba Human Rights Adjudication Panel. The purpose was to address these delays. That review was completed. It was presented. There were 19 recommendations, 11 which called for amendments.

There were improvements, essentially, that could be made to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and to the adjudication panel, but some of these changes to promote better service would require legislation, and those amendments are presented for debate in the Legislature this spring.

So Bill 26 addresses all of Mr. Fineblit's 11 recommendations by introducing important process and service improvements, essentially to reduce the time it takes to resolve a human rights complaint and to streamline the complaint's adjudication process.

In particular, this bill brings The Human Rights Code into alignment with other jurisdictions in Canada. This is always an important consideration for debate in this Chamber. I'm often asked in the question-and-answer period that follows the minister's remarks whether there are jurisdictional comparisons, and I would want to satisfy that concern for all members and say this was part of the analysis taken by Mr. Fineblit to look at other jurisdictions, to see what was being done in those jurisdictions to improve

access to justice in respect of their human rights commissions and those processes.

And so, in Manitoba we are looking for that same change now to provide the Human Rights Commission with the authority to decline to investigate complaints that are frivolous, without merit or fall outside of the statutory jurisdiction.

So I would say for the purpose of debate that, yes, there are those times, and it has been after experience with the Human Rights Commission that it would be advantageous to have the commission executive director be able to make that litmus test, that threshold determination of a complaint to say, does this meet the test?

And there can be many issues that go into discussing whether that does or does not meet the test of a threshold requirement for a complaint that should be investigated and then could proceed as a complaint by a complainant for the adjudicator to hear.

So currently, what happens is the commission is required to investigate every single complaint and that is not otherwise resolved through alternative dispute resolution. So enabling the commission to decline to investigate complaints that are clearly without merit, or are better addressed through other avenues, would improve the efficiency of the complaint system.

It would allow the commission to dedicate its resources, then, to complaints that require that thorough investigation and resolution. And I will speak for just a little while this afternoon about what would be those categories in which the executive director could make that determination.

But these amendments to go on will also streamline decision making by moving decision-making authority from the commission's board to the executive director, in accordance with the procedures employed by other human rights commissions in Canada and other administrative decision makers. A shift will help parties receive decisions more quickly by eliminating unnecessary operational processes.

It is simply the determination, the recommendations of Mr. Fineblit in his report that we were relying too much on the board, which may convene every four weeks or eight weeks or 10 weeks, but essentially we had this executive director in place at all times, who could advance things, and then notify the board in a proper governance way of decisions that are undertaken. So this shifts some responsibilities now that are the responsibility of the board of directors to the

executive director. And, as I said, consistent with other jurisdictions in Canada.

The bill also helps to address issues of timeliness and fairness of human rights hearings by allowing the Human Rights Adjudication Panel to develop clear hearing procedures and introduce time limits for the commencement of hearings and the issuance of decisions. These are accountability measurements. They are guidance systems that would allow them to say a minimum—a maximum number of days, for instance, before a complaint must proceed. A maximum number of days before a decision that's been reached is communicated. And those things we know throughout organizations can be helpful to clarify, so this bill seeks to clarify those things as well.

The bill also seeks to support parties in using restorative approaches. And this is important because we are—we need to constantly be mindful of the ability of alternative ways to resolve disputes; not everything is best heard by an adjudicator at the Human Rights Commission. This is also the finding of Mr. Allan Fineblit. So we want to encourage the resolving of some human rights complaints through alternative means—restorative approaches, and reducing the number of complaints that proceed to a full hearing as a result.

Now, members of the opposition might say, well, there are some cases that are very, very serious and you're talking about a process that, you know, provides an off-ramp. I would suggest in response that it's precisely the function, then, of the Human Rights Commission executive director to make that determination. And, in serious cases, those are exactly the complaints that need to proceed more expediently to the process. But we do know from experience, many situations, many complaints have been able to be favourably disposed of in a manner that made sense and in a manner that met the satisfaction of all parties, and that helps in the overall carriage of justice. So this bill provides adjudicators with that authority to mediate complaints at the hearing stage.

Together, we believe that these instruments will ensure inefficiencies that are currently in the legislation will be remediated, they would reflect this government's commitment to reduce unnecessary regulatory requirements, it would streamline government operations. Manitobans have the right to expect timely and fair human rights decisions as a result of these important legislative enhancements.

And, finally, I should also indicate that the bill does increase certainty for all parties by capping the

amount of damages for injury, to dignity, feelings and self respect. In other jurisdiction, including the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and in their legislation, and also, in the Canadian Human Rights Commission, we have the same type of cap, and this bill would seek to set that cap at \$25,000, which we believe is appropriate.

However, at the same point in time, there is no cap, of course, on other awards that an adjudicator can make when it comes to compensation for things like financial losses; there would be no rationale to cap financial losses. Losses could have been \$75,000, they could have been \$100,000, and there would no argument to support the capping of those amounts. So this is the clarification that I wanted to give. There's also other categories like exemplary damages that have caps currently, and this legislation does not propose changes to that.

It's also important to recognize the role in our consultation with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission—has played in shaping this bill. As an arm's-length agency responsible for implementing the code, the commission's expertise is reflected in their contribution, ensuring that these amendments will enhance the effectiveness of Manitoba's human rights system.

As I said, we have a long and rich history in this province of being a leader in human rights and, by addressing the timeliness of our human rights system and introducing these operational improvements, we can ensure that Manitobans can access their rights under the code for years and years to come.

I look forward to discussing this bill further in the question and answer period. I look forward to the committee stage and third reading of debate as well. And I hope that we can count on the support of all members to have these measures that are reasonable and appropriate and we believe reflect the needs of Manitobans passed.

* (16:20)

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any

opposition members. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I would ask the minister, besides the report that was commissioned and tabled, who did the minister speak with and consult in these changes in Bill 26?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): The work of consultation was undertaken by Mr. Fineblit as the agent of the Crown in this case, so he undertook to interview the Human Rights Commission people who had had complaints before the commission. I believe he spoke to other provinces and territories, he looked at the inter-jurisdictional comparisons and we're very satisfied with the report that Mr. Fineblit reported back for Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights.

The honourable member for River Heights?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Here we go. Sorry, I was slow to unmute, my apology.

My question for the minister is this, there's a concern that the long waits are actually due to underfunding by the government of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission; and is this not the reason why the minister is trying to make these changes to decrease some of the ability of the Human Rights Commission to assess in some areas, is because his government has underfunded the Manitoba Human Rights Commission?

Mr. Friesen: No, the member for River Heights does not have this one right. I can assure that member that Mr. Fineblit's report—and I invite him to read it—goes to the area of the efficiencies and the effectiveness that must be gained in order to drive down the wait period for the registration of a complaint, for that determination of threshold, for the adjudication process and for the report to be published. We need to improve the process; this is the way that we will improve the process for—to improve access to justice for all Manitobans.

Ms. Fontaine: Could the minister share with the House—and just for the purposes of those Manitobans that are actually watching the proceedings—actually, year after year, the funding cuts that his government have done on the Manitoba Human Rights Commission?

Mr. Friesen: I invite the member to read the report. I believe that the Human Rights Commission has a

complement of 18 full-time employees that undertakes this work. It is the advice of the expert reviewer in this case, that this is not a budgetary issue and it is not a human resource issue; there are simply very significant inefficiencies built into this process.

It sounds like the member is trying to defend a five-year process that is currently necessary for someone to have a decision rendered through this process. We wouldn't support that; we support changes to speed that time up.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont).

Does the honourable member for St. Boniface have a question?

If not, I can ask if the honourable member for River Heights has a question.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I have a follow-up question. What measures will be taken to make sure that governments in the future don't underfund the Human Rights Commission to cause long wait times?

Mr. Friesen: I'm not certain exactly how to answer the question. It sounds like the member is pointing to a future state at which point the Manitoba Liberal Party might somehow be in power in Manitoba; that could be in the future. And I would exhort that member: if he finds himself in the position of having a Liberal government elected in Manitoba, to not reduce the funding but to actually make sure he defends the changes that we are bringing today that would help to speed up the process of decisions at the Human Rights Commission in Manitoba.

Ms. Fontaine: Could the minister share how shifting the decision-making power from the commission to solely the executive director, to one single person, how does that increase accountability?

Mr. Friesen: We believe that it supports accountability because that executive director is still is—he's accountable to the board of directors. This is meant to be an area of operational efficiency where other jurisdictions across Canada have all reflected that, essentially, their executive directors can do much, much more. And I would be pleased to read into the record a list of those jurisdictions who have made that change to enhance that same office of the executive director, which will reduce the wait times which we are trying to target in this case.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I'm a little bit concerned of the minister in terms of capping the awards at \$25,000. This is, of course, a lot of money for most

people, but if you're talking about a large business and you've got a human rights case against a very large corporation, this is not very much for them.

And I wouldn't—did the minister consider having larger awards possible when it was a large corporation which was not doing what needed to be done in terms of human rights?

Mr. Friesen: I do thank the member for the question. It is an important question, because it's one that Manitobans will be interested in. I would want to clarify that nothing inhibits, in any way, the adjudicator's ability to create a remedy. Even after these changes, when it comes to any financial losses that are sustained by an individual, no cap.

But also, when it comes to the—any contradiction of a penalty or 'exemplary' damages. In other words, the adjudicator can make any other—there's a \$25,000 additional category where they could assess something under—for malice or recklessness. And even beyond that, there are still other ways that the adjudicator can make a reparation for the individual.

Ms. Fontaine: So, can the minister clarify then, what are those—we've heard from him refer to financial losses and that there's no cap there. We've heard the minister talk about exemplary damages—and I don't know, he did not say if there's not a cap there, I don't know if there's a cap—but he's also just mentioned a couple of other additional categories.

And so, maybe, can he share what those additional categories are and whether or not there's any caps on those additional categories?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question, it's a very good question. And I'll say to all members that section 43(2) of The Human Rights Code sets out exactly those remedies that the adjudicator can make right now. And so I won't be able to read the whole list into the record.

A cap exists now when it comes to those exemplary damages; there's no change of that. This only sets a cap on that one category, which is called an injury for dignity, feelings or self respect. And, of course, no cap goes on to any loss of income; there, the adjudicator continues to have full discretion to make those decisions.

And remember as well, adjudicators can also make reparations when it comes to anything else, any other circumstance caused by a contravention—can make awards for contraventions.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. To the minister, one of the things I'm concerned about with the cap in relationship to injury, feelings or self respect, that if you have somebody, for example, who is not working, who is unable to work for physical or mental health reasons, that they're—they might be valued less, because it would be harder to ascribe a financial loss, potentially. But they're, you know, they're hurt, and the consequences on their life may be no less. So, I'm a little bit—

* (16:30)

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Friesen: I believe I understand the—where the member's question was pointing to, but I would tell him that these categories for adjudicators to make reparations are never meant to allow one category to compensate for another category. So that wouldn't be consistent with the spirit of the legislation.

However, I do remind the member that both the Saskatchewan and the human rights commission for Canada both have the same caps in this same category, and I would remind the member, at an amount that is less than what Manitoba is proposing to set that at.

Ms. Fontaine: I know that the minister spent like, I don't know, maybe the last five minutes talking about that there's—you know, in respect of caps and this new cap that we have for injury to dignity, feelings or self-respect—and he's trying to come across as if, you know, this is kind of reasonable and there's all these—you know, there's no caps on these other ones and there's a couple of caps here.

If it's such a good system, Madam Speaker, why did he take the former employee—or, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission to court on the award of \$75,000?

So, I think that he's—what he's putting on the record here is quite disingenuous. Why would this government take a former employee to court for \$75,000?

Mr. Friesen: The member knows that, as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, I'm not in a position where I can comment on specific cases.

The changes that we are proposing to the Legislature are not changes that were somehow just cooked up; they are the result of a very significant process, a review undertaken by Mr. Allan Fineblit. We are looking to implement all 11 of that individual's recommendations. We have confidence in that individual, in the report, and I invite the member to read it.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. My question to the minister is this: what is his expected, or hoped for, target with the time—in relationship to the time taken to deal with a human rights complaint?

I mean, right now, under his watch, it's been four or five years, but surely, it should be much, much less than that. Would he try to have every complaint done in six months or a year, or what?

Mr. Friesen: I've asked these same questions myself. I'm interested to know how great could the improvement be, as a consequence of these changes, if implemented.

Right now, we know—you know, even in 2020, there were 359 complaint files opened. Only 212 of those were registered; 89 of those were resolved through mediation. We believe that the opportunity here for mediation and sooner adjudication is significantly improved.

So I'm sorry I can't quantify for the member, but qualitatively, I would say that we believe the opportunity for improvement and speeding up this process is very significant.

Ms. Fontaine: Last year, last March—so, a year ago—the former minister of Justice stated in the media that the cap of \$25,000 would, and I quote, speed up the process to get to decisions.

How on earth does a cap on injury speed up the process of what the minister is attempting to put on the record of this exponential long waits in the Manitoba Human Rights Commission? How does a cap help that?

Mr. Friesen: Well, I don't agree with the member if she's disputing that these mechanisms and these changes are designed to actually decrease these waits; waits that remained in place under the NDP government.

But I can tell that member this: it's that ability to set the threshold and decline to investigate complaints that are frivolous and vexatious; it's that ability to eliminate unnecessary operational requirements; it's that ability to give the executive director more ability to do things outside of board meetings; it's that ability to commence hearings and issue decisions faster that will all help to decrease those wait times.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if the minister could explain how the appeal mechanism will work for somebody who is, you know, not satisfied that his complaint is called vexatious or it's not dealt with in a way that he or she or they would like to be dealt with.

Mr. Friesen: Yes, I regret that I won't be allowed in the time allotted to me to give a full explanation to the member. But I know that the member did have a bill briefing on this. I can tell that member there is exactly that process he points to.

If someone's case is then declined to continue because it doesn't meet that threshold, if can be reviewed by an adjudicator and there—this would create exactly that mechanism, whereby it would be adjudicated independently from the executive director to make sure that there is fairness built into this process.

Ms. Fontaine: But wouldn't the minister think that that's actually just adding double work, then? Rather than the complaints go solely to the executive director rather than to the commission, and then if there's an appeal it has to go back to the adjudicator. So it's creating double the work. I don't understand how he thinks that that's going to eliminate his supposed time waits.

Mr. Friesen: So we actually really do believe in that process of initial assessment of these complaints. In some cases we find out that the complaint is being heard somewhere else, maybe in the court. Sometimes we find out that the matter's resolved and shouldn't be coming forward. In some cases an individual has deceased and there is still a case coming forward.

There are many cases in which this ability given to the executive director can help to off-ramp those cases and that will speed up the process to those cases that must go forward. We believe in these changes; these—this was the recommendation of Mr. Allan Fineblit.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has ended.

Debate

Madam Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): So I'm pleased to get up this afternoon and put a couple of words on the record in respect of Bill 26, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act.

Like many things that this government does, and in particular this minister, I am quite shocked that here we are in the midst of a global pandemic and the minister is bringing forward a bill that, you know, I would submit in some respects actually dampens and actually puts obstacles in the way of Manitobans filing complaints to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and so, you know, instead of using this

moment in history where we see, you know, things that—human rights complaints that come light. And I'll explain what I mean by that.

So instead of using at this time the—an opportunity to strengthen the Manitoba Human Rights Code or strengthen the legislation to deal with, let's say, housing. We saw at the very beginning, and still today, that the pandemic has brought to light just how fragile our housing experience, our housing stock, our housing reality in Manitoba is. And so that's just one of the things that the minister could have been advocating for and putting forward legislation in how to ensure—which is a human right, the right to housing is a human right for all, as entrenched in, you know, the United Nations declaration on the rights of folks, entrenched there. We know that it is entrenched in our Human Rights Code that people have the right to housing.

And the minister could have used this opportunity to actually put forward legislation that would have enhanced that, that would have actually attempted in some real measure to deal with some of the examples of homelessness that we've seen in this last year that's only been exacerbated by COVID, and particularly this last winter where we've seen, because of COVID, we've seen Manitobans forced to find different ways to keep warm, in an attempt to keep warm, find different ways to find shelter.

And so we know that we have folks that are utilizing bus shelters. Or we know that we have Manitobans that are creating little camps with fire to keep warm. We know that we have Manitobans who have, you know, took it upon themselves to try and deal with the crisis of homelessness here in Manitoba.

* (16:40)

And the minister could have been attempting to do some of that work, but instead we have Bill 26 before us.

We also know that COVID has highlighted the conditions for women. We know that COVID has had a profound impact on the lives of women as they've navigated COVID-19 in the home and in the workplace, and we know that women have been faced with exponential responsibilities.

We know that they were among the first to lose their jobs; we know that they're among the last to be hired back; we know that women are—the vast majority of women make up the service industry, which is so vulnerable when we see moments like this; we know that a good vast majority of women

were left with all the caregiving in the house—including becoming teachers to their children, caring for their elderly parents or continuing to work from home.

And so, you know, the pandemic was an opportunity for the government to say, okay, this has really brought out the gaps where we are violating human rights, where we should be strengthening the human rights of Manitobans. But instead, the Pallister government—and under the leadership of this particular minister—has brought forward Bill 26.

And, actually, he did have time to withdraw the bill, because the bill was first introduced back in March of 2020 at the very height—or the very, very start—of COVID-19, and so they could have used the opportunity to say, we're going to hold back on this bill, but they didn't.

And so, I know that the minister provided us with some information here, and the minister is attempting to—is saying—that this bill derives itself primarily from the report that was done and satisfies 11 recommendations in an attempt to reduce the wait time.

The reality, Madam Speaker, is that under this government, we've seen cuts in respective human resources and funding to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission that have contributed—like, since 2016—that have contributed to some of the wait times that we see at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

And so, you know, the issue is under the watch and administration of this government—and then the remedy is Bill 26, apparently, which will actually only work to disenfranchise and work against those that are actually the most marginalized in Manitoba.

And so, we've got the government that sets the conditions and then we set the—we have the government that then penalizes those individuals that don't have any power or any ability to make any recommendations here.

So, Madam Speaker, the minister—we've spoken a little bit about the cap on the injury, and I'm going to get the proper wording because it is quite a mouthful here—where is it? So, Bill 26 calls for a \$25,000 limit on damages for injury to dignity, feelings or self-respect stemming from a human rights complaint; and currently there's no limit.

What this does, what this cap does on that, is it already puts a limit—it puts a price on a human rights violation even before Manitobans have an opportunity

to come before the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and file a complaint. So it's already putting a price on what an individual's injury might be—superseding even the investigation—there's already a cap on that.

And so, that does nothing for protecting the rights of Manitobans; in fact, it limits the rights and it is a very concrete way for the government to shirk its responsibilities to Manitobans who face discrimination and violation of their human rights.

And I think that that's really telling about this government, that this government would, before any complaint is even heard, would put a monetary price on what they think—it's just arbitrary; it's just an arbitrary amount that the minister has placed on this process before it's even come to the commission. And that's what they deem is an acceptable amount for a violation of a human right.

And there are, as you know, Madam Speaker, a variety of different human rights complaints that come before the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, and all, if not most, are pretty egregious and have long-lasting impacts on the lives of Manitobans. And here the government is already determining what that amount should be—the monetary amount to an individual's human rights violation.

And, you know, I know that the minister attempted to explain that there are other dollars—there's no capping dollars in respect of other criteria. I do find it a bit hypocritical because, as we said, and I can go here—we know that it was only a little while ago that the government, under the administration of the previous minister, went to court because of a judgment that was offered—or rendered in respect of a Manitoban where he was awarded \$75,000, and, apparently, that was way too much. That amount offended the minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister); that amount, \$75,000, was deemed too much by this government. This government thought that \$75,000, for what was proven a violation of a Manitoban's human right, was way too much money,

And so what did we see in—and so this government took that to court. They didn't want to pay that money; it was too much money under their assessment, and so they took it to court. Keeping in mind, Madam Speaker, that you're putting a Manitoban, who's already been through, first off, the violation itself, and then so—been through that whole violation, then goes through the complaint process and all of that and what that entails, and I'm sure that for anybody

that's put in a Manitoba Human Rights Commission, it's probably not a fun process.

I imagine that it's actually quite traumatizing for folks that have to come forward, share their personal information, you know, retraumatize themselves by rehashing out everything that occurred to them, waiting—waiting for the judgment—it's not a fun process.

And so they—he went through that and then was awarded these dollars. I'm sure, and I mean, I can't speak on his behalf, but, you know, I imagine that there was probably a sense of relief once it was found in his favour, and, you know, somewhat made up—somewhat made up for what he went through and was, you know, probably hoping to move on with his life and put this whole piece behind him, happy in the knowledge that he—it was found in his favour, and happy in the knowledge that, you know, where the complaint derived itself from, you know, they would be aware that they can't do that anymore.

So, not only did he—was he found—the judgment found in his favour, but it also—it—for anybody that's coming after him, he set the path that people cannot be discriminated like that.

And then imagine, then, so after all of this process—the violation, the investigation, the adjudication, the judgment—trying to get onto his life, what does this government do? This government—and, again, keep in mind, for those that are watching, this government, who has spent millions and millions and millions of dollars on consultants—you know, consultants from everywhere doing every little bit of work, you know, doing this, tearing apart this, that they've spent millions of dollars. They're fine spending millions of dollars on their consultant friends, but for a Manitoban who was given a judgment of \$75,000, that was too much for them. That's what put them over the limit. They're, like, no, no. I can't—we can't—we just can't accept that. We can't accept that this independent body, who the minister just said, not only, like, 15 minutes ago, said that they're independent and they do the adjudication and they're quite—they've got the knowledge and expertise to do this, but he's picking and choosing which times he wants to adhere or listen to or honour a judgment.

* (16:50)

And so, that was the case that \$75,000 was what put them over the limit, but not the millions and millions and millions of dollars that they've spent on consultants to really just rip apart Manitoba and rip

apart all of the infrastructure that—and the social net infrastructure that the NDP put in during our time in government. They've done everything that they can to just slowly but surely rip apart that infrastructure.

So, I think it's disingenuous to stand up in the House—for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) to stand up in the House and say that by capping the dollar amount to \$25,000, somehow that's going to speed up, you know, supposedly, the wait times that the Manitoba Human Rights Commission is currently experiencing.

I don't—I can't square that, Madam Speaker. I don't understand how the minister thinks that by capping the amount of money, before a complaint has even come before the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, how that's going to speed up things.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, is that, you know, in 2018, I stood up in this House and asked the minister—the former minister—why they cut 15 per cent of the staff of the commission, and when we knew that complaints were raising by 13 per cent. So that's two years ago.

We know that in 2015-2016, so, during the NDP, they had 21 staff. And then we know in 2019-2020, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission had 17 staff. That's a significant drop in staffing levels for the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, and again, when we know that human rights complaints are increasing.

And so, I just don't see how the minister can, in any way, shape or form seem to think that—or try to divorce himself from his culpability and responsibility for the wait times at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, and then, you know, divorce himself from his culpability and him and his boss' culpability in this.

But then at the same time, like, it's one thing to say, like, listen, it's not our fault, there's just so many complaints or whatever kind of, like, excuses the minister wants to say. It's one thing to say that because they say that every single day in this House. Every single day, they get up—the Premier (Mr. Pallister) gets on the media and it's either Justin Trudeau's fault or it's the NDP's fault or it's the member for Radisson's (Mr. Teitsma) fault. Like, it's somebody's fault. It's never their fault. So it's one thing to say that.

But then it's an entirely different thing to actually go out and actually put the measures in place where you're actually penalizing Manitobans even before

they come to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission to file a complaint. And then to already, you know, pick an arbitrary number out of their hat on capping those damages.

So, I want to point out, I want to make sure that it is perfectly clear on the record that the Manitoba Human Rights Commission does phenomenal work and they have phenomenal staff. And in—we also know that in the last year, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission has been dealing with, you know, many complaints in respect of masks. Like, who knew at the top of this pandemic that these would create such a fuss in trying to protect Manitobans.

But we know that they have received, like—I can't remember, I read it just a little while ago—like, upwards of 100 calls a months from Manitobans dealing—wanting to, you know, understand how these masks—by forcing people or making people wear a mask is violating their human rights.

So they have been dealing with so much, Madam Speaker, during the pandemic as well, on top of the work that they're already doing and that they're sustaining and that they're maintaining. On top of this government, you know, cutting staff, not giving the dollars to ensure that the Manitoba Human Rights Commission is adequately resourced with staff and experts that can do this work.

And so now, here we are debating Bill 26. This bill, Madam Speaker, puts marginalized and low-income people in particularly hard positions because it is a process to get a complaint in here, and now we know that they've already even—just before they can even start, they've already cut the dollars down.

You know, sometimes I wonder, when we hear the members opposite, you know, spout off whatever spin or whatever they're trying to get Manitobans to try to believe them—I often wonder to myself as I sit here and I'm thinking, do they actually believe what they're saying? So when I listen to the minister—and I still—I haven't worked that out, I think there's, like, do they really believe it, or do they not? I don't know. And they're just falling in line with what their boss says.

But I don't understand how the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) can get up in the House—like, not even 20 minutes ago—and say that by somehow reducing the amount of dollars that are awarded for—at \$25,000, that's going to reduce the time that it takes to get to complaints. I don't understand that.

I don't understand if he believes that—like, if he really, really does believe that, somehow, capping those dollars are somehow going to magically reduce the amount of time that it takes for complaints to be resolved. Or, does he not see that it is incumbent on him to make sure that the Manitoba Human Rights Commission has the staff that they need to do it?

I don't know what to believe, Madam Speaker. And I'm not alone. I know that I get so many messages from Manitobans, and a lot of the messages are, like, are they really doing all of this? Like, do they really believe in what they're doing? And my response is always like, I don't know. All I know is this: all I know is that they are doing this to Manitoba, and we—and—to Manitobans. And we can go down the list of everything that they've done. Even if you—let's not even go back to 2016; let's just go back to last March. The things that they've done to Manitobans, just in the last March, in a global crisis, in a global pandemic—and they sit in this Chamber and they clap for their leader and they clap for all the ministers that get up and they spout off this spin—I don't understand how members opposite actually sleep at night.

Like, when you know that you are eroding—and in Bill 26, I don't understand why nobody gets up and says, you know what, like we shouldn't be capping dollars on judgements in respect to people's injuries to feelings. Like, why are we doing that? Nobody gets up. Like, nobody ever gets up and goes against their boss. Nobody gets up and fights for Manitobans.

And so here we are, debating another bill, and for Manitobans that are watching, we've got 68 bills in the queue—the most that I've ever seen since I've been elected in 2016—and for Manitobans' information: you know, the official opposition has the ability to hold over or designate, like, delay five bills.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, like, the five bills—to be able to delay, is not nearly enough that we need to deal with the legislative agenda of this Pallister government. Like, five is not even a drop in the bucket to deal with some of the bills that we have before us.

And so—you know, here we are with the Human Rights Code and again, like I said, the minister could have taken this opportunity to enhance human rights in Manitoba—and you'd have to be absolutely blind, you'd have to be absolutely—not be able to see clearly what's going on in Manitoba in respect of human rights and the conditions that people are forced to live in because of the decisions that this minister and his Premier (Mr. Pallister) have made, including, as I said, the right to housing.

And so, Madam Speaker, I just want to say that, again—I don't know if I veered off a little bit—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 18, 2021

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