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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTomARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	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, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon.	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	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
<i>Vacant</i>	Thompson	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 7, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Madam Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may 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.

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated. Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Madam Speaker: The honourable official opposition House—[interjection]—oh, private members' business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Would you call Bill 227, The Turban Day Act, for second reading debate this morning.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 227, The Turban Day Act.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 227—The Turban Day Act

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I move, seconded by member from St. Vital, that Bill 227, The Turban Day Act, be read for a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Brar: Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh. [The Khalsa belongs to God, Victory belongs to God.]

Madam Speaker, yesterday I was at an event, met a gentleman and he said to me, where are you from? I was like, I am from Winnipeg. No, no, I mean where did you come from? I was like, I moved from BC. No, no, I mean where are you originally from? I said: I was born in Punjab, which is a beautiful province in India.

I don't know why he asked such questions. I didn't feel embarrassed, but I thought that the thing I am doing right now is the most important thing that should happen in Manitoba because I thought there was a lack of education about my turban, about how I look like, about who I am.

So this incidence happened after I had already moved this motion for the first reading of the bill a few days back. But I feel so proud today that we, as elected representatives, we would get an opportunity here in this Chamber to talk about diversity, inclusion, social justice, turbans, freedom of faith, harmony, peace and many more such things.

Turban—first of all, I want to share this. This is not just a piece of cloth. This is not just a headgear. It's way more than that. And I also want to share that turban does not belong to a specific gender. It's for everybody.

Turban is sacred for the Sikh community, and there's no specific age that someone starts wearing a turban. It's about covering the head. In Sikh faith, covering the head means showing respect to your group, to God, to people who you meet and yourself. Unlike showing respect by removing your hat in Western culture, it's by covering your head.

So different cultures have different values. We need to educate each other about our own cultures.

So basically, if I talk about myself, when I started tying this turban was in grade 5. And I started learning the art of tying turban. It's an art; it's not just, you buy it from the market and just put it on your head and remove whenever you want to.

And there are so many historical events associated with that. And if you talk about the turban-wearing people, and what they did for the

respective countries they lived in, you would learn a lot.

Punjab is a very small province—population-wise, I think 2 to 3 per cent of the population of India. And if you talk about the fight for freedom during the British rule, the sacrifices made by Sikh or Punjabi people would be like 80 per cent, 85 per cent. If you count those who were hanged, if you count those who were imprisoned for life, this 2 per cent, 3 per cent population would be 80 per cent, 85 per cent.

And the people of Punjab, they contribute a lot to the central food pool in India. Just a small piece of land contributing 40 to 50 per cent of rice and wheat to Indian national food security.

So when you talk about the discrimination—in spite of all the sacrifices that this community made, they continue to face discrimination. I would start from Canada, 1914. The Komagata Maru ship—376 passengers, 340 of them were Sikhs. They were not allowed to settle in Canada due to the discriminatory policies of immigration in Canada. And it was after 102 years after that, that an official—an official apology was issued, which is unfortunate because we had to wait 102 years to hear about that apology.

* (10:10)

If you talk about the people—turban-wearing men and women in Canada—just imagine, Madam Speaker, if you're working in a library and you're not allowed to read to the people or the kids who attend the library because you look different. How would you feel? This is happening right now, here, in this country.

What if you're a power engineer—turbaned power engineer and you're forced to do a cleaning job for two years because you refuse to remove your turban to do your professional work. And imagine the situation and state of mind of somebody who fought for human rights through a complaint to get their rights.

So, international students—there are so many international students who are coming to Manitoba directly. There are so many international students moving from east and west within this country to settle here. Many of them, they have to make a hard decision to remove their turbans, cut their hair, because they fear discrimination. So this is the state of the affairs in our country.

In 1984, Sikh genocide happened. People were identified because they could easily be identified because they used to wear turbans. They were murdered. They were raped. They were beaten and

burned alive. So that's what the Sikh community endured in various parts of this world. And the Sikh community, as we all know, contributed a lot to the economic development of this country, to the social development of this country, to the political development of this country and cultural development of this country.

This is not hidden from anybody, what Sikhs have done. They have achieved higher positions. They have served as MPs, ministers, MLAs, and they continue to do so.

To fight this discrimination, there are two ways: enforcement and education. My bill, Bill 227, talks about celebrating April 13th as turban day in Manitoba; for example, the same way we celebrate Pink Shirt Day. So it's an educational activity.

I propose that once this bill is passed—which I think would pass because I'm getting positive vibes from all parties—so people would be able to celebrate turban day in schools, colleges, universities, businesses, offices and so on.

I look forward to a unanimous support for this bill, and thank you so much.

Madam Speaker: For the information of our guests here in the gallery, we welcome you here, but we do indicate that guests here are not to participate in the proceedings on the floor by applauding. So we would appreciate your co-operation in that, but you are welcome here.

Questions

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

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Sat Sri Akal. [*Truth is God.*] My family is also from the province of Punjab.

I want to thank the member opposite for bringing forward this important bill recognizing the importance of wearing the turban.

As a man of faith myself and a visible minority, I would like to ask the member if he can explain the importance of this bill and what this bill would mean for other communities that would also want to bring

forward and see religious cultural practices and symbols recognized here in Manitoba.

Will the member and his party support such a movement in the future?

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Salaam alaikum [*Peace be unto you*], member from Fort Whyte, and I welcome your first question to me in this Chamber.

Of course, it's important to recognize the religious symbols; that's about the Charter of Rights. Bringing forward this bill means that I and my colleagues on this side of the Chamber, they support that we should be free to express our religion. We should be free to practise our religions and use these symbols—doesn't matter which community or which faith you belong to, it's for everyone. It's about human rights.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I want to thank my brother, the member from Burrows, for bringing forth this very important bill. It's something that is significant to our province, significant to the people that call Manitoba home, and this is not going unnoticed by the community and I want to thank you for that.

So, the question I have, Madam Speaker, is: I notice that the turban that the member from Burrows wears—it's a particular style. I also also notice that Jagmeet Singh, the member—or the leader of the NDP federally, wears his turban differently.

Can you talk about the differences and their significance, please?

Mr. Brar: Thank you so much, member from Transcona, for such a wonderful question. I didn't have enough time; that was on my notes, so thank you for that.

There's so many types of turbans and I can name them: the turban is called *dastar*, *pagg* or *pagri*. It's also called *keski*. It's also called *dumala*, *parna* or *patka*. There are so many types, depending upon the shape, depending upon the size, depending upon your personal choice to wear a particular type of turban, but that does not mean that these different types of turbans—significance is difference. Different—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for Burrows for bringing forward this excellent piece of legislation that we are very excited to hopefully see passed here this morning.

My question is, you started to talk about your experience, how in grade 5, that's when you learned about the turban. Could you share a little bit more

about how it was explained to you, the significance of the turban and maybe how you have since then explained it to your family and your children?

Mr. Brar: Thank you, member from Tyndall Park, for this beautiful question.

I started it earlier than my friends because I loved to tie turbans since an early age. I used to look at my dad, when he would wear a turban every day. He would tie his turban every day before he go to school. And the same way my older son—he is 18-plus—he wears as turban as well, and he also copied me.

I didn't have a formal training for him but I talk about turban and its significance and I'm happy that he is not pressurized by this society, even if he's the only person in his school, he would choose to tie turban.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I thank the member for Burrows for bringing forward this bill. I really appreciate also the emphasis that you have—that he has made on Charter freedoms and rights.

And I was wondering if he would like to comment on what's happening in Quebec with bill 21. I'm guessing that he shares my concerns and I'd like to give him the opportunity to speak about that.

Mr. Brar: Thank you so much for the question.

* (10:20)

Bill 21—that prevents government servants to wear their religious symbols at work. I opposed that bill, bill 21, and that was the first time I spoke for 30 minutes right here in this Chamber, just after I was elected.

There are so many people who had to move from Quebec to other provinces due to that legislation, and I think that legislation is discriminatory. Things like that shouldn't happen here, and we should stand together with the bills like the one we are discussing today.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon East.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Oh, pardon me—following a funny list.

An Honourable Member: Come on over. Come on over.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Transcona.

Mr. Altomare: Both the member and I are former—oh, actually, I'm a former educator. He's a current educator.

I would like to ask the member from Burrows, how will education and awareness about the turban combat racism and discrimination?

Mr. Brar: Thank you so much for the question.

You know, whenever we read about something, whenever we talk about something, the stigmas, stereotypes go away. When I was working with Manitoba Agriculture in Arborg, I had a turban demo. I did turban demo at every workplace I was since now—since I started working right here. I did it with my colleagues as well.

And the comment I got after the demo was done was that we had prejudices about turbans, and this 10-minute exercise faded them away, and now we love you.

Mr. Isleifson: I first want to say to the member from Transcona, thanks for the invitation. I'll come visit you in Transcona and we can have wings and things like that.

But for now I do want to congratulate the member from Burrows for bringing this bill forward. I stand in this House a lot and talk about ethnic communities and what they mean to us, and I'm very involved in the Icelandic community.

So I'd like to ask the member what his involvement is, and his participation is, in the Sikh community.

Mr. Brar: Thank you so much for the question.

And before I proceed with the answer, I would like to welcome community members in the gallery today who are joining us in this process.

I participate to the maximum possible extent in—not just in Sikh community events but all the ethnic community events happening around me. It could be Ukrainian, it could be Filipino and other communities, Black communities—I want to participate. I want to sit together, eat together, learn about their food, culture, language, and that's what I like and I like to participate and that's what I do on a regular basis—and also in Brandon.

Mr. Altomare: I would like to ask the member from Burrows: what can this government do to promote inclusivity in this province at all levels?

Mr. Brar: Well, I think all government should encourage BIPOC people to run for office, first of all, so that this Chamber could be as diverse as possible and the people from different communities, especially people of colour, Indigenous people and people of different ethnicities, they think that the people representing us in this sacred building look like us.

So governments should be promoting that diversity. That would be something good that they can do.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, member opposite.

Just curious as to what the significance was of the member choosing the entire day of April 13th for turban day.

Mr. Brar: As many of us know that Vaisakhi is a festival which is culturally important and religiously important. It's not a festival of Sikhs only, it's a festival that is celebrated by so many communities on this earth. So Vaisakhi is celebrated on April 13th or 14th in various parts of the world.

So it's related to Vaisakhi. That's why April 13th was chosen.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period is—has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this bill. And these kinds of mornings of private members' business where we get to discuss things that we all agree with and that we all respect and enjoy as part of our culture and part of our great province here in Manitoba, that's a good morning and a good way to spend, I think, an hour in debate—or hopefully slightly less than an hour, I believe, is what the member might hope for, and I think I would share that desire, as well.

You know, the member shared with us some of the experiences that he's still having today, which is sad, you know, to hear people assume that he is in some way not Canadian. And certainly I feel that, too. I know my father, growing up—so he came here from the Netherlands, so he might have looked like a lot of folks here, but that didn't mean that he wasn't distinguished from others very, very often. And because of his thick accent when he spoke, when he

first arrived here he was routinely asked, you know, where are you from, and why don't you—sometimes suggested that he should go back.

And when I was born to him and, you know, started living my life and experiencing those same kinds of discriminations, right, that—because we were poor, we were immigrant, these things were somehow looked down—we were looked down on for that. My dad was very, very, very firm in insisting that I not even call myself a Dutch Canadian, that I call myself a Canadian. And he insisted on it. And I really, really respect why he wanted me to take that attitude.

And it's because Manitoba and Canada is a multicultural society, and its intent, the way it should work, is that we all together enjoy the variety, but welcome the unity that we share as citizens here of this great province, and that we're not divided when these distinctions come in play, but rather that we celebrate them, that we enjoy them. And I thank the member for bringing this forward.

I myself am new to understanding what a turban is even. I grew up as a Christian and so the first thing I ever learned about turban was that, you know, 3,000 years ago, the high priest in Israel, when he would present himself at the temple, wore a turban. And so, my first impression was that it was not necessarily culturally bound, but more something specific to a role or a, you know, so a guru would wear a turban, but maybe not everyone else. But I'm glad to have had the education this morning from the member.

And I, myself, I really enjoyed the hospitality that we get to see here in Manitoba during Folklorama, as an example. And at Folklorama, I was at the Punjab pavilion with my daughter and there they knew that—they recognized that I was a government official and they insisted that I try a turban, that I wear the turban and see what it felt like. And I was at first a little hesitant, but they were very encouraging, and so I accepted.

And it was a surprising experience. It was in a way delightful. My daughter wore the sari and she wore it better than I supposed. She certainly looked amazing. But it was an interesting experience to have a taste and to have a sense of what comes with that culture. And so I really appreciated the generosity and the openness and the welcome that I received from the Punjabi community and from the Sikh community in Winnipeg and in Manitoba. So—grateful for that.

* (10:30)

I try to do my job here in the Legislature with no regrets, and I'm sure Madam Speaker might think I should regret a few things more than maybe I do. But I have a brief confession for the member, really, and—to make. And that was last week, I think, or in last couple of weeks, we had a ministerial statement on Bangladesh Independence Day—I think the member would remember.

And, you know, our Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mr. Smith) spoke and then the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) spoke, but he didn't have enough time to complete his results. And I sat there, wanting to jump up and ask for leave, and I, for whatever reason, felt afraid to do so—for leave for you to continue. And perhaps I expected one of your colleagues would do that, and that didn't happen.

And then the member for Burrows, she waxed eloquent. Her colleagues asked for leave to continue on and she went on and on for quite a while, and even then, I thought to myself, I should just jump up right now and ask for leave for that—for the member for Burrows to finish his remarks, because I respect what you have to say when you come into—or what he has to say when he comes into this Chamber.

I respect the perspective that he brings, and the experience that he has, and the involvement in our multicultural society, and what you represent in this Chamber by bringing elements of Sikh faith with you, by expressing what that faith means to—or, sorry, means to him, by expressing those things in this Chamber, I think that makes us all stronger, and it's something that I'm grateful for.

So I wanted to tell the member that, and to assure him that—assure the member that if this happens again—oh, I called the member for—

An Honourable Member: Tyndall Park.

Mr. Teitsma: —Tyndall Park, thank you. I should have referred to the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux) who waxed on and on, not the member for Burrows, of course, is the one who's introduced this bill. My apologies, and I thank my colleagues for reminding me of the constituency for the Liberal member for Tyndall Park.

Now, where was I? Yes, just, I guess, expressing gratitude to the member, and I also want to take a moment as the first speaker on the—this side of the House to welcome members of the Sikh community who have come here, and to acknowledge that your presence here means a lot to me, and I'm sure it means

a lot to the members opposite, and especially to the member who introduced the bill.

It is very nice to see you. It's been a couple of years since we've been able to have guests regularly in this Chamber, so it's a little extra special to have you here today. But I think it is a good thing, and it's a fitting thing as an expression of that multi-culturalism that we have in our good—our province here, that members of this community that are interested in this bill, that are interested in seeing it come to fruition and come to pass are able to support the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) and be here in person.

That's a wonderful thing. This is the way our democracy should work. And I always love that Manitoba as a Legislature, as a building—you called it a sacred hall—it was built and designed almost as if it were a temple, that this building has a very unique architectural element also here, and I think today it's expressing itself very well, and that's this horseshoe that we see.

Most other legislatures in the Commonwealth, shall we say, are more oriented towards the benches that oppose each other, and that's, I think, a representation of the way that government and opposition are to function. There's a point to that as well, and we have that element here with the—at least the end of the horseshoe.

But the fact that we come together in the middle is, I think, very symbolic and it's something that we should celebrate and we should mention every time we have an opportunity to say what's unique about the Manitoba Legislature. This is a unique thing that we do not oppose each other, but, rather, we come together often in the middle and that we can work together, and today's bill is a great example of something that we can work together on.

And so, wrapping up, I do want to once again express my thanks to the member for bringing forward this bill. On a personal note, Vaisakhi's always important to me because my birthday's on April the 14th, so it's a little extra special. Most years, I get to celebrate my birthday and Vaisakhi at the same time, and I'll take it. Means some extra good food, on occasion—not that I need more of that.

So, in conclusion, then, I thank the member for bringing this forward. I'm encouraged by the tone of the debate this morning, and I'm optimistic that we'll be able to move this bill along and get it to committee.

So, with those few words, I thank you all for your time.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): It is my honour to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 227, The Turban Day Act. I'd like to thank the member from the Burrows, my friend, for bringing this very important bill forward.

And, while talking to member from the Burrows, I was just wondering, like, the reason for bringing this bill forward. What do we want to accomplish?

So there's a couple of things that the member from the Burrows has mentioned to me that he's looking forward to highlighting those things, like, the significance of the turban in Sikhi, our Sikhism, and also combatting racism against turban-wearing Sikh Canadians.

And when we are talking about Sikhism, we can't—we have to start from Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Guru of the Sikh religion. What Sikh—Guru Nanak Dev Ji teaches us—there are three main teachings from Guru Nanak Dev Ji: Vand Chhako, share with the other people; Kira Karo, make an honest living, and also, Naam Japo, means worship the God.

So it doesn't have to be—like, Sikh religion tells us, we respect all the religions. It doesn't have to be, you have to respect—obviously, you have to respect every religion. And so, for us, if we go to any, like, say, mandir or to church, we respect those religions too. So it is very important. That's what the Guru Nanak Dev Ji have told us.

And from there, if we go first Guru, and then we have to think what Guru Gobind Singh Ji—that's the 10th Guru of Sikhism. Before becoming a Sikh, or before becoming a Singh, Guru Gobind Singh was a Guru Gobind Rai. But on 1699, April 13th or 14th—as we were discussing just me and Diljeet—sorry, member from the Burrows—it is either 13th or 14th April, 1699, when Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the Khalsa. While creating the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh Ji also has given us a name, a middle name. Every male, man, is a Singh, meaning lion, and Kaur is the woman name, middle name, and means princess.

And Guru Gobind Singh Ji also has given us five Ks. What those Ks are: they are kesh, uncut hair; kangha, wooden comb; kara, a bracelet usually made of iron and steel; kachera, a white undergarment; and kirpan, a small curved sword of any size, shape or metal.

Madam Speaker, when I talk about the five Ks, I also want to go way, way back to 1999, July 8th, 1999, to be exact. That was the day my MP, current MP Kevin Lamoureux, that day, he brought a resolution, resolution 68, the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa to recognize the importance of the five Ks. This resolution was passed unanimously by this House. That was the first step recognizing the five Ks that Guru Gobind Singh Ji has given us.

* (10:40)

From there, I can go to 2019, bill 228. That was the day that the member from Fort Rouge, Official Opposition Leader brought in a bill that was to celebrate April as Sikh Heritage Month. That was the second step in the right direction.

And the third step will be recognizing April 13th as a turban day. So those are the steps we are up to. I'm hoping that we will pass this resolution today unanimously, but I—before I wrap up my speech, because I do want to give time to other people, there isn't that much time to debate but I'm sure everybody wants to speak onto this bill.

I do like to highlight a couple turban-wearing Sikhs, be in politics or doing other works. First one comes into mind is Jagmeet Singh, official opposition leader—Canada's NDP leader. While wearing a turban and doing the work, recently I saw his statement where they had—they are doing some kind of work with the federal Liberal government. The question was, if the credit—all the credit was taken away, the Liberal government, what did your thoughts on this said?

What Jagmeet Singh said, you know what, I want to make sure every person have the coverage—it was related to the dental care. So it doesn't matter if my name comes in there or not, but everyone should get the coverage. So this is Jagmeet Singh.

And I also like to highlight Sajjan Singh, a former defence minister. I felt really proud whenever he went to the international stage and seeing a turban-wearing Sikh standing on the stage.

Khalsa Aid, Ravi Singh, 23 years ago he started the work to help war-torn foreign countries with his charitable donations. So even this day, Khalsa Aid is in Poland helping Ukrainian refugees. And I also want to highlight one other person, from Winnipeg, who is in Poland working for Khalsa Aid, volunteering his time: Bashir Singh [*phonetic*].

So those are the few people wearing turbans, highlighting the Sikhism turban. And so there isn't—is there—isn't that much time left, but I have a couple more people to highlight. But before I—maybe I'll just give the floor to someone else, because I'm sure the member from Tyndall Park wants to speak to this too.

So, thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Again, good morning everyone, and it certainly is an exciting opportunity to rise in the House this morning and welcome our guests to the gallery. As it's—has been mentioned before, it's been a tough couple of years of not having folks in the gallery to watch how we proceed.

And this is an excellent opportunity with a bill like this to show how this House works, when we can stand together and—I guess we can't really use the word debate—the bill, because I don't see a need for a debate. I see a need to put words on the record of support, on something so genuine that really supports what Manitoba is, what Canada is, which is really an ethnic group coming together and we're all proud to call ourselves Canadians.

I do want to mention what the member from Burrows—I had a great discussion with the member in Brandon at the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair. Him and his son Jai sat beside me at supper and a great conversation it—and, again, it really shows us the opportunity to grow within and to grow throughout the entire province as we all come together.

I am happy that I am in this rotation of the speaking order. The last three times I've risen in this House to speak, I've run out of time. So today, there is 15 minutes left, or let's go for 13 minutes to make sure we can take the opportunity to pass this bill. So I will not take my entire 10 minutes because I know the member would like to speak, as well, and I know how frustrating it is when that time runs out and everybody tells you to basically shut up and sit down so everybody else can continue.

So with that, though, I do want to, you know, address the member from Burrows on this bill because there are other things that I would like to know. I know the member from Radisson talked about the amazing opportunity to have a turban. I have watched on YouTube how a turban is established and worn. I've never experienced that, myself, and I think that would be a great opportunity.

I actually visited a Gurdwara for the first time when I got elected in 2016 in Winnipeg here. And I

know with the Gurdwara that's in Winnipeg here—and I apologize, I hope I'm saying that right—they are actually celebrating an anniversary on April 14th. So this kind of 'goinconcides' with what this bill actually talks about. And it is—April 14th will be the 52nd anniversary of this Gurdwara. It is also the 322nd anniversary of the establishment of—and I'm going to say what the translation is, or maybe not because it doesn't give me the whole thing on here—but is the 'khalaza'? Or something—Khalsa. And again, I apologize.

And those are things that we, as Manitobans and Canadians, we can learn. And when the member from Transcona talked about the current educator—and I understand he is doing some education—that's an excellent opportunity to educate all of us on the different languages, the different customs, the reason for the colours in the turbans, because I notice the member wears different colours all the time. And I am involved quite a bit in the ethnic community in Brandon, but it's always interesting when you spend time with these groups to learn, to get educated and to understand. So we certainly have that amazing opportunity to really grow Manitoba from within.

We also have the opportunity to build on what Canada really is and, again, what Manitoba has to offer to newcomers. I know in my community of Brandon, and I know the Sikh community there are always talking and they're coming to me and asking me for support to help bring family members over. And that is something that I will never turn down because it gives us a great opportunity to continue to not just showcase what Manitoba is, but really just showcase who we are as Manitobans, how open we are, how welcoming we are, and it builds our community.

We all have a role to play in eliminating racism. We really do. And everyone in this House should take every opportunity to stand, whether it be in the House, whether it be out front, whether it be down the street, to stand in support of eliminating racism. To accept the customs of others so that we can again grow as one and really build Manitoba up.

I think it's important that we continue, as Manitobans, to really value and create those valuable conversations of the elimination of racism. And we can use this bill as an example of how we can come together and how we can support a day to celebrate and educate everybody on the turban.

As the members across the floor—took a little bit of time, Madam Speaker—but they come to their senses, and they helped support the Filipino heritage

act. And again, I say that in 'jesterly' that we can come together. You know, we can debate back and forth here all we want, but in the end Manitoba is one large ethnic community that is open to everybody to come here to see what we have to offer, to work with each other, to be one great community and to really grow and diversify the relationships that we have with others.

* (10:50)

This can be an amazing start for all ethnic communities. We can get this bill passed today. We can go out and we can celebrate and educate ourselves and get educated by others on April the 13th and really start to understand even more what being a Manitoban is really like.

So, again, I'm going to end my conversation there so that the member from Tyndall Park can say a few words so that that member's not cut off as well and then we can pass the bill. So thank you very much for your time.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Again, I'd like to thank the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) for bringing forward this legislation and all of my colleagues for keeping their comments shorter. I know I often only get one or two minutes to talk and today I might get four or five, Madam Speaker, so I'm very happy about that.

Before I dive into the legislation, I also want to say hello and Sat Sri Akal Ji [*truth is God, to you*] to all of our guests. Thank you for being here. It's been way too long since we've been allowed guests up in the Chamber and it's such an honour to have you all here as we debate the significance of the turban.

Madam Speaker, I really, really appreciate the way in which the member drafted and worded the legislation that he brought forward, talking about how symbolism can be integral to religious identity. This is something I studied quite thoroughly back in my undergrad.

I studied religion and culture and politics, Madam Speaker, but in studying religion and culture, I've learned about the significance that symbolism can hold in one's faith. And that's really what Sikhism is all about.

When I first started to learn about turbans, I was quite young and the thoughts about the turban that I've carried with me throughout my life is it's to help a person stay grounded. It's a humbling symbol, Madam

Speaker, a symbol of the reminder to be kind, to be kind as humans.

As I continued to age, I continued to learn and I recognized that the turban is a symbol of sovereignty, courage, equality and self-respect, as noted in the legislation. It is considered respectful for Sikhs to keep their heads covered when in public and religious spaces, and sometimes people aren't aware, but I'm really glad that the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) talked about this. Turbans are not only for men. Children wear them, too, as well as women.

I've actually had a turban tied on my head a couple of times, Madam Speaker, at events like Vaisakhi, and it truly is a neat experience to be able to hold. And, you know, one of the things that the member from The Maples started to touch on is the kindness that comes out of Sikh religion. If you go into a Gurdwara—and I myself, I believe in a god; I would argue maybe I follow under more of the Christianity field, if we're going to go in that direction.

But, Madam Speaker, when I go into the Gurdwara—and I go in about once a month with my father—we try to be very intentional about visiting. We sit there and we get to experience the religion. We get to experience the culture and the faith. And I have never been welcomed into a culture, into a faith with non-judgment. The people who are Sikh, people who practise Sikhism, are the most kind-hearted and welcoming group of individuals that you can ask for and we need more of that in our culture.

And that is why it is incredibly important that we're talking about the turban. That is why it's incredibly important that as our Sikh community continues to grow here in Manitoba, especially in the North End where we're from, Madam Speaker, we need to understand the significance behind the symbolism.

So, Madam Speaker, a couple more thoughts—I think I have about two more minutes here. Knowing this is important and the significance and recognizing the growing Sikh community, not only do we need to celebrate, but we need to be aware and include more of these learnings in our school curriculums. This is something we should be doing across the province. We should be reviewing our curriculums as more and more students of Sikh heritage and Sikh faith are coming into our schools. They should be taught what it symbolizes, what it means.

We should also be following through on promises. We've talked about the Komagata Maru park, Madam Speaker. We need to make sure that the

residents in Waterford Green get the park that they were promised because the Komagata Maru, it symbolizes something much larger. It's a step towards forgiveness and we need to make sure this happens.

Lastly, we need to end the racism that is still experienced every single day here in Manitoba, Madam Speaker. You know, I had a couple of examples that I wanted to share. I think I'm going to skip them, but I will wrap up here so we can ensure the legislation gets passed. But again, I want to thank the member for bringing forward this legislation and look forward to seeing it passed here unanimously today.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh [*The Khalsa belongs to God, Victory belongs to God*] and Sat Sri Akal [*truth is God*] and welcome to all of our guests who have taken the time out of their busy schedules to be here with us today on this important day where we, as a Legislature, recognize the importance of Bill 227, of the symbolism of the turban not just to the Sikh faith, not just to the Punjabi community, but to all Manitobans and, I would say, all Canadians.

I want to thank the member for Burrows for bringing this forward. I think it's an important way that he can continue to educate us, how we can continue to educate one another. And as he said, this is about the education and about learning from one another, learning about how we can appreciate not our differences but our similarities and how we can work together.

I know my time is very short here and we do want to see this bill move forward. But I just thought I'd put on the record very quickly that, as was mentioned by the member for—

An Honourable Member: Burrows.

Mr. Wiebe: No, no—[*interjection*]-Maples. Thank you, my goodness. The Maples. And I thought he did this very well, including it—included in his education, he also sort of gave a history of how we have recognized elements of the Sikh faith here in this House.

I also wanted to add to that that in the Parliament of Canada, it was Bill Blaikie, who I had the honour of working with, who brought forward a bill talking about the five Ks and talking about the importance of that. That was also a bill that was adopted unanimously. And that was at a time when I would venture to say there were a lot more people who didn't, you know, understand maybe elements that we do now about the Sikh faith, and didn't understand the community as well as maybe, hopefully, we do now.

It was brought forward in a way—in the same way that the member for Burrows is bringing this forward, to ensure that we're all educated.

But we also need, as he said, to look—to think about how we not only educate, but we enforce and protect these rights for all peoples. There are bills in this country and there are political movements that seek to outlaw religious symbolism. I was proud to bring a resolution here in this House many years ago that spoke out about that. I continue to speak out every chance I get. It doesn't matter if it's a cross, a hijab or a turban, we need to understand that these are important ways that we communicate to one another about our values and about our common history.

So I stand with the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) today. I thank him for bringing this forward. And once again, I thank the members of the community who've come here, shown us that respect, and I look forward to working with them going forward.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.
[*The Khalsa belongs to God, Victory belongs to God.*]

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 227, The Turban Day Act.

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

I declare the motion carried.

The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen).

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Acting Government House Leader): I ask the House to make the vote unanimous.

Madam Speaker: Is it the will of the House to make the vote unanimous? [*Agreed*]

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 10—Calling on the Provincial Government to Stop Raising Hydro Rates

Madam Speaker: And the hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Calling on the Provincial Government to Stop Raising Hydro Rates, being brought forward by the honourable member for St. James.

* (11:00)

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I move, seconded by the member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino),

WHEREAS the rising cost of living is making life unaffordable for many Manitobans and making it harder for families to make ends meet; and

WHEREAS in January 2022, Canada's annual inflation rate reached 5.1 per cent, which outpaced wage increases of 2.4 per cent over the same period and was the first time the annual inflation rate exceeded five per cent in more than 30 years, according to Statistics Canada; and

WHEREAS recent studies have shown that more than half (53%) of Canadians say they can't keep up with the cost of living and seven in ten Canadians report being stressed about money as inflation rates continue to grow; and

WHEREAS nearly 40 per cent of parents indicated that they face challenges paying for child care; and

WHEREAS according to Harvest Manitoba, demand for hampers is at an all-time high and continues to break its previous records, with the organization seeing an increase of 30 to 40 per cent of their pre-pandemic volumes and expecting that number to increase with rising fuel prices; and

WHEREAS the interference by both the former Pallister Provincial Government's and the current Provincial Government in Manitoba Hydro has cost ratepayers and led to higher bills for families; and

WHEREAS Manitoba Hydro already increased its rates to 3.6 per cent last December; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government increased hydro rates at the cabinet table in 2020 and attempted to raise them again at the cabinet table in 2021, for the first time in modern Manitoba history, costing families hundreds of dollars; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government has introduced a new bill which will allow cabinet to effectively set Hydro rates at the cabinet table and will increase hydro rates by up to 5 per cent every year, which will make life even more expensive for Manitobans.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to call on the provincial government to stop its plans to raise hydro rates and to instead make real investments to make life more affordable for seniors and families.

Madam Speaker: Sorry, could the member repeat who seconded it—this? Notre Dame?

Mr. Sala: Seconded by the member for Notre Dame.

Motion presented.

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, about two months ago, I had a constituent come to our office, looking for help. It was her first time ever reaching out to an MLA office for anything, and she felt quite embarrassed, actually, to be reaching out and seeking assistance from our office.

She works a minimum wage job and she lives in an apartment in my community. And she came to share that she was facing a 15 per cent rent increase in her apartment in the months to come, that her food costs were exploding, and she was struggling to be able to make ends meet. And as a result, she was being forced to make decisions between paying her rent or buying the food she wanted to buy, and she wanted to know if there was anything that our office could do to support her.

And sadly, Madam Speaker, while we worked to do what we could to identify programs and other supports that she might look to for some help, there really wasn't a lot that we could offer her in the way of actual day-to-day assistance with helping her to meet her cost of living.

That is a story that is common in my community in St. James, which has a lot of working-class families, and I think that's a story that's very common across all of Manitoba, and it's especially true today, Madam Speaker.

And that's why this resolution that we're bringing forward, which calls on this government to take action to improve the affordability of life in this province, is such an important one. And I hope that today this discussion over the next hour leads this government to want to actually take real action to try to improve affordability here in Manitoba for families.

The costs of living in this province, as everyone here knows, are going up, and they are going up across not only Manitoba and Canada, but they're going up across many parts across the world.

We've seen inflation recently in January as high as 5.1 per cent, which is a massive increase. We haven't seen inflation like that in over 30 years.

Studies are showing that over half of Canadians are stating that they're unable to keep up with the costs of living. We're seeing, again, food costs are skyrocketing and Manitoba harvest is reporting that hamper deliveries and the requests for hampers are at an all-time high. Families are struggling to be able to

afford food and basic vegetables, milk and the things that they need.

Fuel costs are up more than 30 per cent, again, something that almost—well, vast majority of families in Manitoba are forced to deal with, and that's leading to cost increases over the next year, potentially as high as \$1,000; of money that many families don't have. And we can only expect those costs to stay in place and continue to be high for the foreseeable future.

And, of course, the conflict in Ukraine is going to lead to other supply chain disruptions, especially as it relates to the cost of grain, and Manitobans can expect to see the cost of basic food and especially bread and other grain-based food items to continue to go up.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Unfortunately, while all of these costs are going up around us, the one thing that isn't going up are wages and the revenues that are coming in for average families in Manitoba.

The last minimum wage increase that was brought forward by this government was only 5 cents, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Seniors and people on fixed incomes are seeing their revenues stagnate. Our EIA program isn't indexed in this province; it's not indexed to inflation.

So if you're a single individual in this province on EIA and you're getting \$195 a month, you're still getting \$195 a month today, even though all of your costs have gone up. And people are barely getting by on those EIA benefits as it stands.

So the average Manitoban is way worse off today, especially as a result of the decisions being made by this government, than they were five years ago, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, and that is a massive concern. Revenues are stagnant and we're not seeing this government take the action needed to help make life more affordable in this province.

In fact, instead of working to make life more affordable, what we've seen is actions that will make life more expensive for the average Manitoban and will make life harder for people like the individual that came to my office looking for help, desperately seeking some type of assistance to help her get through the month that she was facing.

We can look—what they've done in a number of different areas, but, of course, one of the biggest areas of concern—and a real issue that I would really urge the members across the way here to really think about, speaking with the Minister responsible for Hydro and

engaging him in a conversation about this—is the work that this government has done to raise hydro rates.

We've seen, over the last five years, increases of 16 per cent. We've seen this government legislate a hydro rate increase for the first time in this province's history, and they tried to do the same thing again, but they backed away from it at the last second.

We know that Manitobans are struggling, but we're seeing again this continued push to raise hydro rates even further. We're seeing more people in arrears than we've ever seen before in this province. An additional 2,000 people were put into arrears on their hydro bills just in the last few months alone. We've now got 80,000 Manitobans who are in arrears on their hydro bills.

And, you know, in—May 15th, it's possible that a lot of those Manitobans will see their hydro shut down, that they won't have power. Is that their fault, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker? Is it their fault that they can't afford to pay for their hydro when those rates have gone up and up and up, when their incomes have not gone up as much?

I would argue that is not their fault, and that we should be doing what's necessary to protect those Manitobans for having that power shut off, and we should be doing what's necessary to help them to avoid that type of a situation.

Now, in addition to raising hydro rates over the last several years and legislating increases, we've seen them bring forward a bill—Bill 36, which I had the honour of offering some words on yesterday in debate, that is focussed on raising hydro rates as quickly as possible.

This bill is a rehash of the bill that they abandoned, thanks to an outcry from Manitobans and thanks to the work of our caucus last fall—or last year. And this is a bill that ultimately removes rate setting from an independently managed process and moves it over to the Cabinet table.

And it asks Manitobans to trust that this government is going to do what's right, that they're going to set rates at a fair and manageable level, when we know that this government has a history of trying to raise rates as high as possible.

They're removing our advocate that ensures that we don't overpay for hydro in this province. No matter what they say, no matter how they try to spin it, the bill they're bringing forward eliminates independent oversight and it eliminates that advocate that we all

have that's there working in our interests to protect us from hydro rate increases that go beyond what's necessary.

We shouldn't be weakening the role of a consumer advocate in the midst of an affordability crisis. That is absolutely the wrong direction to be going. And I'd love to know, again, what the constituents of members opposite have to say about the fact that they're removing that advocate that we all have, that protects us from unnecessarily high hydro rate increases. And we know that this is going to lead almost inevitably to 5 per cent rate increases year after year after year once that—those measures are put in place.

* (11:10)

Manitobans can't sustain that. The individual that came to my office is a great example of that, of the struggles that a lot of Manitobans are facing. Their revenues are staying the same, their income is staying the same, their minimum wage rates aren't going up, and yet everything is going up. And the things that are within the control of our provincial government—hydro, MPI, university tuition—all these different things that are actually within the control of our provincial government are not going up.

We need to ensure that we look out for everyday Manitobans. We need this government to take action where it can. It can't solve all of these issues but there are a lot of key costs that can be minimized or frozen if this government chose to take the action that needs to be taken.

So we call on them to do what's needed to improve affordability in this province. I appreciate the chance to speak to this resolution, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held, and questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another party; any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): The member for St. James (Mr. Sala) insisted we sent the last rate increase to the PUB and now he seems to complain about the decision reached by the Public Utilities Board.

Do the members opposite not support the impartial work of the PUB?

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I thank the member opposite for the question. It's a strange question because it's coming from a member of a party that is actually working to dismantle the role of the Public Utilities Board.

So the question is embarrassing in that this bill that this government is bringing forward actually does away with the role of the Public Utilities Board as an independent rate setter, and I look forward to speaking with the member opposite afterwards if he wants some clarity on why that's the case but it's a strange question.

We firmly support the role of an independent reviewer of rates in the Public Utilities Board.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I mean, we've seen this government raise hydro rates. We've seen them make life less affordable for Manitobans by only increasing the minimum wage by a nickel, 5 cents.

And so I ask the member, can you tell us a little bit about what you've heard from stakeholders and from constituents about the affordability crisis?

Mr. Sala: I thank my colleague for that really important question.

Look, I think myself, and I'm sure all my colleagues—and I would think the members across the way here—are hearing the same thing, and that is Manitobans are struggling right now more than ever, and that's because their hydro bills are going up, that's because their rental costs are skyrocketing because of out-of-control above-guideline rent increases. Their MPI costs are going up; their children's university tuition is going up. People are struggling.

So this government needs to look at those costs that are within their control and they need to take action to bring those costs down.

So I thank the member for the question, and we really need to see action and improving affordability in this province.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Yes, can the member opposite explain if they understand the difference between a maximum and minimum, since in Bill 36—our government recently debated—clearly states hydro rates will be only allowed to be raised to a maximum of 5 per cent or the consumer price index, whichever is lower.

This fact seems to confuse the member opposite.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the question.

I think the member opposite is actually the one who's confused here because there doesn't seem to be clarity on—from members opposite—about what this bill seeks to achieve. It seeks to tie a rate setting to debt-to-equity targets that are unachievably high, and that will require Hydro to drastically increase the amount of revenue that they bring in.

And the only way they can do that is by raising rates as quickly as possible, and that is very likely to result in the maximum 5 per cent rate increase that this legislation purports to cap things at, to be hit, year after year, after year.

That's going to be a problem for the average Manitoban.

Mr. Moses: We've learned just recently that 80,000 customers are behind on their hydro bills—2,000 of which, just in the last few months.

I'd like to ask the member, have you seen from this government any ability to address the concerns of those who struggle to afford to pay their Manitoba Hydro bills?

Mr. Sala: Yes, I really appreciate the question. And this particular concern, which is that we've seen a lot of Manitobans fall into arrears, especially over the last few months—2,000 additional Manitobans, in fact, falling into arrears—is a huge concern. Those individuals, those are—we've now got 80,000 Manitobans that are in arrears.

All of these people are now facing the potential of having their hydro cut off, and that's in large part due to the fact that this government legislated hydro rate increases and that they've continue to raise hydro rates at a time when Manitobans are struggling.

You know, it would be great to see this government look to take measures to protect those Manitobans who've fallen into arrears to guarantee they won't have their hydro shut off, but as of yet, we haven't heard anything from this government that would suggest they're seeking to give them those protections.

Mr. Nesbitt: Can the member for St. James explain if he or his party has a plan to eliminate Manitoba Hydro debt, which was added to considerably during the time his party was in power, rather than using the non-partisan Public Utilities Board?

Mr. Sala: Yes, I appreciate the question.

The question, you know, of managing Hydro debt is, of course, an important one. Fortunately, the Public Utilities Board has done the important work. We saw in the needs-for-and-alternatives-to in 2014 that they had laid out exactly how Hydro could about managing their debt and exactly how that should be approached.

That is something that we've seen the Public Utilities Board do analysis of, and we trust the work of that independent regulator. On this side of the House, we trust that they can be trusted to do the analysis necessary to help Hydro develop a plan to deal with that debt.

So we need to look to that independent regulator. They're the experts, not members of this—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

Mr. Moses: We know this government has made life more challenging when it comes to the affordability crisis. We've seen them not address the housing crisis, not address affordability when it comes to transportation costs.

We also know that they make like more difficult when it comes to hydro rates and fees. We see that there was a without-cost-to-Manitobans guideline given when it comes to the Xplornet contract and that provision was removed.

I ask the member, what does that tell you that this government thinks about a cost to Manitobans when it comes to hydro, with respect to the fact that they removed the without-cost-to-Manitobans provision on the Xplornet deal?

Mr. Sala: I thank my colleague for that important question, and what he's referencing is the fact that the Xplornet deal that was made by this government where they gave away access to our publicly owned fibre-optic infrastructure.

We know that this government had suggested that there was going to be no cost to Manitobans in this deal. Later, language was removed from a Cabinet directive that suggested that they recognize there, in fact, would be cost to Manitobans.

Those costs are costs that will be put back onto our hydro bills and that, ultimately, Manitobans are going to carry. So that's a real concern for all Manitobans. It should be a concern for the minister responsible for that deal, that his government actually is going to be bringing additional costs to Manitobans through their giving away of those assets, but that's something that we've—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wowchuk: Can the member opposite explain why the NDP government didn't bring this resolution forward when the NDP increased hydro rates 11 times in 12 years? Kind of look at it as putting the fox in the chicken coop, here.

* (11:20)

Mr. Sala: I'm a little confused, admittedly, by the question.

And it is hard to bring forward a resolution when I wasn't in the Chamber at that time, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, but, you know, we're not looking backwards, we're here today. We're here today and Manitobans are facing greater affordability challenges than ever before.

So, instead of looking backwards and, you know, trying to accuse us of not taking action 15 years ago, the government should just look in the mirror today and say, what can we do to help Manitobans? What can we do to reduce the cost of living so that Manitobans can have an affordable quality of life?

Mr. Moses: Mr. Deputy Speaker, under this government, under this PC government, college and university costs have increased by 18 per cent just in the last three years, 18 per cent under the last three years for university prints. And each—students at university also pay their hydro bills, and that's why I want to know that the review that was done by Manitoba Hydro by Brad Wall failed to account for the \$5 billion for Saskatchewan.

How does that impact ratepayers, including university students who continue to face higher tuition under this PC government?

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the question.

It is important that we do talk about the million dollars that was spent on this review that was conducted by not one, but two, ex-Conservative premiers. So, you know, a wildly partisan report which was authored by their friends which, of course, conveniently ignored the fact that we sold \$5 billion in electricity to Saskatchewan.

So, you know, the members opposite don't like to reveal that actually the investments that we've made in Keeyask are bringing Manitobans—already bringing Manitobans massive economic benefits and that they'll continue to bring us economic benefits going

forward, and that will help to keep rates low. Members opposite want to ignore that.

That infrastructure will serve us for years to come and will contribute to bringing more—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

The floor is now open for debate. [*interjection*] Oh—time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The floor is now open for debate.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): It's my pleasure to put some comments on the record. I'm always pleased to speak on any resolution brought forward by the NDP party on the subject of affordability to Manitobans.

We always—we understand that it must be a very difficult thing for the NDP right now, try to distance themselves from the legacy overspend of Keeyask, Bipole III, the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission line—project costs that went over budget by \$4 billion. These are projects that the NDP spent \$1.2 billion on before actually receiving project approval. They were projects that went around processes that were designed to ensure that the project was needed, and at that time that process is called the NFAT review. It—they skirted other approval areas.

I can recall, as a newer legislator in this place in 2014 when the NDP presented a budget estimate of Keeyask, and even at that time they knowingly understated that cost by more than \$1 billion. Why? Because they did not want Manitobans to know that the business case for those projects at that time with those control budgets was eroding and eroding and eroding. But they went at it anyways. They insisted on building these things.

But it was more than that, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. What they did is they sold to Manitobans the narrative that Manitobans wouldn't be on the hook for the costs. They said that Manitobans wouldn't have to pay for the costs of Keeyask and Bipole III. They used 'terminology' like Manitoba's oil, that electricity was Manitoba's oil and that others would buy it. And it is true that we've got contracts in place for export sale, we have for years and years and years. But that's a very different thing to say that it would account for all of the cost of the dams.

What we have before us today is a resolution which is absurd, because it is by an NDP party who raised hydro rates every single year when they were in government, sometimes by 5 per cent in a single year. In fact, in the time they were in office, those rates accumulated, came to 35 per cent. But that doesn't take into effect the cost of compounding, fully compounding; that rate increase is 41 per cent.

So today the NDP present a resolution to this Legislature that says hydro shouldn't go up—ever. And yet the NDP raised hydro each and every year by significant amounts. So I guess this resolution is subtitled, please do that which we never did. And I can speak to that resolution, the please do that which we never did, because that's a resolution that actually bears out. It really creates the distinction between that party and this one, because on affordability, we have a credible record where they have a record without any credibility.

You know, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, since 2016 when we were elected, we made pledges to roll back taxes for Manitobans by 2020. That meant by the year 2020, that we would actually—by the year 2022, we would see a tax rollback that was more than \$2,000 toward the average Manitoban.

And I can tell you that we're on track. I can tell you and remind you that we lowered the PST, the provincial sales tax, from 8 per cent to 7 per cent, and of course that's meant hundreds of millions of dollars in the pockets of Manitobans.

But I remember being a newer legislator here. When the NDP raised the PST, it wasn't just that mechanism, because in the year prior to doing that, they widened the PST. I believe it was 2012, and they widened the PST to take in whole areas that had never been subject to provincial tax before: things like haircuts and personal services, insurances. At the same time, the same year, they actually brought in a new surcharge for your vehicle registration.

But the insipid thing was that then the next year, when they raised the PST, they were also—having already broadened it—bringing in much more revenue than they otherwise would have done. But the real catastrophe was that they told Manitobans they wouldn't do it. In that lead-up to the 2011 election, their premier, their members, all said it was nonsense. They said it was folly; they said it was ridiculous; they would never do it. Then they broke their word and did it.

Why? Well, because they had lost their willingness or intent to manage the finances of Manitoba in a way which was sustainable. So, as a classic NDP, they simply went back to their old tax-and-spend ways.

But we know that what creates sustainability for Manitoba families, for Manitoba businesses that are looking to grow, is actually stability, is actually being able to make good investments in health, education, social services, infrastructure, but doing it in a way that does not threaten that stability, that that's the responsibility of government, to be able to reduce taxes to give Manitobans more money in their own pockets, and then to be able to sustain these finances, to attract new businesses, to grow the economy, and that's what we've been doing.

Just a few high points along this way. I would be remiss if I didn't mention, we've been reducing those vehicle registration fees that the NDP increased. We're 20 per cent of the way there, and stay tuned for Budget 2022, which will come up next Tuesday. We eliminated probate fees. We've been eliminating and phasing out education property taxes.

In one year alone, we've sent out more than 450,000 cheques to Manitobans, almost a quarter of a billion dollars back to Manitobans. *[interjection]* And while they heckle, because we know they don't like this—we know they don't like this, because what it meant is that every Manitoban was paying less. We were leaving more money in the pockets. So no wonder the NDP would heckle me now, because we know that their tax-and-spend ways do not support Manitobans, leaving more money in their own pockets.

I guess what the NDP is saying, the member for Transcona is saying, is that he wants Manitobans to pay more education property tax. He knows that member was in education for years. He knows that Manitoba is the outlier. No other province funds education on the ratio that Manitoba does. *[interjection]*

* (11:30)

The member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) chortles and laughs on his side, but he also knows that no other province has arranged their finances in such a way that that ratio of funding would go to fund education.

So what are we doing? We're fixing it, and we're leaving more money in the pockets of Manitobans. And I say, stay tuned for more examples of Manitoba's affordability.

Just a word or two about hydro, and then I'll wrap up. On hydro: so the NDP say, don't raise hydro rates; they raised them every single year. They say somehow we shouldn't.

But let's remember that the overspend on Keeyask and bipole—almost \$4 billion; \$1.2 billion spent by the NDP before they even got permission to spend. The amounts of increases and overspend hidden from Manitobans in full view: hidden in budgets, hidden from Public Accounts, hidden from the Auditor General—and those investigations will go on for a long time.

I continue to say, and Manitobans continue to understand, that the NDP mismanagement of Hydro is the economic scandal of the 20th century in Manitoba. History will bear this out. For the NDP to pretend, somehow, that we can—that we have no responsibility to stabilize Manitoba Hydro is simply putting their heads into the sand.

My government believes in a strong and public Manitoba Hydro, but we believe that we must stabilize Hydro where the NDP threatened it; and by threatening it, they threatened that affordability advantage to all Manitoba ratepayers.

We will get that affordability advantage back. We will stabilize Hydro. We will give a broad and appropriate mandate to the PUB. We will make sure—in the legislation that I had an opportunity to debate yesterday in the House—we will make sure that the PUB has the authority to make sure that Manitobans can never be hoodwinked again on a major capital Hydro project by an NDP government, who we all know will do it again. If given the opportunity, they will do it again; they will overspend, they will hide costs and they will put Manitobans behind the eight ball when it comes to affordability.

We care about the low rates. Manitoba is No. 2 in all of North America for the lowest rates in hydro. We care about that; we care about maintaining that. Their failure to support that legislation essentially means they support higher rates annually for Manitobans, and they support—what—well, what would they support then? They would support rates higher than 5 per cent.

Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this resolution this morning, a resolution that should be called, please do what we never did.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): You know, the pandemic calls upon governments to be creative in

how we emerge out of the pandemic, how we support our citizens that put us in this place.

It doesn't call upon old PC talking points, right? It calls for bold action and an awareness, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, of a crisis that many Manitoba families are facing right now.

I want to thank the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) for bringing forth this particular piece of legislation, this resolution, because it indicates what's happening to Manitoba families, to Manitobans, right now, at this very moment.

That's what governments are supposed to do: know what's happening, understand the real issues—affordability—that people are facing every day.

I can tell you, in Transcona, there is a crisis in affordable child-care space. I will say that a recent signing of a \$10-a-day daycare in Manitoba, we still don't see any real plan coming forward to deal with the staff crisis, to deal with just the sheer volume of spaces that are needed, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, to deal and tackle with this program.

I will say that there are many daycares in Transcona, and I would say, in all of our jurisdictions and constituencies, that have wait-lists that are hundreds-deep. And we have yet to see a plan from this government that outlines how they're going to deal with the capital costs, how they're going to deal with attracting more people to that particular profession, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

And this adds to—added stress on top of the pandemic that people are feeling, especially constituencies where you have working families—working families like many of us do. And what they're telling us is when they're contacting their MLAs, they're contacting me, they're saying, what am I going to do for a child-care space? Where am I going to find an affordable child-care space?

And these are issues that need to be tackled right now, because in order to emerge from the pandemic, to have equal participation in an economy where everyone has the opportunity to better themselves, to better their families, you have to have access to services like child care, ready access to child care that's close to home.

And we've been waiting for years, now, since 2016, I believe, to have a real, credible plan to deal with these—not only wait-lists but also space crunch that we're facing right now, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. And that needs to be dealt with. Calling this

bill absurd, as the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) did, is an insult to Manitobans that are facing this crisis, right now.

Affordability—when we talk about something as simple as ensuring that we have a competitive minimum wage with other parts of the country, that would put more money into the pockets of people that are working two or three jobs just to make ends meet so they don't have to make the impossible decision of either putting food on the table or paying rent. And these are the real crises that people are facing right now, and we have to deal with that. We have to ensure that when we have our communities that our communities are properly supported. Because I can tell you that when you have communities like the communities out in northeast Winnipeg that right now are facing a crisis in access to quality, accessible child care, that has to be dealt with. And that's part of this affordability crisis.

But I want to go back to the minimum wage structure and something called a living wage. Because I will tell you, when a person is forced to work two or three jobs just to get to a living part, that's a problem. That's a problem because families are unable to have that work—that cherished work-life balance that we talk about that is important to Manitobans. Instead, we have—and I had this in many of my schools—parents working 14 to 16 hours a day, running from—back and forth from job to job, in order to put food on the table. We're talking about a crisis here that is not going unnoticed because we hear about it all the time.

So, again, I want to thank the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) for bringing this forward because this is putting voice to the people that are impacted every day by the decisions made by this government. Now, here's another example where the pandemic has challenged us to come up with innovative solutions. What did we notice when we went to remote learning? What we noticed was there is a digital divide in Manitoba that exists, not only in rural Manitoba, but especially in northern Manitoba.

I know the member from Flin Flon, the member from The Pas-Kameesak, the member from Keewatinook often talk about a digital divide that exists in this province. And we had an opportunity with the Manitoba Hydro fibre-optic network, a backbone that runs right from Winnipeg straight up through the Nelson River right up to Gillam, Manitoba. It's like a spine, a fibre-optic spine, where we could've had access to those services, a plan put

forward by government in order to close that divide that would help with the affordability crisis.

Instead, they have to make the impossible decisions, the people in rural and in northern Manitoba, on whether or not they want some kind of Internet, or do they put food on the table, or do they pay the rent or do they have to pay these higher gas prices?

* (11:40)

So what this does, this particular piece of legislation brought forward by the member from St. James, is that it calls on government to become creative, to ensure that they're listening to Manitobans so that we can make life more affordable.

And the way we do that is by ensuring that we have access to quality adult education that is funded properly instead of ad hoc here and there, depending out—a particular school division you're in. Because we know that education is the pathway to a better life.

And this is an opportunity that I fear is being missed right now by this government, to realize that when you're providing adult education opportunities as outlined by Jim Silver in his report of two months ago, where he specifically stated: the return on investment is not only people paying taxes, but also people having self-worth, the dignity of being able to live comfortably in a province that is rich not only in resources but also desire but also rich in needing to and wanting to be and improving their particular lifestyles.

Again, opportunities—pandemic has provided that. What have we had from this government? I don't know. We got bill 71, bill 71 that was intended to prop up the sagging poll numbers of a failed premier. Manitobans saw through that. They had to borrow \$244 million without a plan on how they're going to fund public education.

Actually, we do have a plan. The plan is—and it's outlined and framed every year since 2016—cut the provincial share of public education systematically: 2016, 62.4 per cent; right now, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, down to 58.2 per cent. That tells you exactly where their priorities are.

So again, when we have the member from St. James having the courage to come here and put voice to the many concerns that I briefly touched upon, I want to commend that member because that's our job here in the Legislature—is to bring voice to the concerns of everyday Manitobans.

And I will say, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, this side of the House will continue to do that every day when we show up to work, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister responsible for Efficiency Manitoba): Certainly, again, it is an honour and a privilege to rise in this House and have the opportunity to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, certainly, I thank the member for the resolution that he's brought forward today. And there have been a number of times where we've had the opportunity, the member from St. James and I, to have discussions with respect to maybe similar ideas, and particularly with Manitoba Hydro, and talk about energy as we go forward through a very sensitive time in energy, particularly in a new strategy and how that'll look and how we will move forward with things like hydrogen and other things.

So, certainly, I appreciate the member bringing this forward, but there are some areas in this resolution that I certainly don't agree with the member, and I would like to highlight a couple of them.

Whereas January 22nd, Canada's annual inflation rate reached 5.1 per cent, I agree. Inflation rate has—had not been higher for over 30 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that not only Manitobans but Canadians are hurting when it comes to this current inflation rate. As we come out of the pandemic, Manitobans have been really feeling the pinch.

Again, whereas recent studies have shown that more than half or 53 per cent of Canadians say that they can't keep up with the cost of living, and seven in 10 Canadians report being stressed about money, and inflation rates continue to grow. Again, I will agree with the member from St. James. Absolutely, I'm hearing it, I'm sure he's hearing it at the constituency level as well. And certainly, as representatives of our constituencies, it's our job to advocate for them and that's exactly what we do every day in this House.

And for those couple of comments in this resolution, I agree with the member, but that's where it ends, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I cannot continue to agree with what the member from St. James has brought forward.

Effectively, the member is stating that, you know, he's saying that government is essentially putting—setting hydro rates. Well, that's totally untrue, the member knows that. We've had several discussions at the table and talked about affordability with respect to Manitoba Hydro, and the member knows the history

of the NDP when it come to areas like Bipole III and Keeyask.

The member, I would assume, as well, has been able to read a little bit of the Wall report for some good, light reading to really shed some light on some of the challenges that Manitoba ratepayers and Manitoba Hydro will continue to endeavour over the coming decades and future to say, generations, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We know, in particular, when it came to cost overruns in, essentially with bipole and Keeyask three–bipole and Keeyask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that the previous government had decided to build Keeyask and it was locked in, no matter what the market conditions dictated. We know and the member knows that in—when we look at what was happening down in the northern states where this power was dedicated to go to, we know that there were a number of other areas being looked at through the northern Minnesota and South Dakota and North Dakota, where we know that fracking was ramping up at that time.

We know that alternative energies were being looked at, as well, and certainly the member and the former NDP government knew that was happening but chose to ignore those red flags that constantly popped up in—right in front of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They saw them, they chose not to act on them, and hence we ended up with a number of cost overruns.

We know that Bipole III and Keeyask cost was estimated \$13.3 billion. *[interjection]* We know that they went over it \$3.7 billion. And I know the member from Concordia doesn't want to hear this because he was one of the only representatives at the time that sat in that government, that made those poor decisions that will affect generations of Manitobans when it comes to affordability, and when the member from Concordia knows, I'm sure he'll admit to it at some point, that it was truly a mistake on behalf of the former NDP government to move forward with that process.

Keeyask also cost \$8.7 billion, \$2.2 billion over budget. We know, again, the boondoggle and the issue that that'll cause Manitoba ratepayers.

Essentially, they misled Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know, massive infrastructure project that they took on, and again, we also know that Manitoba—or, the NDP felt that Manitoba Hydro, they owned

Manitoba Hydro, they forgot who the real owners of Manitoba Hydro is, and that's Manitobans.

We know that. We know that the debt right now at Manitoba Hydro has tripled. Tripled—and the members know that, they understand that, I'm sure, but are not willing to acknowledge it publicly, because of mistakes they made when they moved forward, fast-tracking Bipole III and Keeyask to affect generations as we move forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and come out of COVID knowing that hydro rates are going to be an issue going forward based on their incompetence.

Again, pleased to also support the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and Bill 36. We know that, going forward, Bill 36 will culminate a number of areas to ensure that the Public Utilities Board has more insight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on future general rate applications. On a go-forward, they'll be able to have better informed decisions and make decisions on behalf of the owners of Manitoba Hydro—again, Manitobans.

We know that multi-year general rate applications will save tens of millions of dollars to Manitoba ratepayers, and ensure that three-year general rate applications or five-year general rate applications—we're not—we're saving upwards of \$10 million annually in ratepayers' money, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that that equates to almost a half a point when it comes to rate increases, so if we can find a way, and the Public Utilities Board can find a way to make that happen, that's exactly what their mandate is to do: to protect Manitobans.

* (11:50)

I know the member from St. James stands up and talks about that all the time. We agree that Public Utilities Board is going to ensure that Manitoba ratepayers are protected, and we certainly do support that, and Bill 36 supports that initiative as well.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a number of other areas, and I wish I had about an hour to speak, but I certainly will get through some of these important areas again so that we can move on.

We know that affordability was a part of the resolution brought forward by the member from St. James, and we know that, under their management of Manitoba Hydro, we know that hydro rates are going to be a challenge on a go-forward, and certainly the Public Utilities Board will be able to mitigate some of those challenges, we hope, under Bill 36.

We know that when it comes to affordability, the NDP are devoid of any common sense when it—with respect to that, simply because of—they're the tax, tax, tax party of Manitoba. We know that—and I know the members love to hear this but—we know the members raised the PST, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from 7 to 8 per cent. We know what happened when they raised it from 7 to 8 per cent. We know that there was obviously some issues within their party and there still is, with the team that they acquire to have, but we know that there's issues. There was issues then, there continues to be issues. It looks like we went from 7 to 8 per cent, and then what happened next? They broadened—they broadened the PST.

We know—and here we go, we know that they're—they don't like to hear that because they do start talking amongst each other, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they know there's fractions within that party over there. But we know that they broadened the PST to things like haircuts. They talk about affordability for families and seniors. Oh my gosh, added the PST to a haircut. Imagine? They talk about affordability, yet they go ahead, they talk out one side and plug another 1 per cent—or 8 per cent, in this case—on haircuts.

They also talk about small business. Well what did they do when they raised and broadened the PST in small business, Mr. Deputy Speaker? They charged insurance—they charged PST on insurance for—and benefits for companies, including their employees. So now, when that employee—when that employer of small- or medium-sized business goes out and wants to hire more people, they have to think twice because now they have to pay an extra 8 per cent—8 per cent on things like benefits, dental wear, eyewear, you name it. And being a former business owner myself, I know the challenges that—when the NDP upped taxes on small- and medium-sized business and have no focus on what the employers do throughout Manitoba, the engine of Manitoba.

So, with those few comments, I see I'm already running out of time. It's too bad because I know the members would love to listen to me chat all day on their inability to take care of Manitobans when it comes to affordability. I can tell the members opposite that this government is focused on that and will continue to be focused on that. And I thank the time today to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We can absolutely agree with the principle of this, that the provincial government should not be raising hydro

rates. And there is no question that they have been because they put it in the budget. They did an end run around the PUB, and this is something that in previous years would have been described as a shocking intrusion on the independence of the PUB.

It's not something new. Back in 2003, Gary Doer had problems with the PUB and wanted to reduce the amount of costs that in—that are involved. But the fact is it's a, frankly, a very questionable thing to be saying we need to be spending less money with the PUB in order to prevent massive cost overruns in the tens of—in the billions of dollars.

So the idea that we're going to get some sort of benefit by choking off resources to the PUB as—which has been suggested, or as is being proposed under the current bill, is a big mistake.

Look, and we also know, like, in 2007 it was known that energy efficiency alone was enough to prevent having to build Keeyask. That was known in 2007, it wasn't a—it was—it wasn't a question. That's the reason why we have Efficiency Manitoba even though we built Keeyask anyway.

But over the last 10 years—it's completely disingenuous to suggest that the PC government hasn't been taking money out of Hydro because in the last 10 years, of \$10 billion in debt, the Manitoba government took out \$4 billion, and about \$2 billion of that was under the NDP government, and \$2 billion of it was under the PC government, and they are taking out more because the more debt that Hydro gets into, the more the government takes out.

But the PUB, in 2018, said, stop taking all that money out. We would not have to have the kind of the level of rates that we're seeing because what's been happening is that the Manitoba government has been putting its debt on Hydro's credit card. That is what's been happening.

And they've been taking cash out of Hydro in exchange, and that's an incredibly risky thing, because we now have a provincial utility with revenue of \$2 billion a year that has a debt of over \$20 billion, that rivals that of the entire government.

And the government can raise taxes. The government can get new transfers. But we're still putting Hydro at risk by bleeding it dry and taking money out of it, and adding to its debt. That is a government decision that should have stopped a long time ago because there's no justification for the water rent—the level of water rentals, the debt guarantee fee and the capital tax.

Now, we would like to ensure that this comes to a vote, I do believe that this is worth supporting. But the fact is, is that when I hear the debates back and forth, it's not as if either of these parties has been terribly friendly to Manitoba Hydro, and the decisions made by this government have been catastrophic.

The one thing you can say about the NDP is that the entire Hydro board never resigned under the NDP. And under the NDP, I will also say that there were never multiple credit downgrades, because this government was deciding to cut taxes in a way that they were signalling to markets—international markets—that this Province is not going to be able to pay its bills in a crisis. Those were under—that was under the PC government.

I mean, the fact is, is that it's one of these things is—the end, they can always say yes to be—it's an argument about two wrongs not making a right. And if they want to talk about all the times that hydro rates went up under the PUB, as determined by the PUB under the NDP, the fact is that nine wrongs don't make a right, either.

We need to be focused on making sure that people can actually have affordable hydro rates because that hasn't happened, because Hydro has been used as a piggybank. It's been used as a credit card. Even worse, it's been used as a credit card to—for—and people—for the government to take out cash withdrawals for about 20 years. And it's going to—and there was a real risk.

The reason that Hydro board quit was because of an existential crisis, and there was one thing I'll say, is that the risk of privatization is low because no one will want to buy a company with that much debt, unless it is possibly in—and that is the sad reality.

That is the state of the utility that people call our Crown jewel. It has really been abused. The workers have been mistreated and there's all sorts of other stuff that needs to be done in—for—in terms of Hydro justice for Hydro-affected communities up north. And having 5 per cent increases for people when there are people, especially in rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba, who have no choice. They cannot switch to anything

else. They depend on electricity. They will be—they risk being broken by these issues.

So, frankly, this is a—there is lots that this government could have done and should be doing to keep rates low, to keep people employed at Hydro and keep investing. And unfortunately, they've just dropped the ball, but we will support this.

Thank you.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I know I only have a couple of minutes here so I'm just going to put a few key messages on the record here that—I just want to tell everyone that our government understands that Manitoba Hydro's low energy rates here in Manitoba are certainly great for the population, for business and consumers alike, and that, you know, this advantage has been put at risk by the mismanagement in the past; the overruns on Keeyask and bipole, which now we're debating how we're going to pay for moving forward.

And there's no question we're going to have to pay for them. I guess it's a question of how many generations are going to have to pay for them and how quickly we pay for them, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

So, members opposite, you know, continue to speak about affordability, and I think that all Manitobans recognize that we are the government that has cut taxes over the past five years and that the opposition was the government that raised taxes.

So, Bill 36, here, will put a cap on hydro rate increases but also do the necessary work to stabilize Manitoba Hydro for future generations. Bill 36 expands the role of the PUB to oversee and advise on future large infrastructure projects in order to prevent the rampant partisanship we saw exercised in the past.

This bill also establishes reasonable debt-to-equity—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Riding Mountain will have eight minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 p.m., the House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 7, 2022

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