

**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**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
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	Woleseley	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

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

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

**Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk):** It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would kindly ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk):** O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may to the welfare of the prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, that—we pray Thee, that we may desire only which is accordance with Thy will, that we seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everyone.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Municipal Relations):** I'm pleased to table the 2020 Annual Report of the Municipal Board.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Now we'll go on to ministerial statements.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26-2.

Would the honourable minister pleased proceed with her statement.

### Manitoba Day

**Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** It is my pleasure to recognize today as Manitoba Day. It was on this day in 1870, 151 years ago, when the Manitoba Act received royal assent, paving the way for entry into Confederation, the only province to do so under Indigenous leadership.

Today we embrace Manitoba Day as an opportunity to explore our history and acknowledge, enjoy,

and honour our province's diverse mosaic of people and cultures. Whether it be—have been those who have made their lives on the lands for thousands of years, hundreds of years, for decades or for only a short time, all have enriched our province with their stories, languages and traditions.

Manitoba has been the home of hope for over 150 years, and I am optimistic that generations to come will continue to call our province home.

It was in 18—it was in 1986 when the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba formally established Manitoba Day as a day to honour and learn about the history of our beautiful province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this second Manitoba Day of COVID-19 pandemic we must, once again, celebrate our history at a distance. As we have done for over a year, we must continue to commemorate this occasion safely and virtually, and we all look forward to the time when we can gather again with our friends and loved ones to celebrate our province's vibrant history past, present and future.

Together we can take pride in the collective work we are doing to keep each other safe. The vast majority of Manitobans have embraced this task in the same spirit in which we have supported each other in previous times of peril.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I invite everyone to visit Manitoba Day page on the Sport, Culture and Heritage website to enjoy the online programming developed by our province's hard-working museums and heritage organizations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we reflect on this special day in Manitoba's history, we must be mindful of those that came before us and recognize their significant contributions that made Manitoba the best place to call home.

Thank you. Miigwech. Dyakuyu.

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, if there is one word that Manitobans embody like no other, it is resilience. Every year Manitobans persevere through hard winters and work together to protect their neighbours from seasonal flooding.

Today, on Manitoba Day, we celebrate 151 years of that resilience, as well as of the generations of

First Nations and Métis peoples who have lived on this land long before the Manitoba Act was passed on this day in 1870.

One hundred fifty-one years ago today Manitoba officially became a Canadian province. Manitoba was the first and only province to do so under an Indigenous leader, Louis Riel. It is impossible to speak of Manitoba's history without talking about 1869 to 1870 Red River Resistance, in which a group of Métis, led by Louis Riel, fought the federal government for their rights, culture and land.

When Louis Riel led the Red River Resistance that led to our province's formation, no one could have imagined the many great leaders and achievements that would come from the Postage Stamp Province.

These great Manitobans and their accomplishments deserve to be recognized, and while our in-person celebrations may still be on pause, the spirit of that celebration continues to live in the hearts of Manitobans.

Manitobans are resilient, and this year that resilience means coming together, as Manitobans do best, to keep each other safe and healthy through these uncertain times. Manitobans have shown caring and compassion, creating innovative ways to help each other and to celebrate each other's successes. This is the true nature of Manitobans, and when future generations speak of Manitoba's resilience, they will reflect on this time.

While we have to keep our physical distance, there are many ways to celebrate Manitoba Day from home. There are online resources available from various organizations in our province, including Heritage Winnipeg, the Manitoba Historical Society, the Manitoba Museum and many more.

I hope all Manitobans will take some time to learn more about our province's history and the diverse groups of people who call it home. We will get out of—

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Does the honourable member have leave to finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Brar:** We will get out of this pandemic, and we will do it by continuing to be resilient together.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Does the honourable member for Tyndall Park have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

**Ms. Lamoureux:** Today we are recognizing Manitoba entering Confederation 126 years ago. It was back on May 12th, in 1970, when the Manitoba Act was passed by the Canadian Parliament. The act was passed in a vote 120 to 11, and shortly after, on June 23rd, the land was transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Government of Canada.

\* (13:40)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the following day, the Manitoba Act was endorsed by Louis Riel's provisional government and proclaimed on the 15th of July in 1870. This is how our province was officially established.

Since entering Confederation, we have witnessed our province grow into a cultural mosaic where hundreds and thousands of individuals from across the world have chosen Manitoba to call their home. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitoba is a prime example of hard work, dedication, family values and resilience, and we have seen this amplified this past year as we continue to manage through the COVID pandemic.

I think about the Manitobans who have had to sacrifice and compromise so much, everyone from our critical and essential workers, especially in our health-care fields, in our education system, to everyone who has had to refrain from visiting loved ones in long-term-care homes, to students who are having to go-forgo graduations.

In spite of the sacrifices, Manitobans have made it through the last 15 months.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we are talking about this anniversary, we must also recognize Manitoba's history pre-1870. Indigenous folks were caretakers of the lands long before what it is now, Manitoba. We must continue to recognize and work in partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit to ensure that their stories are heard and that their struggles are recognized and addressed through equitable outcomes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has been a tough year, but Manitobans has—have 'preserved,' and I'm honoured to speak in this House to recognize Manitoba entering Confederation.

Thank you, merci and miigwech, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** We have another ministerial statement from the honourable Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26-2.

Would the honourable minister proceed with his statement.

### Eid al-Fitr

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** Today, Muslims in Manitoba and throughout the world will celebrate Eid al-Fitr, known as the festival of the breaking of the fast to mark the end of Ramadan. Whether they were born in Canada or they've chosen to make their homes here, Muslims represent a significant element in the Canadian mosaic.

During the past month of Ramadan, devout Muslims all over Manitoba and around the world have reflected on their lives and turned their thoughts on peace and compassion as they abstain from the comforts we sometimes take for granted. Ramadan is the holiest month for Muslims and is one of the five pillars of Islam. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from negative thoughts, abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset and conclude each night in gratitude through prayer. The observance is a time of profound worship and deep spirituality.

For Muslims, the fasting that occurs during Ramadan is more than just about refocusing their lives, it is also about demonstrating love for all people through charitable deeds. In years past there would've been occasions where Muslims would gather throughout the months of Ramadan with their loved ones.

I commend the strength of our Muslim community as this year, due to the challenges of the ongoing pandemic, traditions needed to be altered and Ramadan was observed safely at home.

As the appearance of the new moon brings Ramadan to a close, I trust that the new horizon will usher in a year of reconciliation and peace. I encourage all Manitobans to join me in wishing a warm Eid Mubarak to the Muslim community in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** This week, Manitoba Muslims are celebrating the end of Ramadan. The Muslim community in our province has spent the past

month fasting during the daylight hours, and today marks the end of that fasting.

Eid al-Fitr is a three-day religious holiday that's celebrated by Muslims around the world. Its name means festival of breaking of the fast as it marks the end of Ramadan. The date of this celebration varies from year to year based on when the new moon is sighted. This year, it begins this evening and ends tomorrow evening. The celebration of Eid al-Fitr also signals the first day in the month of Shawwal.

Traditionally, Eid al-Fitr includes prayers that are read in a large open area like a field, at community centres, or mosques. These prayers are followed by a sermon, and after that Muslims will visit together and hold large communal celebrations in homes, community centres or rented halls.

Since giving to others through charity is an important part of Ramadan, it is also a part of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

Many Muslims donate food to the poor, which is called sadaqah al-fitr. These donations are an important part of the holiday as it ensures that everyone will be able to mark the end of Ramadan by enjoying a special meal.

Under normal circumstances, families and friends would get—

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

**An Honourable Member:** Leave.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Is there leave to have the honourable member for Burrows to finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Brar:** Under normal circumstance, families and friends would get together to celebrate, which includes a large feast and gift giving. COVID-19 has changed how that will happen again this year, with celebrations and prayers moving online instead.

The Manitoba Islamic Association is hosting virtual prayers tomorrow as well as a virtual Community Eid Game Night on Friday and is encouraging people to donate to help those in need.

This Eid will be second year in a row that Muslim Manitobans cannot celebrate with their friends and families. I know this is a challenging time for many and I want to encourage people to reach out to their family and friends.

Everybody, Eid Mubarak.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** I ask leave to respond to the minister's statement.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Gerrard:** The festival of Eid or Eid al-Fitr is today, the end of Ramadan, a very important Muslim festival.

The Muslim community in Manitoba is growing and is now about 17,000 strong. Muslims are contributing in so many ways to our province.

Several years ago now, we had many, many refugees who arrived from Syria and now call Manitoba home. It was an initiative of the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau to accept people who are refugees and from a country which was and still is experiencing a very difficult period.

But we now have in Manitoba young people who came from Syria who are graduating from high school and university and getting jobs and helping to build our province.

Among the many Muslims who have come to Manitoba are about 4,000 whose family originally came from Bangladesh. For my wife Naomi and me, this is special because our son Tom is married to Nadine Jahangir, whose family was Bangladesh. When they were married about nine years ago, the ceremony incorporated both Muslim and Christian traditions. Today, with their son Zayd, they are helping to build our community of Canada.

And so today on Eid, even though we cannot gather as we usually could because of COVID, we celebrate a major Muslim festival and we celebrate the fact that, as Manitobans and Canadians, we continue to help each other and to build a better province and a better country together.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Before we start members' statements, I just want to take this opportunity to thank the clerks for all the work that you've done yesterday. I know it was a busy day, it was a lot of moving parts. The report stage amendments—you know, it took a lot of work behind the scenes, especially now that we're doing everything virtual.

I have to say thank you to all the support staff when it comes to our technology here and they've done a wonderful job and the—you know, everything went flawless. And as hard as it is, they even made me look good yesterday, so give the staff a hand.

Okay, we'll go on to members' statements.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Darren Sakwi

**Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure):** Mr. Speaker, last year, our beautiful province celebrated two outstanding milestones: (1) we commemorated the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of the Manitoba Act, and we celebrated the 100th birthday of our Legislative Building.

In celebration of these impressive milestones, a time capsule, which will remain sealed for 100 years, was filled with 75 objects. I am proud to say that local Niverville artist Darren Sakwi designed and created this beautifully crafted stainless steel time capsule. This capsule will be on display in the Manitoba Legislature for all to see.

\* (13:50)

Darren is an Indigenous artist, a fabrication designer and the owner of Stainless Concepts Inc., who moved to Niverville 10 years ago with his family. With a career spanning over 20 years, his passion for metal fabrication began long before the creation of this time capsule.

He is a graduate of Red River College, with a certificate in computer-aided design, which has been the foundation of his entire career. In 2009, Darren formed Stainless Concepts and continues to provide a positive and supportive work environment for his employees and customers.

His career within the industry has allowed him to be involved with a variety of exciting projects and to become engaged within his community. Apart from the time capsule, Darren is also known for his other pieces of artwork entitled *The Gathering and Sky Spirit*. These sculptures can be seen at the corner of Broadway and Smith Street and in the community of Sage Creek in Winnipeg.

Darren uses his artwork as an opportunity to express and educate himself on his Indigenous background. Every project has its own story and meaning, which truly brings every piece to life.

Congratulations to Darren and all the employees of Stainless Concepts Inc. We look forward to the projects you will create in the future, and I am certain your work will be admired for centuries to come.

### Remote Learning

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** Today, Winnipeg and Brandon schools switched to remote learning. This is a difficult time for staff, students and families.

This situation was made all the more difficult because of the failures of this Pallister government. They have had modelling in their hands that showed a growing crisis that they still refuse to share with Manitobans. They have seen the exponential growth in the province's case counts for weeks.

The priority should have been to vaccinate our first-line educators. They're critical workers like police and firefighters, but educators weren't prioritized.

Instead, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) developed a back-of-the-napkin plan to send them to North Dakota that fell apart almost immediately. Vaccinating teachers weeks ago could have helped reduce the risk of transmission in the classroom, but it's too late for that now. Winnipeg and Brandon schools have gone remote.

Manitoba families are furious at this government. This shutdown was announced on Mother's Day, with very little notice. Parents are facing impossible choices, especially many of my constituents who cannot do their jobs remotely. They must now leave their jobs without pay or, in some cases, quit their jobs to care for their children. Many will also withdraw their younger children from child care.

This is going to do long-term damage to a lot of people in our community. They're losing their jobs, they're losing their child care and all of it is being done last-minute, in a panic, because this government failed to inform, failed to plan and failed to lead.

For the parents suffering right now, we hear you, and we are committed to fighting for you. To the students and teachers who must once again bear these weeks of learning remotely, we are with you.

The Premier and his government should apologize to families, students and teachers for their gross mishandling of this pandemic and for their failure to protect our schools when they had the chance.

### Brandon Wheat Kings— WHL East Division Champions

**Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East):** I will admit that I love an opportunity to brag and to gloat on occasion, and today is no exception. I proudly share the words

announced on a local Brandon radio station recently that went like this: Your Brandon Wheat Kings are the 2020-2021 WHL East Division champions.

This announcement has now been stated 14 times over the years, and each time it comes with a remarkable story of hard work, true grit and plain determination. This year's session—or, season, pardon me—was like no other, as COVID-19 forced the division to play all of their games from March 5 to April 24 in the Subway Hub Centre in Regina, Saskatchewan.

With a record of 18-4-2-0 and 38 points through the 24-game season, the Brandon Wheat Kings led all teams in the East Division with 104 goals while allowing only 61 against them in the entire shortened season.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can only speculate that had this been a regular season, we would have seen a repeat of the 2015-16 season where the Wheat Kings not only captured the East Division title, but also went on to defeat the Seattle Thunderbirds in the league championship to proudly hoist the Ed Chynoweth Cup high into the air as WHL league champions.

I also want to give a huge shout-out to Wheat Kings right winger Lynden McCallum, who led the WHL in scoring by netting 21 pucks during the season, and to his teammate Ben McCartney, who led the Wheat Kings with 27 points, consisting of 13 goals and 24 assists.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a proud Manitoban, I also want to extend a congratulatory message to Peyton Krebs of the Winnipeg ICE who led the eastern division with 33 points, with 13 goals and 30 assists; also to the Winnipeg ICE who finished the season behind the Wheat Kings with 37 points.

I will conclude my statement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by asking for leave to include the names of all the players and coaches of the Brandon Wheat Kings in Hansard, and asking my colleagues to join me in congratulating coach Don MacGillivray and all the players and staff of the Brandon Wheat Kings on winning the East Division Subway Cup.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Is there leave by the House to add all the members of the coaching staff in Hansard, as requested by the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson)—and the team, in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

*2020-2021 Brandon Wheat Kings: Jake Chiasson, Nate Danielson, Jaxon Dube, Riley Ginnell, Ridly Greig, Logen Hammett, Jacob Hoffrogge,*

*Brett Hyland, Vincent Iorio, Ethan Kruger, Jonny Lambos, Lynden McCallum, Ben McCartney, Chad Nychuk, Reid Perepeluk, Nolan Ritchie, Rylan Roersma, Neithan Salame, Braden Schneider, Marcus Sekundiak, Rylan Thiessen, Ty Thorpe, Connor Ungar, Tyson Zimmer; Doug Gasper, general manager; Don MacGillivray, head coach.*

### Adult Literacy

**Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Last fall, I tried to send letters home to parents about lead contamination in my constituency, but vice-principal Jackie Gagne at Brooklands School told me they don't send letters home, as many parents can't read.

This literally stopped me in my tracks and opened my eyes to how many Manitoban adults need greater supports so that they can improve their literacy outcomes.

Functional illiteracy is shockingly common in Manitoba. About 300,000 Manitoban adults do not have the literacy deemed necessary for full participation in society. This greatly impacts a person, her children and really, all of us.

Higher literacy and numeracy skills help people find good jobs, lift their families out of poverty and often with measurable economic improvements within one year of mature high school graduation. It's different for each and every adult student, but it's a process that usually takes three to four years of time, because often students need to overcome multiple barriers in order to succeed.

Our current system for adult learning centres is broken. It's a poor cousin. It's an afterthought. It's a disorganized patchwork of gross underfunding.

I've met with adult learning centre teachers who make \$20,000 per year working full time. I've met a principal who has to fundraise at churches for pencils and paper for students to use. Less than 1 per cent of Manitoban adults who need this programming are currently enrolled, and the number of learners registered at ALCs and the number of graduates are now falling.

This PC government has actively made outcomes worse. The minister's Monday funding announcement amount means that programs will need to be cut this year. Repealing The Adult Literacy Act removes government accountability for outcomes, and Bill 64 puts in jeopardy adult education programs that schools have implemented on their own.

The PC government needs to commit to doing more to improve adult literacy outcomes in Manitoba and not hiding them out of shame.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

### Dave Theunissen

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** Today, I rise to recognize and honour one of the recipients of Honour 150, Dave Theunissen.

Dave has been a cornerstone of volunteerism in our community for many years. He is a builder, business owner, volunteer, avid outdoorsman, artist, husband, father, animal lover and friend.

Dave has been involved with many organizations over the years, and when he becomes involved, he puts his entire heart and soul into it: A member of the Rotary Club for more than 40 years, a long-time member of Ducks Unlimited, Swan Valley Animal Protection League and Swan Valley agricultural society.

Dave has always been there to offer his perspective and spend countless hours helping others bring local projects to life. Dave is well known for spearheading projects when there is a need in the community.

Dave, who is now 90 years young, is responsible for initiating and organizing many projects for the town, including Legion Park pathways, Rotary soccer fields and the Swan Valley Rotary auction.

His most recent volunteering contribution went toward raising funds for the new building for the Swan Valley Animal Protection League.

This past February a street was named in his honour: Dave Theunissen Drive. The street intersects with Richard Walker Way, named after one of Dave's closest friends—a reunion recognizing two outstanding individuals. As Dave said: It's such a privilege to live in a place like this. I try to give back to the community as best I can whenever I can.

Dave, you've done that. Congratulations on a well-deserved recognition.

Thank you.

\* (14:00)



### Deputy Speaker's Statement

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Before oral questions, I have a Deputy Speaker's statement for the House.

Today, May 12th, 2021 marks the 151st anniversary of the day that Manitoba Act received royal assent by the Canadian Parliament. This act created a province of Manitoba, and accordingly May 12th has been designated as Manitoba Day.

In honour of this historic occasion, as we have done in the past several years, our Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms carried our original Manitoba mace in today's Speaker's parade.

Carved by the wheel hub of an art-Red River cart by the soldiers with the Wolseley expedition in 1870, this mace made its—the first formal appearance on March 15th, 1871, at the First Session of the first Manitoba Legislature, held in the home of A.J.B. Bannatyne—the Red River settlement. The Bannatyne home was destroyed by fire on December 1873, but thankfully the mace survived.

After 13 years of service and—the original mace has been retired in 1884, when our current mace debuted. The original mace has a permanent home on display outside the Speaker's office, coming out of the—retirement annually for this celebration.

This important historical artifact sits on the table today as tribute to the rich history of our province.

In addition to the original mace, the star blanket cushion and the beautiful, beaded mace runner gifted us to—the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in 2010 are also on display today to help celebrate Manitoba Day and honour Manitoba's Indigenous heritage.

This artifact also serves as a reminder that the Assembly Chamber and the Legislative Building are on Treaty 1 territory and the traditional lands of the 'ishinabe' and the home of the Métis people.

I am pleased that we are all able to include our original mace in celebration of Manitoba Day. I trust that this tradition will continue.

I would encourage members to reflect on the solemn responsibility we all share to serve our constituents in this Assembly, and recall that whatever heats—heated debates we have here, we are all part of one legacy to serve the citizens of this province.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Time for oral questions.

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### COVID Deaths in Manitoba Condolence to Families

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Today, our province passed a grim milestone. We have lost 1,000 Manitobans to COVID-19. This is a sad day for Manitoba and it makes for a dark Manitoba Day.

Now, COVID-19 has not discriminated. We've lost friends, we've lost family, we've lost people we know. We've lost people from all different backgrounds. We've lost centenarians and, unfortunately, we lost a young boy under 10 years of age.

The pandemic has also been damaging to the survivors. We've all had our way of life changed. We've all seen the things that we expected, both in 2020 and 2021, to be disrupted.

So, as we perhaps look ahead later this year to a post-pandemic Manitoba, it's my hope that we can learn the lessons of the past 15 months. And there's nothing political about that.

I do have a question about health care, but I wanted to say that first.

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** I thank my colleague for his words—they're good words—and it is an important thing to remember the joy and the sorrow that's inherent in today.

We are sad, and we must be sad at the tragic loss of so many fine people in Manitoba during this pandemic. We must also be joyful for the willingness to rise to the challenge of working together to make sure that we lessen whatever suffering has and will occur as a consequence of this pandemic.

And, as we stand together in that struggle, we will celebrate the heritage that we have been gifted before we became a province—long before, by courageous people, by Indigenous peoples, by the Métis people and by the people who came here after that from around the world to settle, to pioneer and to do their best to make a life for themselves.

So, as we look for that home of hope here today, I think we must again commit ourselves to working together in brotherhood and sisterhood to achieve that better goal that drew so many people here over so many centuries before and will draw them in the centuries in the future here as well.

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

### ICU at Grace Hospital Staffing and Equipment

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** One of the key lessons that we've learned throughout the pandemic is that we need a health-care system that is strong enough to meet the needs of everyone in Manitoba. And yet, even though we've seen that lesson taught to us and presented to us time and time again, the government has failed to learn it.

Even as we head into this third wave, they have cut staffing positions at ICUs in Winnipeg and across Manitoba. I'll table this document, which shows that in the weeks ahead at the Grace Hospital's intensive care unit they are projecting vacancies of as many as 15 nurses—15 nurses missing from an ICU at the heart of the third wave.

Why has the Premier let the situation at the Grace ICU get so bad?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** I think, probably in the spirit of today, I would simply remind the member that there will be tons of analysis and blame to go around about the history of neglect in terms of health care over many, many years prior to us coming to government.

I think, in analysis, he might find that we inherited the longest waits in Canada, that we inherited shortages in terms of access to many supplies and many people, that people were struggling to find room in personal-care homes that were not built, that people were struggling to find physicians who were not available to them in many parts of our province. Many of these issues have been addressed; others are in progress to be addressed.

We are investing in our health-care system more than has ever been invested before, three quarters of a billion dollars more than the NDP government ever did in the past.

I think, in the spirit of today, I would simply remind the member to consider the full history and then to join together in facing the challenges of the future.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Another lesson we've learned is that the blame game doesn't help during the pandemic. I'll table a series of documents that shows how things are getting worse throughout the pandemic.

The first document, which the Premier—  
[interjection]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** —neglected to mention, is proof that we are going to have 15 empty nursing spots in the Grace ICU in the days ahead. The second document that I will table shows that the situation with vacancies at the Grace has been getting progressively worse since the Progressive Conservative government took office.

And the final document that I will table is an ad from the Free Press in the past few days that shows the Grace Hospital needs your help for whatever equipment needs arise for patient care and also to support our staff.

This is the Premier's record on health care. The Grace Hospital, one of our intensive care units, is begging the public for help just to meet some of their basic staffing needs.

How has this government allowed the situation in our health-care system to get so bad?

**Mr. Pallister:** Again, in the spirit of the day, and in the spirit of what I consider to be the initial thrust of what the member opposite is aspiring to say, it is important to put in perspective the reality that it was this government that addressed, initially, upon becoming government, the significant waits that existed in hospitals in our province, more significant waits in emergency rooms than anywhere else in the country, including at the previous Grace emergency room. It was this government that took the initiative to fix that problem by building a new and far better equipped and staffed emergency facility at the Grace Hospital itself. More than \$40 million was directed to do that.

And so, in the midst of a pandemic, as the member says, it's not wise or fruitful to point fingers on a political basis. He should refrain from doing so and consider that, in the essence of today's pursuit, I think Manitobans understand there's a pandemic; we need to work together to face the challenges of defeating it.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a second question.

### Prairie Mountain Health Region Nurse Vacancy Rate Concerns

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** This isn't pointing fingers; this is laying out the facts: 20 per cent vacancy at the Grace Hospital that has risen over the past few years as the result of decisions made at the Cabinet table. The

impact affects the people of Manitoba. We hear about seniors waiting in the hallway at the Grace for days on end and now, as we head into the third wave, an ICU that is understaffed by some 15 nurses.

We know that the situation is a major concern outside the Perimeter as well. I'll table a document that shows that nursing vacancies in the Prairie Mountain region is reaching a crisis position as well.

When will this government finally learn the first lesson of the pandemic and stop cutting health care?

\* (14:10)

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Facts matter, and the fact is we're investing three quarters of a billion dollars more this year alone—pre-pandemic—in health care than the NDP ever did. And the fact is we inherited a system that had been neglected for many, many years. And the fact is that we are working very, very, very diligently to fix it. And we're doing all of that in the middle of a pandemic, which poses additional challenges.

Most certainly, I would be remiss in not thanking our vaccine team for their tremendous efforts and to acknowledge those efforts because, today, close to 600,000–600,000 Manitobans have received their first dose.

And that is a tremendous accomplishment, and I would think it would be wise for all of us to respect and acknowledge the tremendous work that our vaccine team and their many team members have put into achieving these goals, as they dedicate themselves to creating a safer Manitoba for all of us.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, what the Premier neglects to mention is what the documents show: there are 61 fewer positions for nurses at the Brandon hospital. And this is not isolated to Brandon. The reason why I call attention to Brandon is because that facility has an intensive-care unit and is part of our province's overall ability to respond to the third wave.

Let's not forget that it's National Nursing Week. We're asking nurses to step up again, and yet we're sending them into battle against the third wave without the resources or the necessary support in order to ensure their success. This is the result of decisions that are being made at the political level; it is within the Premier's ability to change course.

I'll table the document about the Prairie Mountain Health stats again.

Will the Premier finally commit to hiring more nurses to make up for the damage that he's caused to date?

**Mr. Pallister:** Well, again, the member chooses to personalize this. I would say to him that a three-quarters-of-a-billion-dollar additional investment pre-COVID and a very, very significant investment during COVID, the second—according to my friend Molly McCracken, second highest in Canada—second highest in Canada outside of the government of BC—*[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Pallister:** —is a true indication of our willingness and our desire to make sure we strengthen a health-care system that was in disarray pre-COVID, I would emphasize again.

I would also say eligible people can now book appointments at vaccination sites, and I think that this is important. I appreciate that members on both sides of the House have been encouraging Manitobans to get a vaccination, and I thank them for that. We can now book appointments at all vaccine supersites: Gimli, Dauphin, Steinbach, Winnipeg Convention Centre, Leila location, Brandon, Thompson, Selkirk, Morden.

And there is a toll-free number: 1-844-626-8222. That's 1-844-626-8222.

Thanks to our vaccination team, thanks to Manitobans. Get your vaccine. If you're 18 or older, you can get it right away; make your appointment.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question. *[interjection]*

Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** So, this is the important work of the opposition: to bring issues that are of urgent need of attention to the government.

If we want a post-pandemic Manitoba, we need to permanently increase our capacity in health care. That is the only way we are going to manage COVID-19 as it moves from a pandemic stage to an endemic stage. And yet, the government has been undermining and reducing our health-care system capacity.

We've proven that's the case at the ICUs in Winnipeg; we've proven that's the case at the ICU in

Brandon. These documents also show that it is the case at other hospitals and other health centres and other personal-care homes in Dauphin, in Swan River, throughout the Prairie Mountain Health region.

If we want a post-pandemic Manitoba, the government needs to get beyond citing nominal dollar values and start hiring back nurses where they belong: at the bedside.

Why has the government failed to do so throughout the pandemic?

**Mr. Pallister:** As usual, the member chooses to draw on false facts and he chooses to put things in a partisan lens. I won't do that today, I'll simply give the real facts.

We've hired 1,700 additional nurses in our time in government. We have been ranked by the Canadian Institute for Health Information as the only province in Canada that has been able to shorten our emergency wait times. We have achieved these things while moving to reduce the burden of tax and future tax through deficit on Manitobans. We have stabilized the the Province's finances. We have strengthened our health-care system. And we will continue to dedicate ourself to getting vaccines in arms.

I thank the vaccine folks that are involved. We have 3,864 people currently hired and involved in getting vaccines out.

I encourage all Manitobans to get out there and help us all get our lives back.

#### **COVID-19 and Health Care Staff Vacancy Rate Concerns**

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** We mourn today the 1,000 people lost to COVID-19 and we send our deepest condolences to their loved ones.

Unfortunately, this third wave will be a fight for far too many. At Grace Hospital, the situation is beyond serious. They're facing shortages of up to 15 shifts per day in their ICU.

I'll table the documents again. Emergency has vacancies of over 20 per cent, and patients are waiting in hallways. In total, there are 1,300 nurse vacancies across Winnipeg. The situation is clearly a crisis.

Why has the minister left our health professionals to manage their crisis—this crisis on their own?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care):** Our heartfelt condolences go out to all of those who lost their loved ones during this

global pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Certainly, our thoughts and prayers are with their families today.

What I do want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is certainly we are expanding our bachelor of nursing programs to get more registered nurses into our system. We have 20 new spaces that have been created in our University College of the North's diploma in practical nursing program, which is now being offered for students in Thompson, Flin Flon and surrounding areas.

We recognize that some good work has taken place. We recognize there's more work to do. And we will work with officials to ensure that we get that work done.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station, on a supplementary question.

**MLA Asagwara:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the situation, too, in prairie region has gotten worse, not better. Registered nurse vacancy has swelled again, now at 21 per cent, and licensed practical nurses also facing 23 per cent vacancy. That's more than one in five nurses missing from the bedside. And I'll table those documents as well.

Rather than staff up, the Pallister government is increasingly relying on overworked and exhausted staff to get us through this pandemic. The minister has left our health professionals to manage this crisis on their own.

Why have they pushed our nurses, our doctors, our health-care professionals, allied staff past the breaking point?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that, certainly, that there has been challenges—it's not just here in Manitoba but across the country—when it comes to staffing nurses and to nurses—the challenges with staffing around nursing. It's nothing new. It was something that took place back in the previous NDP government.

We've been working diligently to ensure that we do hire those nurses, and we've been working closely with officials towards that end. We're working hand in hand with the Provincial Nominee Program to find individuals with professional nursing backgrounds. We're providing assistance in navigating provincial regulatory registration processes; 37 registered nurses have recently completed the critical-care nurse orientation program.

There's many, many things that are going on to ensure that we have the capacity within our health-care system to look after those who need it.

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

The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary question.

**MLA Asagwara:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, critical areas of our health-care system were dismantled during consolidation. Well-trained, well-staffed areas we so badly need during this pandemic and during this third wave were completely undermined.

Promises at some future date are simply too late. The third wave is here right now, but there's 1,300 vacancies for nurses in Winnipeg alone, 21 per cent in Brandon, in some of the hardest hit COVID places in North America right now.

Why has the minister left our health system and our professionals so badly prepared, so under-resourced during this third wave? *[interjection]*

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Deputy Speaker, I'll continue to remind the member opposite that, after 17 years of incredible mismanagement within our health-care system, they lived through these staffing shortages at that time. They didn't fix that mess then. We're continuing to fix up—fix their mess from 17 years of mismanagement of our health-care system.

We recognize, certainly, there has been some progress. I have outlined some of those in my previous answers to this member's question. And—but we recognize there's still more work to do and we're committed to getting that work done.

#### **Future Hydro Rate Increases Request for PUB Hearing**

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** This week, the Pallister government's continued efforts at distorting Hydro's financial situation hit a major roadblock. The Public Utilities Board has ordered Manitoba Hydro to produce financial records, including an integrated financial forecast.

The financial state of Hydro has changed substantially since its last rate hearing three years ago. As we've learned, Hydro remains very profitable; they've recently finalized a deal to sell \$5 billion worth of

energy to Saskatchewan, and interest rates are at historic lows.

Manitobans deserve clarity on Hydro's financial situation before any further rate increases are allowed to occur.

Will the minister ensure that happens, and will he withdraw Bill 35?

**Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services):** Certainly, the member and the party—the NDP—former NDP government know a little bit about distorting figures, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We know that, under the NDP, that \$10-billion boondoggle—Bipole III and Keeyask, that will put burdens on generations—I'm saying generations of Manitobans that—not even born yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We'll ensure that we get—ensure that the consultation with PUB and Hydro continues on in a collaborative way to protect Manitobans.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for St. James, on a supplementary question. *[interjection]* Order.

The honourable member for St. James, if you can unmute your mic.

**Mr. Sala:** What the minister and this government intend for is for rates to be increased behind closed doors with no public review whatsoever. Ratepayers—both residential and industrial—are concerned about this government continuing to raise Hydro rates without public review. Industrial consumers are on record saying that rate hikes without transparency would do lasting damage to the economy.

Bill 35, which remains before this House, would further undermine the PUB's authority and give this minister and this Premier (Mr. Pallister) the ability to set rates how they see fit. The PUB is calling this government's bluff.

Will the minister ensure that all future rate increases are brought before the PUB, and will he withdraw Bill 35?

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** The legislation that we have, Bill 35, will actually strengthen the PUB, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Ratepayers are going to be protected.

The real reason why rates have gone up through Manitoba Hydro is because of the \$10 billion of waste

that the Leader of the Opposition and his party approved during their time of government.

We're not going to make those mistakes again. We think the legislation will provide some predictability in terms of rates and will ensure that Manitoba Hydro ratepayers are protected. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

The honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Sala:** Manitoba Hydro has not had a rate hearing in three years. The last full financial projection is from 2016, which is five years ago. With Bill 35, the minister intends to keep raising rates for years behind closed doors with no public disclosure as to the true financial situation at Manitoba Hydro.

The PUB has called his bluff and ordered financial disclosure. It's an important step, but this minister and this government are still barrelling ahead.

Do they intend to raise rates again this year by Cabinet order before this matter before the Public Utilities Board has been resolved?

**Mr. Fielding:** We know the NDP, their track record not just in terms of tax increases but in terms of rate increases, in terms of Manitoba Hydro.

A 40 per cent increase—*[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Fielding:** —Mr. Deputy Speaker, 40 per cent. The real reason why the rates are going up: because the \$10 billion of mismanagement that was led by the NDP government over the last number of years which—*[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Fielding:** —the Wall report predicted and showed evidence of.

We're not going to make the mistakes again, by—Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're going to ensure there's predictability in terms of rates, and that's what people like the industrial group want and that's exactly what this legislation does, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

### **Drug Overdose Deaths Addiction Treatment Services**

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** Families are facing a horrendous battle in this crisis—addictions crisis, with the Pallister government nowhere to be seen. Last year, 272 people lost their lives to this epidemic. Loved ones are desperate to get them the care that they need.

I've heard heartbreaking stories of families mortgaging their homes just to get their loved ones into treatment in desperation to saved their loved one's lives. There are many families left to grieve the loss of their loved one because they could not get the help that they needed.

Where is the funding, as recommended by the VIRGO report? Why is this not being treated as a public health emergency?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care):** It was our government, under the leadership of this Premier (Mr. Pallister), that recognized that there are some challenges with respect to mental health and addictions. And that's why we have the first ever in our province Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery Minister, and I want to thank her for the incredible work that she's doing.

In fact, we have—we take this very seriously, and that's why we expanded the distribution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of Thrival Kits: \$1.4-million investment that's helping more than 30,000 Manitoba students between the age—between the—grades 4 and 6 in the province of Manitoba.

There are many, many initiatives that we're working on. I want to thank the minister for doing what she's doing, working with those in the community to ensure the betterment—

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

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

**Mrs. Smith:** I'll table two documents for the minister and the House. This is information received through freedom of information.

There are less treatment beds available now than there were before this government came to power: less available.

It's unthinkable. There are—waves of meth and opioids have been ripping through this province for five years. Less treatment beds available? Hundreds

of preventable deaths, dozens of innocent babies were—with congenital syphilis that is completely preventable, yet less addiction treatment beds. Deputy Speaker, 272 lives were lost last year.

Why would this minister serve in a government that has turned its back on Manitoba families?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Our government takes the issue of mental health and addictions very seriously. That's why we've invested over \$50 million into more than 30 programs across the province helping hundreds of thousands of Manitobans. In fact, we announced \$823,000 for increased support for the northwest youth hub, helping increase—increase in aid to more than 150 more youths out there in the community.

We'll continue to work with those who are delivering these programs in the community to ensure the better health and well-being—mental health and addictions of those individuals who need it.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a final supplementary question.

**Mrs. Smith:** VIRGO called for 9 per cent of the health budget to be focused towards mental health and addictions within three years. This minister and this government—there's nowhere close to that.

The meagre steps that they are taking are not addressing the crisis. Deputy Speaker, 272 people have died last year. That's 272 families left to grieve. Many of those families sought treatment and couldn't get it. Many more are dying right now. There's many more who are needing treatment and can't get it. Yet, there's less treatment beds in this province.

Manitoba families are desperate.

Why can't they get the help they need? Why is this not—why is this government not treating this as a true public health emergency that it is?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government does recognize the importance of mental health and addictions issues in the province, and that's why we've increased significantly the number of RAAM clinics to help those individuals that—the very individuals that the member opposite is talking about; that we have invested in more than 30 programs, over \$50 million across the province of Manitoba helping those. That's \$50 million more than the NDP ever spent on this issue.

\* (14:30)

This was a very serious issue back during—  
[interjection]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** —the 17—dark days of the previous NDP government. [interjection]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** We're continuing to clean up their mess.

### Post-Secondary Education Operating Funding

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** On this side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognize the immense value in post-secondary education, especially as many Manitobans are exploring new career options. However, this government doesn't share that value.

I table a FIPPA that shows that, since 2016-17, many, many post-secondary institutions have seen huge cuts by millions of dollars year over year. Most Manitobans have seen two tuition increases just over the course of the pandemic: hundreds of extra dollars that many are struggling to afford because of this government's funding cuts.

Will the minister do what's right for students and restore operating funding to our post-secondary institutions?

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** I thank my opposition critic for the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to remind the member that we on this side of the House are making sure that our education for our future youth and future employers and employees throughout this great province of ours, that their tuition is going to remain the lowest west of Quebec and the third lowest in all of Canada.

So I'm not going to take any lessons from the member from St. Vital because, in fact, we're trying to make sure that our students are prepared with the right skills at the right time for—to help us through this—to increase our economy after this pandemic.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Vital, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Moses:** Members opposite should be ashamed of themselves with what they're allowing this minister and this Premier (Mr. Pallister) to do to post-secondary education in our province.

I table a FIPPA that shows that, since 2016-17, they have cut funding at U of M by over \$11 million, they have cut year-over-year funding at U of W by almost \$4 million and Red River has been cut by millions of dollars as well.

These funding cuts mean that tuition costs are increasing at an unsustainable rate, especially because this government has removed caps on tuition, putting post-secondary education out of reach for even more Manitobans. This is unacceptable.

Will the minister admit that this funding approach is wrong and restore operating funding for our—

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** I appreciate the question from the member, and I appreciate the fact that he brings up the topic of accessibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mean, here in the province of Manitoba right now we have historical amounts of supports through scholarships and bursaries going to our students; we're talking \$30 million.

And on top of that, we have also increased the amount of Manitoba student loans to the tune of well over \$60 million, which I must repeat to the member that they're interest-free, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So again, we're making sure that our post-secondary institutions, our post-secondary—

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

The honourable member for St. Vital, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Moses:** Manitobans want and deserve a government that prioritizes quality and affordable education. Manitobans want and deserve a government that makes sure those priorities are met by investing in post-secondary institutions.

This government used the cover of a pandemic to introduce a regressive funding model, they continue to slash and freeze operating grants and they are pushing through Bill 33, politicizing academic programs and allowing the minister to decide which programs he fits—sees fit is going to skyrocket in tuition.

Either this government has no regard for the long-term impacts of the decision on education or they just simply don't care.

Will the minister stop hiking tuition and restore operating funding to our post-secondary institutions?

**Mr. Ewasko:** I really wish that this member would've taken a bit of a different approach in regards to his questioning.

I know that he's probably just reading off some form of script that he was—that was written for him, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but in fact, we here on this side of the House, our PC team, strongly feel that we want to encourage our youth to be trained here in Manitoba and with the right skills at the right time and make sure that those opportunities are here for our youth.

I just know that the member from St. Johns, she doesn't like the word canoe, but I was really hoping that this member from St. Vital was going to turn his team's small water craft in a different direction and stop with his leader's attention-seeking behaviour, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I would also caution the honourable minister for referring to someone in the Chamber by a name. Again, it has to be referred to as a—either their constituency name or their position. So I would, again, on—have the honourable minister to apologize.

Okay, now we'll go on to the honourable member for St. Boniface.

#### **Hydro's Churchill River Diversion Licence Renewal Concerns**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** For more than 45 years, Manitoba Hydro has been allowed to operate the Churchill River Diversion on an interim licence that has been renewed every year, even when Hydro was breaking it. The impact on fisheries and the environment has been devastating.

Indigenous communities in northern Manitoba have often paid a terrible price for projects that have enriched southern Manitobans. I table, virtually, an open letter from Tataskweyak Cree Nation and O-Pin-Na-Piwan [*phonetic*] Cree Nation. It says, quote: We oppose issuance of a final licence for the Churchill River Diversion because Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro have not honoured their obligations to us. End quote.

Will this government hold off on a final licence and an interim licence renewal until Hydro commits to doing right, working in partnership to undo the harm that they have done? [*interjection*]

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Yes, well, the NDP member claps. It was an NDP government that did the harm, so that's good he's clapping, because he's acknowledging the record of the previous NDP



government that did not adequately consult and work with First Nations and Indigenous leadership in terms of the planning and the implementation of these types of projects.

That being said, this consultation process has gone on since 2009, and so what the member is asking for is something that I think we have to also consider on the other side of it needs to be considered in a respectful sense for all parties. We need to have agreements and discussions that lead somewhere at some point.

We're trying to get an outlet built to protect communities in the Interlake area that were flooded out. The—whole communities have been rebuilt, but the fact of the matter is we need to prevent future such events from occurring. That process has gone on now for almost 10 years. Previous NDP government began it. We're continuing it, but we need co-operation on both sides.

Reconciliation has to be a two-way street that benefits all of us and protects all of us going forward.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Lamont:** Hydro has been operating outside their interim licence for decades without being held to account. A final licence has been described by the communities as a licence to destroy because Hydro wants to maintain the status quo that is destroying waterways for which they never had permission. Islands, forests and fisheries are being washed away by Hydro's decision to flood South Indian Lake at a whim.

Hydro needs to clean up its act, but it will not do it on its own. This is a government decision. So, whether Hydro gets to ignore its obligations or not, we have an opportunity to fix a historic wrong by requiring that Hydro works in partnership with First Nations to undo the harm that has been done.

Will the Premier do the right thing, or will these communities be stuck with more decades of status quo? Because their livelihood depends on it.

**Mr. Pallister:** Yes, I appreciate the member—very much appreciate the member raising the issue, because Bill 35 is part of the solution.

Bill 35 is designed to make the Public Utilities Board respected and to make Manitoba Hydro more accountable to it on a systematic, logical and reasonable basis so that what the previous government did, for example, with respect to Keeyask—pushing that

project forward while not respecting the need to even consult with the Public Utilities Board, spending \$1 billion-plus without permission and indebting Manitobans for generations—can never happen again.

And the consequences to the communities of that area are real as well. And so the reality here is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we need a process like the one we are legislating that will make this more transparent, that will bring the operations of Manitoba Hydro into the light and out of the NDP darkness of the past. *[interjection]*

\* (14:40)

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary question.

#### **Whitefish Fishery on Southern Indian Lake Request for Fish Ladder at Missi Falls**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the historically crystal-clear waters of Southern Indian Lake—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I just wanted—if the member for River Heights can put on his video.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for River Heights.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes. The historically crystal-clear waters of Southern Indian Lake, Manitoba's fourth largest lake, are cloudy and turbid from extensive erosion. Whitefish, which once flourished there, are few. The sturgeon downstream are almost extinct.

These horrific changes were caused by actions of the NDP 45 years ago which were never mitigated. The whitefish fishery, which sustained 140 fishers and their families, is gone, through no fault of theirs.

I ask: Will the Premier make changes in the operation of the Churchill River diversion and put in a fish ladder at Missi Falls to help improve life for the fish and for the people of O-Pipip-Na-Piwin *[phonetic]* and Tataskweyak Cree Nation?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Well, I appreciate the member's passion if not his pronunciation, but I have to say that this is a—these are debates that have been ongoing for significant numbers of years. The member is expecting me to resolve them at this very instant. I don't think that that would be a fair assumption. I can only say to him that I think all of us should desire a process that's more transparent and that

effectively protects the involved parties and that—and reaches a resolution in a reasonable period of time.

What we're trying to do, of course, with the project in the Interlake is create an outlet that will protect communities throughout that region that have suffered disproportionately for many, many years through inaction on the part of many governments from previous half-century plus.

And so I would encourage the member to get behind encouraging his colleagues federally to let us resolve this issue as Manitobans in the best interests of all Manitobans.

### **New School Construction Government Announcement**

**Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley):** Budget 2021 focuses on protecting Manitobans and advancing Manitoba, which includes protecting education for Manitobans.

Can the Minister of Education explain our commitment and our PC government's recent announcement that will accelerate the construction of the 20 new schools ahead of schedule?

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education):** I want to—[*interjection*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Cullen:** I want to thank my colleague from Waverley for the question.

Our \$1.6-billion education funding guarantee includes new and upgraded schools for our communities.

Budget 2021 alone invests \$260 million in school capital, a \$100-million increase. This includes following through on our commitment to build two new schools in Waverley West that we just recently announced and have gone to tender.

Our government is committed to 20 new schools, and we are expected to complete those ahead of schedule, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Time for oral questions has expired.

### **PETITIONS**

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station. [*interjection*] Order.

### **Epilepsy Treatment**

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the reasons for this petition—as follows:

(1) One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer worldwide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring on an orthopedics ward with an orthopedic staff, instead of on an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death, in some cases.

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due to dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

(6) Epilepsy surgery is extremely effective, resulting in patients requiring less medication, sometimes becoming seizure-free, enabling them to return to work, drive and live fulfilling lives.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to open a genuine, four-bed epilepsy unit, similar to the one recently opened in Saskatchewan, at the Health Sciences Centre, with modern equipment and adequate epilepsy neurosurgeons, neurologists, nurses, clerks and technicians.

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

This has been signed by Juliette Austin, Laurie Raxter [*phonetic*], Melody Bousquet and many Manitobans.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** In accordance with rule number 133-6, the petitions are read—they are deemed to be received by the House.

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer worldwide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring on an orthopedics ward with orthopedic staff, instead of an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death, in some cases.

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due to dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

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(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

### **Menstrual Product Availability**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

(2) 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.

(3) 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.

(4) 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:

\* (14:50)

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

(2) 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.

And this, Deputy Speaker, has been signed by many Manitobans.

### **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:

(1) 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 can also experience

unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

(2) 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 don't—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.

(3) 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 50 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 cost of all provinces.

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, AADL, 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 is approximately \$11,000, is much more expensive than 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.

Sound by Blair Tounstra, Brad Profeta, 'chrisabeth'—Christopher Bray and many, many other Manitobans.

#### **Diagnostic Testing Accessibility**

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood):** 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 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.

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Any further petitions?

Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** First, I have a request for leave prior to calling government business. Could you please canvass members for leave to allow the House to consider today all remaining stages in the legislative process for Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, COVID-19 vacation–vaccination leave—we would all like a vacation, but it's vaccination leave—including consideration in the Committee of the Whole?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that—to have leave to allow—like, to have leave to allow the House to consider—to—is there leave to allow the House to consider today all remaining stages in the legislative process for Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave), including consideration in the Committee of the Whole? Is it—is there leave? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Goertzen:** I thank all members of the Assembly.

Could you please, then, call for second reading Bill 73?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** We're going to be calling for the second reading of Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave).

## SECOND READINGS

### Bill 73—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave)

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen), that Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave), be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member for—Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable member for Justice, that Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave), be now read a second time and referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and I table—the message is tabled.

**Mr. Fielding:** I'm pleased to rise again and to provide comment on Bill 73. Our government is now in the middle of the largest immunization campaign in Manitoba history. We are committed to delivering a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine to as many Manitobans as possible in as quick a time frame as possible.

\* (15:00)

Bill 73 will help remove barriers that employees may face in obtaining their COVID-19 vaccination by amending Manitoba Employment Standards Code to allow employees to take up to three hours of paid leave to receive the COVID-19 vaccinations without a reduction in pay. This paid vaccination leave can be used for every vaccination required by a worker and will ensure maximum uptake on vaccines throughout Manitoba workforce.

Moreover, Bill 73 will clarify that the existing public health emergency leave provisions provide job protection for employees who are unable to work due to the suffering side effects after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination. This will also address the employment-related barriers to an employee receiving this vaccination.

Let me be clear: ever since the vaccination campaign began this winter, the government has repeatedly heard about employers being

accommodating and enabling their staff to get their vaccinations. Most employers recognize the cost of the workforce outbreak or forced shutdown to—greatly exceeds that would allow, as an employee, to few hours—take a few hours off to attend to their vaccination appointment.

Bill 73 is about formalizing this practice into law and ensuring that the rules are consistent with all employees and provide clarity for these employers. The changes in Bill 73 were reviewed by Manitoba's Labour Management Review Committee, which is supportive of the changes. It is a measure that is supported by business workers and government and show hope we move quickly through this process here today. I'd like to thank the committee for their input on this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

### Questions

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed in the—to the minister by members of the following sequence: the first question from the official opposition critic or designate, subsequent questions may be asked by independent members, remaining questions be asked by the opposition members. And no questions or answers shall exceed 45 seconds.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry):** I'm wondering why wasn't this bill introduced much earlier, when the vaccine campaign was just starting?

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** This bill will allow people—we know that, well, it's 71,000 Manitobans have had their second shot, but the vast majority of Manitobans still need to have their second shot as well as probably over 60 or 55 per cent of Manitobans that haven't had their existing shot plus boosters that will come up in fall.

So this legislation takes into consideration any leave that employers and employees need to make sure that Manitobans are fully vaccinated.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I'd like to thank the minister for bringing forward this legislation. We are in support of the legislation, but curious why the government is willing to legislate three hours of paid sick leave for receiving the vaccination, but not the announcement made last week for \$600 paid sick time if you contract COVID or have to self-isolate.

**Mr. Fielding:** This legislation is legislated because it probably will go past the time and the emergency

measures orders that's there because it includes booster shots. We don't know how long we'll have to take booster shots in the future, but it is quite reasonable to believe that that will happen well into fall, even into next year.

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Oh, the member from Flin Flon—can you put your video on?

**Mr. Lindsey:** Why has this government continued to act reactively rather than proactively throughout this pandemic? They could have introduced this legislation to help folks a long time ago.

Why do they always wait to do the right thing, and then do the minimal possible?

**Mr. Fielding:** Our government took the lead in terms of sick leave provisions that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) announced last week. In fact, it's the most generous program of all the provinces. In fact, you look at some of our neighbours to the west, Alberta as well as Saskatchewan don't have a sick leave program in and itself.

We think the legislation here, as it relates to a vaccine lead, makes a lot of sense. We know that the first vaccines that were given out were age-based: older Manitobans that probably weren't in the work world that would need the leave because they're older and potentially are retired.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I was wondering if the minister could tell us—I mean, we have about 45 to 50 per cent of the population in Manitoba that has been vaccinated.

Why now? Why wait? And why didn't that 45 per cent-plus of the Manitoba population get protection from a bill like this at the start of the vaccination campaign?

**Mr. Fielding:** I just checked before with our office, with Employment Standards. We've got no—there's been no, in fact, complaints that we've registered where employers aren't able—aren't giving time off to their employees. I think where Manitobans—we're working together, all hands on deck to make sure people are vaccinated.

As I just mentioned, to individuals the vaccination campaign started at the most elderly Manitobans and have worked their way down. We know that now people in the work world are accepted into this program.

We also know this program will be available to the second shots, where the vast majority, over 95 per cent of Manitobans will be supported and also boosters into the future.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Does the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux) have another question?

**Ms. Lamoureux:** No, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay, the honourable member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey).

**Mr. Lindsey:** This bill isn't retroactive, I take it, and yet we've had any number of workers—and I know certainly even health-care workers in some of the northern communities that took time off from work to drive to another community to get the vaccine because they thought it was important that they stay on the job and that they stay healthy.

So will the minister commit to making this retroactive?

**Mr. Fielding:** Again, I'll re-emphasize the fact that I just in-checked in with Employment Standards before I came here. Employment Standards had no registered complaints of where employees were not able to go because of their workplace to get vaccinated.

We think this makes eminent sense to introduce this. We know that Manitobans are going to need a second dose. We also know that Manitobans are going to need a booster shot that's a part of it. We also know that over 55 per cent of Manitobans still need to get vaccinated.

Also, in terms of the rollout of the vaccination, as all provinces did, you started with the most elderly seniors here in the province, and those people generally aren't employed and don't need time off.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** We've been vaccinating people in Manitoba since December. So six months have passed, and I'm wondering why the minister is dodging a very straightforward question about why there's been a six-month delay to bring in this legislation. And why now? And why wasn't it brought in in January? And why has he refused to answer this question?

**Mr. Fielding:** The member obviously doesn't listen very well and that's apparent.

What I had said is (1) that this legislation makes sure that people on the second vaccination are covered. There's over 55 per cent of people, the vast

majority of people now are in the work world—that's a part of it. We started with an age category where you had 90-year-olds that were first to—vaccinated as well as health-care workers, as well as the age category came down. So we think it makes entirely sense to support this. This is something that other provinces have done.

We've also taken the added step of adding a sick leave program that our neighbours to the west, Saskatchewan as well as Alberta, don't have. Our program is the most generous program.

So when you mix in our vaccination leave program, we think it makes eminent sense. Our government was the most proactive in the country when it comes to sick leave.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Today is the international day of the nurse and it is the anniversary of the birthday of Florence Nightingale. We're also in the week of the nurse.

I'm just—would like to have a comment on how this will apply to nurses, most of whom can't take time off; you can't exactly walk away from a respirator and a patient. So that even though this may be good intentioned and may apply to a number of people who are working, it's difficult to see how this will help nurses who we are particularly paying attention to today.

\* (15:10)

**Mr. Fielding:** With that being said, you know, again, I'm going to reiterate the fact that we did speak to Employment Standards. There hasn't been one single complaint by employees, in terms of hearing that an employer would not allow them to go get vaccinated. We think it's important that we've had over 45 per cent of Manitobans vaccinated and I think that's fourth in the country. So we're moving in that direction to make sure people are vaccinated.

And again, the rollout of the vaccination campaign ensured that the highest or the oldest seniors here in the province of Manitoba were supported. We haven't had one single complaint. What we've heard, actually, it's working quite well where employers are stepping up, all hands on deck, to make sure people are supported.

**Mr. Lindsey:** So the minister keeps saying that they haven't had any complaints to the Labour Board.

Does the minister have any idea of how many workers in low-wage jobs, perhaps new immigrants working in jobs, would know that the Labour Board even exists, that if they were denied leave? Seems

that, depending on how many complaints you've received is, once again, very reactive when there is no statistic because so many workers have no concept that the Labour Board even exists.

So can the minister just explain how that makes any sense?

**Mr. Fielding:** I'm not sure how I'm supposed to answer a hypothetical question but I can say that our government has been the proactive in sick leave.

Let me just review what we have done. Our Premier (Mr. Pallister) worked with the premier-NDP premier from BC, to ensure the federal government offered a sick leave program. We've lobbied-I lobbied, as well, at the Finance Minister's table to ensure that's there.

We are the first government to introduce amendments to allow our workers to obtain some of the federal benefits that are there and we're one of the only provinces that have introduced a sick leave program that's longer in duration-ours is five days; Ontario, as well as BC-they just introduced theirs-was three days. So we think it's the most generous program and most proactive program in the country.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I mean, we heard this government and this minister lauding the paid sick leave program.

So, I'll ask him this: Why is it not mandatory for employers to sign up for the paid sick leave program?

**Mr. Fielding:** We know that the NDP, of course, didn't do this over the 17 years when they were in power. It's kind of hypocritical, but that member is also kind of hypocritical because he suggests that he potentially represents the most poorest people in the province, yet he jacked up taxes time and time and time and time again.

What we believe in, No. 1, is businesses are complying with us. They're allowing people to have sick leave days off. We're, again, one of the only provinces actually to have a sick leave program that's richer than Alberta's, that's-rather is richer than BC's and is also richer in longevity, in terms of the Ontario program.

So if you look at our workers compared to workers in places like Saskatchewan and Alberta, they're very, very much better supported under our plan than other provinces.

**Mr. Lindsey:** So the way the minister has crafted this particular piece of legislation, it says if requested by the employer, the employee must, as soon as practical,

provide evidence of the employee's entitlement to the leave.

So can the minister tell us what would be deemed to be acceptable to an employer as evidence that the worker needed to take time off?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, I would suggest that we haven't had any complaints and, with all due respect, we hearing from worker groups, as well as management groups, that businesses are giving their employees the time off.

I can tell you, to have a person have three hours of time off, as opposed to having a major impact on your business where you may have to shut down, is extremely important. What I do-you know, the employer does have a right to have, you know, provide some sort of verification they did go to get their shot.

There is, obviously, anyone that has had their shot-and this is just maybe an example of something; this isn't in legislation, but Shared Health, obviously, provides your record of appointment when you do have your vaccinations, but we wouldn't want employers to show the vaccination proof but we think that would make sense.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I think the minister wants to talk about hypocrisy. So I'm curious about his response to this question.

He's told us that the paid sick leave program is voluntarily being done by employers, but he also said that vaccine time off is also been voluntarily done by employers, and there's been no issues and that we need to codify the practice to make sure that there's sort of a level playing field.

Well, by that same logic, why aren't we doing that for paid sick leave, and why is he treating paid sick leave differently than the vaccine?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, I did explain in my opening comments-maybe the member forgot to listen to that part of it-but we want to make sure that it's codified in legislation for vaccine leave because it could last a lot longer than the emergency orders where the sick leave came in.

So potentially, you could have a second dose that, you know, probably will happen this summer, but you could have booster shots that could happen well into the future.

So that's why it's important to have legislation that's a part of this. The sick leave program that the Premier introduced over the last number of days



allows for leave during the COVID period during emergency measures.

**Mr. Lindsey:** So my understanding is this vaccination leave is strictly for the COVID pandemic period and that at some point, the minister will withdraw it—if he's still the minister, I guess.

Why would we not include things like the annual flu shot or future pandemic responses so that workers knew, going forward, that they would be protected? And whether it's COVID that's being transported into work by sick workers or the seasonal flu or some future disease that we don't know yet, why wouldn't we take the proactive measure to make sure this a permanent thing?

**Mr. Fielding:** The name of the legislation is The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave). So this legislation talks about the vaccination leave. We know that we're in a race with the pandemic and with the variant that's there, so we need to get people vaccinated as possible. We want to make sure that there's nothing—no impediments that are there to make sure employees can get vaccinations.

They can get it after hours as well. There isn't something that makes them—an employee—get it during the work leave, but we want to make it as easy as possible. And that's something that both employers as well as management, employees are supportive of, and that's why we went through the labour management process and got endorsement for this plan.

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

### Debate

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Debate is open.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** We have passed in Manitoba a shameful and entirely avoidable milestone of losing 1,000 Manitobans to this pandemic, and many of those losses are the direct result of the policy failures of this government.

We currently, in the third wave, have the second highest COVID infection rate in all of North America—not just Canada, all of North America. And we are actually chasing Alberta and, at this current pace, we will become the leader in all of North America for COVID rates.

And the only way out of this is through a vaccine immunization program where we reach herd immunity. And if we don't get this right, many more

Manitobans will needlessly lose their lives, and there will be further economic damage and suffering in our communities. And there are many barriers to reaching herd immunity, and sick leave and the leave program for vaccination is a big barrier. And for us to be successful, we need to get this right.

We need everyone to get the vaccine, and we know that a significant portion of the population, including within the Pallister government, there are people who have vaccine hesitancy. And we know that children under 12 have not been cleared to get a vaccine. And I've heard nothing—and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong about this—but I don't think there's currently any plans for that to change.

If you add up those two very large groups: the—those who are vaccine hesitant and children under 12, that is a significant amount of the population. And we need to reach something like 70 per cent of our population to reach herd immunity, and we're not going to get there. There's some polling estimates that 30 per cent of the population is vaccine hesitant, and those are adults. Those aren't children.

\* (15:20)

If you add in the 12, you know, the zero-to-12-year-olds who can't actually get a vaccine, that is a significant amount of people that won't actually get us to herd immunity, which means that we have to do everything we can as a province to ensure that someone who is not feeling well, that they can stay home. And the reason being that they will protect us by being home, without worrying whether or not they will get paid.

Because we know that if you're a low-wage worker, you just can't take a day off. It doesn't matter how good or bad you feel, you will get docked pay, and because you have a precarious or low wage, your family just can't survive without that wage.

So we need to have proper paid sick leave and this vaccine bill in order to make sure that those who are the most economically vulnerable can do their part to keep themselves and their neighbours safe and, by extension, our entire Manitoba community safe.

So these types of initiatives pay for themselves. It gets us back to normal quicker. We open up our economy quicker. We collect more tax revenue as a result. And so, for the long run economic health in Manitoba, paid sick leave is exceptionally efficient.

Now, the government has said that this vaccine bill, they want to eliminate barriers so Manitoba can

book a vaccine appointment during working hours without fear of losing, you know, wages, and that is a commendable goal. And, you know, they certainly—they're slow learners, and it's been six months and they should have and ought to have done this sooner, but they're here now, and that's a good thing.

And what's happened in six months? Well, their poll numbers have crashed and they're on their way out as a government and they're desperate. And for the first time in their five-year mandate, they're actually starting to listen—not out of any sort of desire to respond to Manitobans' needs but, you know, much in the way that a drowning man may reach for a flotation device.

And, of course, there are significant barriers to the vaccine, and this is one of them, but it's not the only one. We know that people have language and cultural barriers to accessing the vaccine. We know that their economic situation could result in them having transportation issues and that these vaccine sites are not convenient, and for many people, they do not have the resources to get themselves to one of these sites in a safe manner. And these very significant barriers have been completely ignored by this government.

We know vaccine hesitancy is a major issue that we're going to see. Right now, all the Manitobans who don't need convincing, the sort of low-hanging fruit, they're there. They're signing up. They're getting their vaccine. And because the vaccine rollout has been so slow and so incompetent in Manitoba and far behind many provinces in this country, it's backed up, and it shouldn't.

We have, what? On any given day in Manitoba, over 100,000 vaccines sitting in a fridge. And this government says that, well, we have the capacity to do 20,000 a day. They've never come even close to that. I think on their best day, I think they had half that number. And that's deeply troubling and it, just, it's a pattern of neglect and incompetence from this government.

And there is no public education campaign to address vaccine hesitancy. They had all the money in the world for mission accomplished banners during the summer before we got walloped with the second wave. And everybody knew the second wave was coming, except for this government.

They had money—they're going to have money for—to put the Premier (Mr. Pallister), this minister's name on rebate cheques for wealthy people in June. They've got all the money in the world for that, but

they have not put any money into public education to deal with vaccine hesitancy.

And that's deeply troubling because social media is filled with a campaign from anti-science advocates, from anti-'makskers,' anti-vaxxers, and they're flooding the airwaves with messages, misinformation that's going to unfortunately affect many people who will shy away from getting a vaccine.

And, unfortunately, what we've seen with the Pallister government is they actually sympathize with some of these groups. And we've seen some troubling incidents over the past year in this government where they have refused to speak out against these groups. We had a minister of Health who even thought that they had some good ideas.

We have—just looking at the Chamber right now, I don't think there's one government member with a mask on. I mean, that's shocking. We're in a third wave and for them to be so cavalier, so irresponsible and in such an entitled way—I mean, whether we like it or not, as public officials, we are role models. And whether we're fair—judged fairly or unfairly because of it, we have a duty to model good behaviour.

And when somebody looks in the Chamber right now and sees our government acting in the way that they do, what message does that send out to Manitobans? What message does it send out to Manitobans who maybe are getting bombarded in social media with some misleading or erroneous information?

And they look and they see the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) refusing to wear a mask, right? Talk about mixed messages, talk about confusing Manitobans, and then nobody can sit around in that government bench and wonder why we have vaccine hesitancy in Manitoba.

But they have done no public outreach, and the only, if you want to call it, education, is making a lot of chest-pounding noise about enforcement—sort of the silly, tough-guy talk that this government likes to do—that they're going to hand out tickets.

Well, hand out as many tickets as you want; only 10 per cent of the people who've got them have actually paid them. So, you know, obviously that's not working; obviously all the tough-guy talk hasn't worked.

Obviously, the problem is there, and it's going to get worse once all the sort of Manitobans who are—don't need convincing and are on-board with this go

get a vaccine. And the last portion of Manitobans who do need convincing, this government has completely ignored them, and at times has—I wouldn't—I don't know if you'd use the word played footsie, but they have certainly not been sending clear messages that some of those ideas being carried by these individuals are dangerous for our community.

The timing of this is very concerning. This government has had a pattern throughout the pandemic of having to be shamed into doing the right thing. We've been administering vaccines since December. This government refused to prioritize front-line workers like teachers and early childhood educators. Very spiteful, very foolish decision and, again, certainly cost lives.

And we have been making repeated calls on this government to act. This government has evaded, distorted, gaslit; they tried to pass this on, their responsibility, to the federal government.

And then, finally, now, six months into this, with more than 45 per cent, approaching 50 per cent of the population getting a shot, they bring this in. And, as my colleague fairly pointed out: what about almost 50 per cent of Manitobans?

This law has no retroactive application. There certainly will have been workers out there who have been penalized by their employer. It's absolutely silly, when this minister goes, well, there hasn't been any complaints at the Employment Standards, you know, the premise being that that is the be-all and end-all and that every single incident where there's been non-compliance is going to show up there. And, of course, as my colleague, you know, properly pointed out, you need to know it exists and you need to have the wherewithal to complain.

And what this government—I think they understand, but they're sort of obtuse about, is that when it comes to labour relationships, there is a power imbalance. And workers come to the table as vulnerable individuals that don't have the same sort of level of clout as the employer does. And I know this government welcomes that, embraces that, think that's a good thing.

We certainly, on our side of the House, don't and believe that there should be equality and there should be balance in labour relations, and that's why unionization is such a good thing, because it provides that balance. It gives workers protection and that they can deal with their employment issues on a level playing field; they can look eye to eye to their employer and

resolve things in a respectful and productive way instead of being bullied.

\* (15:30)

So, a low-wage worker who gets docked three hours of pay, are they going to complain to their employer? Probably not. They're probably just going to suck it up because the conflict and the bad feelings and all that that would result from that would be not worth whatever three hours of minimum wage they're getting paid.

And then, secondly, are there going to, if they especially need the job—and, you know, we have almost 19 per cent youth unemployment, we have 9 per cent female unemployment in Manitoba jobs, and because of this minister's incompetence, our economy is doing much worse than it should be.

We've seen tons of small businesses close; many more are on the brink; many more say that the very minimal supports that this government has brought in—and, again, only through having been shamed, and only reluctantly—it's not enough. They're saddled with debt: \$180,000 per business. And even if they can get through the third lockdown—which many say they can't—that debt may do them in during the recovery portion. And this government has been missing and absent, absolutely, when it comes to the economy.

And they were tanking the economy before COVID had even hit; we had gone from the second fastest economy in Canada to the seventh and dropping. And that's with all their cuts and austerity; that is absolutely devastating for economic growth.

The Parliamentary Budget Office indicated that this government's finances aren't sustainable, and all the tax cuts for wealthy people have made our finances exceptionally unstable, and we will not be able to support our social services right now, based on the level of finances that we bring in.

We have a revenue problem in Manitoba, and of course this minister knows that. And this is strategic, this is intentional, because his solution will be: well, you know, we got to cut more, we got to cut more schools and teachers, we got to cut, you know, more nurses and health-care beds.

And that's their solution for everything, is—they have no idea how to grow an economy, they have no idea how you create a job; but they do certainly know how you get rid of one, and that's apparent, and it's certainly hurting our economy and it's making things worse.

So, our most vulnerable workers, you're asking them to go to their employer and to demand pay and when the employer says no, go to Employment Standards, make a huge fuss, and expect that they have a job to go to the next day.

Well, the real world just doesn't work that way, and people may have language or cultural or other barriers to even access the sort of more legalistic supports when they have—so when the minister says nobody's complained, that's really cold comfort and that's apropos of absolutely nothing.

So, the other issue here, we have, you know, the paid sick leave program, which is—you know—the companion legislation here. And if you fall ill because of COVID, either before or after your vaccine appointment, whether you actually get any paid leave right now, it's going to be voluntary. It's a voluntary program that your employer has to choose to buy in, and if they choose to buy in, then you can get, you know, compensation for up to five days. Employers are in control of that process, and it's up to the employer to decide if they will support their workers or not.

And this is completely a policy choice. So in one breath the minister says, well, we have to have this vaccine protection program—and we agree, we've been calling for that and that's the right thing to do—and he says, well, you know, employers, they've been doing this anyways, and we haven't gotten a complaint, but you know, even though, you know, we don't think it's necessary—cause that's the subtext of what he's saying—we need to codify this in order to have, you know, a level playing field and to make sure everybody understands their rights.

And, again, I don't disagree with any of that. But then to turn around and say, but we don't have to do that for actually sick leave and we can just make that voluntary, even though we think all employers are doing this anyway and nobody's complaining about it—there's such hypocritical disconnect that you would say that you have to do this for the vaccine but you don't have to do for paid sick leave.

And again—and the reason is simple is the vaccine rollout program is not an expensive program. All—I don't know if all, but many other provinces have certainly been ahead of Manitoba on this and it would be shameful and embarrassing if they hadn't done something. And again, they're always late to the table.

And the paid sick leave program, they're really not committed to it and it's not something that they

want to happen. They've been dragging their feet and slow walking it from the beginning and only reluctantly done it. And they have designed it in a way that it's designed to fail. And it's designed in a way that, if you're a business and you're doing it anyways, it's not going to have any impact on you. If you're a business that doesn't want to treat their workers with respect and doesn't want to protect the community and doesn't want to participate in it, this government is patting you on the back and saying we support you.

And that is deeply troubling because it gets back down to the whole approach of this government in—during this pandemic, because if you have a business that is not going to provide paid sick leave and you have workers who are sick but are precarious or low paid and they cannot afford to take a day off, then we're back to where we started: they will go to their company, they will infect other employees, they will spread variants of concern, we will have increased ICU and hospitalization, we will have businesses that will be forced to shut down.

All this hurts our economy. All this is self-defeating. All this because the government won't do what it needs to do to show leadership during this pandemic and actually get in front of this and say to businesses that don't want to participate to this, you know, we can understand why you don't want to participate and we're going to help you financially but, for the sake of our community, it has to get done—it absolutely has to get done.

And they don't have that courage. They don't have the courage or the conviction because they don't actually believe in the policy. And, like so much of what this government has done, is that—it's all political theatre, it's all a stunt. They don't actually care what the result is; they just want to get the headline out of the paper and this is their ham-fisted way of doing that.

So this program—sick leave program won't work and if it—when it does, it won't be as effective as it could be. And what happens to our community? Well, the transmissions will not stop.

And so, you know, this government said we got to take away the barriers to people getting vaccinated so that we can open up again. Well, they've left a barrier—a major one—in place and when you look at the operation of both these two bills, not much has changed. So, what needs to happen is that we need, with this type of legislation, the employer not to be given the power to block people from getting sick pay.

And we also are concerned about the employer being given the power to demand proof that you took time off for a vaccine. This is a solution for a problem that doesn't exist.

You know, again, it's this whole, well, nobody's complained to Employment Standards, you know, deflection. If a employer–employee is denied leave by an employer to go get a vaccine, the costs, the information that they would need, the amount of hassle it would be to actually get some remedy from Employment Standards—and the whole system is basically designed to ensure that as few of people who—with legitimate complaints actually come forward, and they won't actually see some protection.

We need this law, but it certainly needs to be tightened up.

\* (15:40)

So, like everything with this government, this bill is a reactive piece of legislation and it's coming very, very late: only after this government has been embarrassed yet again and shamed into acting yet again. This could have happened in January or December, and we've heard from many different Manitobans about the the difficulties they were having reaching vaccination sites. There was numerous stories in the media about it and that they were having a hard time getting time booked off.

So it's not like this was a problem that they just discovered. This has been talked about for many, many months in Manitoba, and if this would introduced in a more timely manner, in a more sincere manner, we could have had more people vaccinated and more quickly. And that would have mitigated what's happening now where we are the second highest COVID rate in all of North America.

So, now this government said, you know, they haven't received any feedback—negative feedback from Employment Standards, but in fairness, this government's track record on listening to Manitobans isn't been—great. You just have to look at the education review and how the government completely ignored all the recommendations in there and wasted more money, and did nothing that was actually recommended from that report.

So, if this government believes this bill is so important, then it basically shows that permanent mandatory paid sick leave is important. And, of course, this government, if we came with a bill tomorrow putting in permanent sick leave, they would say no. And they're only agreeing to this because it will

obviously expire with COVID, but it shouldn't, because the logic remains the same.

And why Manitobans just need permanent paid sick leave is that when you have a sick employee who's forced to come to work, they have the potential to infect their entire workplace, making more employees sick, making more lost hours of productivity. And that it's actually in everybody's interests, including business owners, to have this in place full-time, even when the pandemic is over, so that we actually keep our healthy—our workplaces healthier, we keep all of our employees healthy and our businesses running more efficiently, and less disruption, especially during flu seasons.

Now, Manitobans have built this province into what it is today. They deserve to live in a province that values hard work but also honours healthy workers and workers taking care of themselves.

And Manitobans deserve this support when it comes to taking time away from work due to illness; and the safety and health and welfare of all Manitoban workers should remain paramount and workers should not feel pressured to come to work when they are sick to avoid losing pay.

So this paid sick leave is inadequate. Rather than the program being mandatory, as I've already said, the voluntary issue, that's critical. That has to change and it shouldn't be up to an employer to decide whether or not a paid sick leave is going to happen to their employees. That's a recipe for disaster.

And when this government has been questioned on this issue in the past, we've seen with the Finance Minister, he's repeatedly dodged the questions and instead mentioned how, you know, 52 per cent of Manitoban employers already offer paid sick leave, but that's not good enough. And I don't know why this Finance Minister would be happy with that, because that means 48 per cent of the population isn't.

And there's nothing in this bill that will protect those people. But again, we know that that's not the reason for the bill, that this is a stunt, it's political theatre that the government is less than sincere about actually creating programs that work.

And, you know, it's also going to be an issue that Manitoban workers deserve to go to work feeling safe. So, it's not just about the sick person, it's also about the healthy worker at their workplace and that they deserve to be able to have confidence going into work, knowing that a co-worker isn't going to get them sick and land them in the hospital. But we're seeing, year

after year, this government has continued to cut funding to the workplace health and safety department.

This government's Bill 11, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act, cuts protections for workers. It reduces the time frame in which a worker can make a complaint to a health and safety officer to six months. That certainly doesn't make a lot of sense, especially now.

If you have an employer who won't participate in this program, they are in fact creating an unsafe workplace and it'll be curious to hear the minister's comments on whether or not he thinks that's a legitimate complaint under the act and whether or not a workplace should be sanctioned and whether there should be some type of outcome for a, you know, involuntary situation where a worker has to come to work and they're healthy and a worker who doesn't have sick leave has made them sick and the employer has chosen to create this environment. So, is the employer now liable for that?

Say that employee dies and there's a lawsuit, a wrongful death lawsuit. What's the Province's responsibility in those circumstances? We're seeing now at Maples care home that the Province is now getting sued because of policy, legitimate problems with the policies, that this government have intentionally understaffed those facilities that led to the unnecessary deaths, preventable deaths, of Manitobans.

And now Manitobans are going to have to pay out big money in lawsuits instead of doing what was right to begin with by hiring appropriate staff, paying them living wages, treating them with respect and dignity and making sure that those wards were properly staffed. And because of that neglect and incompetence, Manitobans are going to pay out lawsuits.

And it's going to be the same thing with this legislation: if we don't mandate this for companies, there will be issues and Manitobans, taxpayers, we're going to pay one way or the other.

So I wish the government would reconsider their sort of political stunts and their short-term thinking and actually concentrate on keeping Manitobans healthy and bringing in policies that actually further that. And enough with the stunts.

So, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** I'm not going to spend a lot of time speaking about this bill because I understand that it's set to pass today and my colleague from

Fort Garry did a pretty good job of summing up everything that's wrong with this bill.

I guess, really, it starts back at the beginning of why the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) is the minister of labour when really all he's concerned about is balancing the books and cutting costs. He's not really all that concerned about doing what's best for working people. So that's kind of where the problem starts, I guess.

You know, this is—I guess the best we can hope for from this government is a halfway measure that does something, as opposed to their usual story of either doing nothing or figuring out what they can cut.

Now, during the question and answer part of the presentation here today, we talked a little bit about workers, perhaps recent Canadians and workers in precarious jobs, that—what is their knowledge of the Labour Board? And the minister thought that was pretty hypothetical, that he hadn't had any complaints registered at the Labour Board.

Well, of course not, because those very workers that really need the protection the most—because they don't have a union to represent them, perhaps—also have no concept of going to the Labour Board, nor are they going to go to the Labour Board when they know that some unscrupulous employers will then get even with them for that very thing.

\* (15:50)

And the way the government has structured complaints at the Labour Board, there's no guarantee anymore that they'll even get heard, because that may just be one of the things that the deputy minister or whoever's in charge decides is a frivolous complaint, so no point hearing it, no point listening to it, no point making a record of it. Which is too bad because, really, once again, the government could've brought in this particular piece of legislation a long time ago to ensure that workers could take time from work to get vaccinated.

And I get that the minister and perhaps many of his colleagues don't understand the concept of shift work and family care while doing shift work and split shifts and working three different jobs to try and make ends meet while this government continues to freeze wages and refuses to pay a decent wage for minimum wage—it's not a living wage. I get that the minister doesn't grasp that whole concept.

He also doesn't grasp the concept of life outside the confines of the city of Winnipeg. Not every

location has a supersite, so the ability for workers to access vaccinations becomes a whole lot more limited. And certainly, earlier on in the piece, when they announced days that the sites were going to be open and then cancelled them and then re-announced days and when you phoned to make an appointment it was the gong show, to say the least, because the people that were answering the phone didn't know even if there were clinics that had been advertised on specific days in some of those communities. Just makes it that much harder for those workers to make an appointment, and to make an appointment that maybe fell outside of their work time but also fell outside of their need to do child care and their need to do other things.

So, now the minister says, well, okay, you can have this up to three hours—it's not three hours; it's up to three hours—but you may have to supply proof to your employer. Well, I don't know—and I asked the minister during the question-and-answer part, what is acceptable or what's going to be deemed acceptable as proof? Well, he didn't really know that. I guess, I mean, you could take a picture of yourself getting vaccinated, I guess. We've seen people doing that. Well, that'd be proof you got vaccinated, but it certainly wouldn't be proof that that was the only time you can get vaccinated.

So part of the problem is this government believes that workers are generally untruthful, that they would go out of their way to fabricate the fact that the only time they could get the vaccine was during work hours. So now they may have to supply proof.

So when the employer says, well, whatever you showed me, yes, you showed me that you went for a vaccine on this day, how does that prove to an employer who wants to be that way that that's the only day they can go? Well, it doesn't. So right away, it puts the working people at the disadvantage again and, particularly in some workplaces, it puts them in the power imbalance position again, that everybody assumes off the top that they're dishonest and the worker's not going to have any concept of what that proof is, so it's going to be just too confusing, too onerous, so they just won't get vaccinated.

The other question I asked the minister about is his short-sightedness. He had the opportunity to introduce a piece of legislation that would cover not just this pandemic but any future pandemic, seasonal flu, that—he could've structured a bill in a such a way that it covered not just today but the future. He could've also put some retroactivity clauses in there so that working people that have already had to miss work

and didn't get paid would get paid. Didn't do any of that.

When we talk about paid sick leave, and there's something like—what is it—52 per cent offer paid sick leave. And I'm sure the minister has no concept or understanding of what that paid sick leave might be. Does it mean that every worker gets paid 100 per cent of their wages for 100 per cent of the time they miss when they have a sick leave program? And the answer is no.

I'd be surprised if any of the workplaces that have paid sick leave—I should not say that, because I know a workplace I came out of, if you were an hourly worker, you had to be off for—at the time I think it was five days—and then you'd get paid for three of them. If you were in management, yes, you got paid from the day you didn't show up. You got 100 per cent makeup.

So, again, it's that power imbalance. Certainly, there's many workplaces that have something that offers some kind of wage makeup. And even in well-unionized places, a lot of times it's not 100 per cent makeup of wages, it's a portion of.

So, many workers that are in precarious work, minimum-wage-type jobs, they're not going to take a chance on not being able to make the rent by staying home if they think they just have the sniffles, when in fact, that is when they should stay home.

So, the minister, again, had the opportunity to do the right thing but came up short, which is generally what we would expect from this particular government. So, this is going to pass today, and we're not going to stop it from passing because it is better than what was there before. I would encourage the government to relook at their priorities and relook at what they should be doing to protect Manitobans going forward, to make sure that people that are sick have the opportunity to stay home.

And I know there's at least one workplace in the North that had an outbreak that was deemed to be workplace-related—the transmission was through the workplace. Some of those workers would have had a union and would have had some wage-loss protection. Some of those workers may have been contractors from out of the province that maybe didn't have that same protection, so they just took it on the chin.

It's unfortunate that this government has such disdain and disrespect for working Manitobans that they won't step up and do the right thing and go all in to help workers, to help people.

So, before I go on too long, this hopefully will be well advertised so that it's not left up to workers to find out through Facebook or Twitter what is going on. It should be prominently posted in all workplaces, but I'm sure it won't be because there's no mandate to do that.

It's—how are workplaces going to know—how are workers going to know that their workplace is supposed to give them time off to go and get vaccinated if they can't do it any other time? There's a—missing there that the government hasn't really talked about, the minister hasn't talked about.

So, I think, probably, with those very few words, I will conclude my remarks and say that: better than nothing, but far from what it should have been and could have been.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

\* (16:00)

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I just want to speak for a few minutes, as I understand we are going to be passing this legislation today and we want to see it passed, even though it really doesn't do enough. And I don't want to spend too much time on that because we want to get the legislation passed, and I know my two colleagues before me here have expressed that quite a bit as well.

We absolutely want to be doing everything we can to encourage people to get vaccinated, and if we can do that by helping ensure that they will be paid during the time of their appointment if it is scheduled within work hours, it's just one more barrier we can try to remove.

What that said though—and this was mentioned earlier too—this legislation should have been brought forward earlier. Vaccines have been taking place here in Manitoba for several months; it should have been brought forward at the time vaccines actually started. Once again, our province is a step behind.

This legislation also doesn't go far enough and—again, these conversations have been taking place, but just to reiterate them and summarize them—employees do not always feel comfortable asking for this time, and we need to as a Province, as elected officials, be doing a better job at creating a safe workplace environment where employees—no matter which workforce they're in, no matter which field of employment they're in—they feel comfortable asking for this time off, asking for this payment.

But above that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it should be the case that every single workplace has this clearly indicated; employees shouldn't have to fear—in any format, in any just tiny little bit of them—they should not have to fear bringing this forward to their employers, and I don't think this is the case in many employees, employers' relationships, but it definitely is still the case here in Manitoba for several. So by making this mandatory for workplaces, employees would not have to fear this conversation, and really this legislation should make it mandatory for workplaces.

And, you know, it should also be talking about retroactive payment. What about all of those who have already had to take time off of work to go and get vaccinated; it's unfair for them. So to be bringing it in this late in the game—again, it's better than not bringing it in—but it's just scratching the surface.

And, you know, one concern with the legislation—and we're going to be bringing forward an amendment on this—is that many workers may not—may have to prove that they will be or were receiving the vaccination to their employer. I believe that we're at the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where we need to be able to take one another's word and not cause more stress on the system and having to get evidence for an employee to an employer.

What is an employee to do now to prove this to an employer? Are they supposed to book an extra appointment with their physician to get a note saying that they can in fact—or they're going to—get the vaccine on this set date at this set time and then prove with a—maybe—bus schedules that this is the bus they took to go and get their vaccine, and then they came back to their workplace with 20 minutes to spare? It's not fair to ask an employee to have to prove this, to provide some evidence on this.

And I think it would be fairly obvious—let's give this—like, it would be fairly obvious if someone was taking advantage of this. And this is why we're bringing forward an amendment to remove the verification that employers may use to request employees to prove that they are going to get the vaccine.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to try and provide some clarity, just because I've had quite a few people reach out to me last night and today confused about if they get the \$600 from the government on top of or instead of these three hours pay, if they will get paid and if there will be side effects and—I should try and make that even a little more clear, I'm getting confused as I say this.



Ultimately, these are two separate programs. This legislation is about when you schedule your vaccination. If your appointment falls within your work schedule, your employer will still pay you for three hours while you go and get the vaccine administered. Unfortunately, there is no funding for if individuals have potential side effects from the vaccine. This legislation is strictly for those three hours of payment.

The program that was released last week but is being confused a lot with this legislation that's been introduced is the announcement the government made about paying individuals \$600. This is only if a person needs to self-isolate or contracts the COVID virus.

And, you know, I find it incredibly troubling that the government is willing to legislate three hours of leave for the vaccine but not the \$600 if you have to self-isolate or contract COVID. It makes it more about the money and unfortunately, it's hard to think that it's just this government not willing to invest in the health of Manitobans.

So, with that said, we do support the legislation. We think it's doing the very bare minimum, but we strongly encourage the government to bring forward legislation so that Manitobans have the assurance so that they can stay at home when sick, when they're isolating due to COVID, and still be able to afford their bills.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Any further speakers?

Is the House ready for the question?

The question before the House is second reading of Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave).

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

I declare the motion carried.

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Acting Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, as the acting deputy—as the acting House leader, I'd like to move this—like to refer Bill 73 to the Committee of the Whole immediately.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It has been announced by the honourable Minister of Finance that we resolve committee to consider Bill 73 to the—be referred to the Committee of the Whole immediately.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

### Bill 73—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave)

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** The Committee of the Whole House, please come to order. As previously agreed to by the House, this committee will consider Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave).

Does the minister responsible for Bill 73 have an opening statement? None?

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement? No.

So, during the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title clause are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass.

Shall clause 3 pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Pass.

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** I hear a no.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I have an amendment.

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Member from Tyndall Park, please proceed with your amendment.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I move

*THAT Clause 3 of the Bill be amended by striking out the proposed subsection 59.13(5).*

**Motion presented.**

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** The motion is in order. The floor is open for questions.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** No questions. Nothing more than from my statement earlier.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Did you wish to speak to the—to your motion?

**Ms. Lamoureux:** We just—we think that it is important that employees do not feel that they need to prove or come forward with evidence that they are in case going to get their vaccine. We want to trust that

employees and employers have a working relationship, that this process will not be taken for granted and not put up barriers for employees to go and get that vaccination by creating more work for them.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Thank you.

Are there any other speakers?

Hearing none, is the committee ready for the question?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Shall the amendment pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** I hear a no.

#### Voice Vote

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** All those in favour of the amendment, please say aye.

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** All those opposed, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The amendment is accordingly defeated.

The member from saint—or for River Heights.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** On division.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** The amendment is defeated on division.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Shall move on to clause 4. Shall the—oh, pardon me.

Clause 3—pass.

Shall clause 4 pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Pass.

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** I hear a no.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** No, we don't believe that clause 4 shall pass, under the same sentiments, just, we want to be encouraging employers and employee relationships, building up that trust between the two, not asking employees to have to provide evidence that they're getting their vaccinations to their employers to be able to claim three hours of payment.

#### Voice Vote

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** All those in favour of clause 4, please say aye.

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** All those opposed, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The amendment is accordingly defeated.

**An Honourable Member:** On division.

**An Honourable Member:** The Yeas have it.

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Pardon me. The clause is accordingly passed. *[interjection]*

Okay, in my opinion, the Ayes have it.

The amendment is accordingly passed. *[interjection]* The clause is accordingly passed.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I—

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Was it on division—okay, so we'll just—the clause is accordingly passed.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Clause 5—pass; clause 6—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

This concludes the business of the committee.

Committee rise. Call in the Deputy Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

#### Committee Report

**Mr. Len Isleifson (Deputy Chairperson):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered the following: Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave) and reports the same without amendment.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes), that the report of the committee be received.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member for Brandon East, seconded by the honourable member for Waverley, that the report of the committee be received.

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

### CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

#### Bill 73—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave)

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Acting Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, I move concurrence and third reading. Could you please move—could you please call concurrence and third reading of Bill 73.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It's been announced that—by the honourable Minister of Finance that concurrence and third reading of Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave).

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), that Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave), reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and now be read for a third time and passed.

#### *Motion presented.*

**Mr. Fielding:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're very proud of the fact that we're able to introduce Bill 73, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

Amendments to the Employment Standards Code have been proposed to allow Manitobans' employees to take up to three hours paid leave to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations without reductions in pay. It's initiatives that other provinces have done. We're trying to do as much as we can, as I know all members in the Chamber are here to make sure that all Manitobans are vaccinated in a timely fashion. This legislation does that.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** I just have some brief comments to put on the record.

We will be supporting this bill, although we have concerns that this is six months too late and it should

have happened sooner, and we've certainly been calling for this for months.

\* (16:20)

We have concerns that there's no retroactivity clause here, meaning that almost half of Manitobans have already received their vaccines; many of them may have suffered financial consequences in order to do that, to make us all safe, and they're being left behind by this government yet again.

We're concerned that there is, again, this, you know, presumption that employees are going to lie to their employers, and there's sort of a punitive aspect to this bill requiring proof. If we're all in this together, that law certainly doesn't reflect that.

And certainly, when you look at our whole paid sick leave regime in Manitoba through this pandemic, you have to look at these bills—not in isolation, but together. We certainly have concerns that the codification of the practice in Manitoba, as the minister has stated in this bill, is not being done with the paid sick leave bill and that it's voluntary, and that will limit its effect and its reach and will limit its ability to make Manitobans safe.

So, this is a terribly imperfect bill. It's late in coming, but it's better than nothing and we will be supporting this bill, at least as some measure of progress.

Thank you.

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** I have no comments at this time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** No comment? Okay. We'll go on to the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Just a few last comments. We are in support of the legislation. We're glad that it's being brought forward; we just don't believe that it goes far enough. We believe that it's late to the game.

We're hopeful that this will just be one step of many, taken very, very soon, that this government will make to ensure that everyone who needs to still receive the vaccine is given that opportunity to go and get the vaccine, that employees have no fear to have to ask for this payment for this time leaving their workplace to go and get the vaccine, and any other changes, barriers that we can be removing to encourage people to get the vaccination as soon as possible—we'd like to continue to work towards that.

Thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Any other further speakers?

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

I declare the motion carried.

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Could the House prepare for royal assent.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Could we get the House ready for royal assent.

We'll be standing by to—preparing for royal assent, and this in the Chamber.

\* (16:30)

### ROYAL ASSENT

**Sergeant-at-Arms (Mr. Dave Shuttleworth):** His Honour the Administrator.

*His Honour Chief Justice Richard Chartier, Administrator of the Province of Manitoba, having entered the House and being seated on the throne, Mr. Deputy Speaker addressed His Honour the Administrator in the following words:*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Your Honour,

At this sitting, the Legislative Assembly has passed certain bills that I ask Your Honour to give assent to:

**Clerk Assistant (Ms. Monique Grenier):**

Bill 14 – The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020; Loi corrective de 2020

Bill 19 – The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020 (2); Loi corrective no 2 de 2020

Bill 24 – The Legal Profession Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la profession d'avocat

Bill 31 – The Horse Racing Regulatory Modernization Act (Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act and Pari-Mutuel Levy Act Amended); Loi sur la modernisation de la réglementation des courses de chevaux (modification de la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis et de la Loi concernant les prélèvements sur les mises de pari mutuel)

Bill 50 – The Legal Aid Manitoba Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'aide juridique du Manitoba

Bill 68 – The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative

Bill 73 – The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Vaccination Leave); Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi (congé à des fins de vaccination contre la COVID-19)

**Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk):** In Her Majesty's name, His Honour assents to these bills.

*His Honour was then pleased to retire.*

\* \* \*

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you please canvass the House to see if it's the will of members to call it 5 p.m.?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Is it will of the House to call it 5 p.m.? *[Agreed]*

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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