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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 21, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone.

Before we begin this afternoon, we have to take a five-minute recess. Due to some technical issues, we have to reboot the camera system, so it'll be a five-minute recess and then we'll begin again.

One-minute bell will sound before we start.

The House recessed at 1:31 p.m.

The House resumed at 1:48 p.m.

The Speaker: I'd like to thank everyone for their patience. We are now ready to proceed.

And before we get to the normal business, we have some special business to tend to.

The honourable Government House Leader—please be seated, everyone.

The honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): I have a series of leave requests for the House.

Could you please canvass the House for leave to allow the honourable First Minister to make a statement to the House, without responses, before commencing with routine proceedings. The purpose of this statement will be to offer an apology on behalf of the Manitoba government to Edward Ambrose and Richard Beauvais.

Then, Honourable Speaker, can you please canvass the House for leave to allow Edward Ambrose and Richard Beauvais to be seated on the floor of the House for the statement.

Lastly, can you please canvass the House for leave to have a 15-minute recess—[interjection]—or 10-minute recess, at the conclusion of the statement.

The Speaker: Is there leave to allow the honourable First Minister to make a statement to the House, without responses, before commencing routine procedures? Is there leave? [Agreed]

Is there leave to allow Edward Ambrose and Richard Beauvais to be seated on the floor of the House for the statement? Is there leave? [Agreed]

Lastly, is there leave to have a 10-minute recess at the conclusion of the statement? Is there leave? [Agreed]

Please be seated.

* (13:50)

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I would like to draw attention to all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery first, where we have with us today Eileen Ambrose, Tyrell Trinidad, Taryn Beauvais, Evelyn Stocki, Kurt Stocki, Judy Dunn, Maurice Dunn, Bill Gange and our very special guests seated on the floor of the Chamber today, Richard Beauvais and Edward Ambrose.

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

GOVERNMENT STATEMENT

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Honourable Speaker, we are sometimes asked to understand empathy and compassion by considering what it's like to walk a mile in another person's shoes. And if that statement is true, that teaching is correct in our honoured guests here today, who perhaps understand compassion and empathy on a level that very few of us will ever be able to approach. Such is the distance that each of them has walked in another's shoes.

I rise today to deliver an apology that has been a long time coming for actions that harmed two children, two sets of parents and two families across many generations. I want to welcome two people born in Manitoba to the Legislature today, and it's the circumstances around their birth that sent each of them on a journey that is now bringing them home.

Mr. Edward Ambrose and Mr. Richard Beauvais have come to this Legislature seeking something that has been owed to them for 68 years. In fact, it's been owed to them their entire lives. Ed and Richard are here today as two people wronged by the Manitoba government and the institutions they should have been able to trust.

They were wronged from the very first day each of them arrived here on earth at a hospital in Arborg. On that first day, Ed and Richard were switched at birth. Each was brought home to the other's family in towns some 100 kilometres apart. In one moment, the

lives they were supposed to grow into were uprooted and planted into the other's. This was a failure of the system that would go unrecognized for decades.

Now, the story of their families are ones which are familiar to many of us as Manitobans: one child raised as part of the Ukrainian community in the farming town of Rembrandt, the other raised in the Métis community by his mother and grandparents, alongside siblings in St. Laurent—both living through the joy and grief unique to the lives that they were transported into.

For Eddy, spent his early years on the family farm, going to picnics and listening to Ukrainian folk songs before bed. He went on to grieve the loss of both of his parents by the young age of 12.

For Richard, who grew up speaking Cree and French at home, was left to care for his siblings at far too young an age. He grieved the loss of his dad, his grandparents and a life that was impacted by day school and trauma passed down through the generations.

Both boys ended up moving between foster homes, and I imagine that they struggled to make sense of the world around them at many times over the years. Remarkably, throughout these years, their lives found a way of overlapping time and time again. They were connected without knowing it.

There was a time when, as a child on the playground, Eddy asked a girl from a few towns over to be on his baseball team at recess, not knowing she was actually his biological sister.

And, as a young boy, Richard's love of fishing, as a teenager, actually, brought him to the same shore as his biological sister who was casting beside him in British Columbia. Years later, when Richard stopped in at a bar, it turned out to be the same place that that same woman worked. And he sat there, not knowing that she was, in fact, his sister.

It was a fact that, for many years, Eddy's biological sister has, up until very recently, lived just a few blocks away from him.

Even though there were so many times when they could have crossed paths, it would take almost seven decades for them to meet, when Richard was three provinces over, working as a captain of a deep-sea fishing vessel on the West Coast, and Eddy was here in Winnipeg, retired and caring for his grandchildren.

They were first introduced through a phone call. Then, in a long-awaited reunion here in Manitoba,

where they came to face—where they came face to face with each other and face to face with the reality of the life that should have been their own. In that meeting, the lives they had lived changed, and from what I understand, a new stage of life began.

I can only imagine what it must have been like in that moment to, at once, let go of a part of yourself that you believed yourself to be and, at the same time, meet a version of who you might have become.

With this knowledge, real questions of identity pushed up against decades of lived experience. There's a deep, painful loss and questions that remain.

For Richard, who was raised Métis and endured the pain of being denied the ability to speak his language and suffered in the day school and then taken away as part of the '60s scoop—Richard, in spite of this, forged deep bonds with a caring foster family and found a positive path forward, and today, as I mentioned, worked as a captain of a fishing crew in British Columbia.

For Edward, who was raised without the knowledge of his Indigenous heritage, without having important teachings passed on to him, which he could have then shared with his own children and grandchildren.

Both men have parents that they've never met, family members they forever lost the opportunity to forge relationships with, and there's so much to make up for.

We talked to Ed and Richard about how this revelation has changed their lives. I have to say that their focus isn't just on what they've missed out on, they're hopeful about what has been added to their lives as well: the new family members, who they're now getting to meet, where they're eager to share stories with and create new memories alongside. And at this stage of their lives, both men are embracing the old but also building something new for themselves and for their families.

Eddy and his children have been recognized now as citizens of the Manitoba Métis Federation. He's learning to bead and he brings his grandson to powwow.

Richard has come back to visit Manitoba, going on to form new connections with his newly reunited sisters and family. Richard's daughter's got two—got tattoos of the last name, which they now know is their true inheritance: Ambrose.

Eddy is thinking of taking on his birth parents' last name, too—Beauvais.

It seems to me that in meeting both of you today and in hearing the way that you speak about each other, with empathy and compassion, and the empathy and compassion for who you understood yourself to be in the past as well, that it's clear that you both have reverence for the people who raised you and for the lives that made you.

And if I can say, it seems each of you are not necessarily trying to reach back for something from the past, but instead, to embrace the future that you have in front of you now.

What happened to you cannot be undone, but it must be acknowledged and it must be atoned for. That's why we've welcomed you into the Legislature today. This is the people's building of Manitoba. And while we cannot take back the series of failures that caused your pain, we can, perhaps, make things a little easier for you now in offering our sincere regret in response to the questions you have long asked.

Mr. Ambrose, Mr. Beauvais, at the very least you are owed this much. I stand here as the Premier of Manitoba to apologize to each of you directly.

* (14:00)

Richard Beauvais, I am sorry.

Edward Ambrose, I am sorry.

On behalf of the Manitoba government, we sincerely apologize for our failure to care for you, to protect you, to ensure that you would grow up with the love of the families who welcomed you into this world.

We apologize to Camille and Laurette Beauvais, to James and Kathleen Ambrose, for being denied the chance to raise you and to never have known the joy of parenting you.

We apologize to your children and grandchildren for depriving them for so many years of their rightful inheritance, culture, identity and, perhaps most of all, family.

For these things, we are sorry.

We hope these words will help you to reconcile the person you were for the most extended periods of your life with the person that you were at birth, and we offer you this gesture in a spirit of healing and reconciliation.

A great Manitoban, Justice Murray Sinclair, has said, that the need for reconciliation has often arisen in our country's history when we have denied children

the ability to answer four basic questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?

Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?

It strikes me, Mr. Beauvais and Mr. Ambrose, that the Province of Manitoba made a terrible mistake that stood in the way of you being able to answer these questions for many, many years.

But today, we hope to support your personal healing, the healing of your families, by accepting responsibility for mistakes that prevented you from knowing the truth about the first two of those four big questions—who you are and where you came from.

To the third question, why you are here living this life, I cannot presume to answer, but I know that both of your lives are meaningful.

And perhaps our government's words today and actions from here on in can help you with that fourth question so that you, your children and your grandchildren can answer the question of where you are going together.

Miigwech. Merci. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: On behalf of everyone in the Assembly today, we welcome you to our building and wish you nothing but success going forward. Thank you.

We'll now take a 10-minute recess. One-minute bells will sound.

The House recessed at 2:03 p.m.

The House resumed at 2:14 p.m.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: And before I move on to member statements, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Jenna Warkentine, Trisha Warkentine and Anita Wiebe, who are the guests of the honourable member for warden—Morden—Winkler (Mrs. Hiebert).

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Luke Robins

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): Today, I rise to acknowledge Luke Robins, a remarkable young curler who will be representing Team Manitoba at the 2024 Canada junior curling championships.

Luke's love for curling goes way back to when he was—when he would watch his mother and grandfather play at West St. Paul Curling Club. One day he decided to give it a shot and found a home at the club and in the sport. Over his decade-long journey, Luke has participated in several provincial curling championships which were accompanied by numerous awards. He also represented our province at the national stage as Team Manitoba 2 in 2022.

Luke has made a name for himself not only as a championship curler but also as an active community member. After hearing of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he began fundraising for humanitarian relief efforts and volunteered at the Ukrainian National Federation to help displaced folks settle in our province. However, he knew he could combine his passion for curling and his desire to do good.

That's why just last year, Luke launched an introduction to curling program for Ukrainian refugees. His passion and big heart attracted more than 50 people from around the province to learn this classic Canadian sport. Luke was recognized for his initiative as the inaugural recipient of the Curling Canada All Heart Award.

This Saturday, March 23, Luke and his teammates Jace Freeman, Ryan Ostrowsky and Nick Senff will be representing Manitoba at the 2024 Canada junior curling championships as Team Manitoba 2 in Fort McMurray. Luke and his team are emerging from a strong season and have no doubt that their strong work ethic and tight-knit community will carry them through the competition.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Luke and his team as they go for gold at the nationals this coming weekend.

Alexander and Sam Angus

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Honourable Speaker, I rise in the House today to honour two brothers from my constituency of Red River North.

Alexander and Sam began their lacrosse journey when introduced to the sport by a friend at a young age and have been playing ever since. The Angus

brothers now play for the Winnipeg Blizzard lacrosse team and compete across western Canada.

The Angus family have a history of playing lacrosse. Their older brother Will competed in the first International Indoor Junior Lacrosse event in 2023, and their father Colin also loves the game and coached locally, here in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Alexander and Sam Angus competed in the 2024 International Indoor Junior Lacrosse Commonwealth Cup. This event was held in Melbourne, Australia, this past month and the Angus boys were chosen to represent Canada.

This exciting trip to Australia was part of Canada's efforts to grow the sport in different parts of the world. While there, the team competed in a four-day round robin where Canada brought home the win. Alexander scored 14 goals while competing in Australia.

The players held camps and clinics for the children wanting to develop their skills. The Angus brothers were thrilled to have participated in this event, as it aimed to engage more people in the game and teach young people about lacrosse.

Honourable Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to join me in welcoming Alexander and Sam, who are here joining us in the gallery with their parents, Colin and Susanne, to the Chamber today, and congratulate them on their tremendous efforts—accomplishments in Australia.

Here they are: the winners.

World Water Day and Earth Hour

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Environment and climate change are priorities for the constituents of Wolseley, so on their behalf, I'm happy to stand in the Legislature to bring members' attention to two important environment awareness opportunities.

Tomorrow, March 22, is World Water Day. As we all sit in the Chamber this afternoon, sipping water or other beverages made from water, we should be reminded and humbled that our drinking water is all sourced from the community of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation in Treaty 3 territory.

We are also reminded through the mission of World Water Day that access to water is a human right, yet over 2 billion people worldwide live without that access.

* (14:20)

Colleagues who were at the Red River Basin Commission fish dinner last night heard that the theme of World Water Day 2024 is Water for Peace. When we co-operate on water, we create a positive ripple effect, fostering harmony, generating prosperity and building resilience to shared challenges.

As citizens of Manitoba, we can all work to conserve water in our homes in the obvious ways, but we can also eat local, more plant-based meals, shop for sustainable products and cut down on food waste.

Saturday, March 24 is Earth Hour. Earth Hour began over 15 years ago with 2 million Australians turning off their lights for one hour to bring attention to caring for the earth. Now, it is a global movement. Millions of people across 190 countries participate.

This Saturday night, you are also asked to turn off your lights from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Landmarks and homes across the world will switch off to symbolically give an hour for earth, but this year, participants are also asked to spend 60 minutes doing something positive for our planet.

Soon, Wolesey constituents will be out in force giving many hours to the earth through neighbourhood cleanups, planting our gardens and composting. I encourage all Manitobans to do the same, and I invite all members of this Legislature to participate in Earth Hour in your home constituencies on Saturday evening.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Morden-Winkler Community Centres

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, I am thrilled to rise in the Chamber today to share with you two remarkable community centres in my constituency of Morden-Winkler: Central Station Community Centre in Winkler and 500 Stephen Community Centre in Morden. These incredible organizations offer a wide range of programs and services that truly make a difference in our lives of our community members.

Central Station Community Centre is a hub of support and resources, offering various programs such as cooking classes, community-care programs, public drop-ins, advocacy, housing support services and free meal programs, just to name a few. Every Monday, they host a free meal program where people can share stories over a warm, home-cooked meal. They also offer a 10-week program called Community Action Training program, helping individuals to 'develop' skills advocating for their needs and those around

them, empowering them to make positive changes in the lives of those around them and within their community.

I had the opportunity to participate in the Coldest Night of the Year through Central Station, raising support and awareness for homelessness in our community.

Honourable Speaker, 500 Stephen Community Centre has played a pivotal role in bringing together people in Morden. It was created to provide a safe and inclusive space where individuals from all walks of life can come together, share and forge meaningful connections.

In a world that often feels divided, the centre stands as a beacon of hope, unity and inclusivity. The centre caters to non-profit and community groups, offering much needed space for meetings and offices. A wide variety of programs are run through the facility, from the local food bank, farmers market, skill development programs and community mobilization programs. They also host a hot meal for the community. Whether you're a long-time resident or a newcomer to the neighbourhood, they ensure that everyone feels welcome and valued.

The centre also created—celebrated International Women's Day, emphasizing the importance of supporting and on—lifting women in our community.

Please rise with me in honouring Jenna and Trisha Warkentine, Anita Wiebe, seated in the gallery, and to thank all volunteers that serve at the community centres in Morden and Winkler and across our great province.

The Speaker: Oral questions. [*interjection*] No? Oh, sorry.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning—my apologies.

Video King

Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I rise today asking us to remember the times we would head down to the local video store, pick out a video cassette or two, watch with family or friends. Many of us probably recall debating with those same family and friends what to watch and which movie to pick out.

A local video store was a great place to gather and lose oneself in the many aisles and stacks of cassettes and DVDs, trying to decide what to watch next. Thanks to the Video King store in the constituency of which I

represent, these were not distant memories but rather the current reality for the many folks in Transcona and the surrounding area.

Video King owner Glen Fuhl and his family have been running the business for 40 years and is a cherished staple for many families in our community as well as, of course, the surrounding area. Video King, at its height, supplied small-town Manitoba and locations throughout Canada with over 222 different pieces of information—video cassettes, DVDs, the works—throughout the past 40 years.

Honourable Speaker, many were sad to hear of the Transcona location closing the residential rental portion of their business, announced the same day as their 40th anniversary.

As technology progresses and the film industry adapts—many of us, I know, wax nostalgic about making a trip down to the local video store.

Transcona is blessed with many businesses that make our community unique. I want to thank Glen and his family for their dedication to our area. While we wish them all the best in their future endeavours, I hope he knows his customers are grateful for providing entertainment to them, for bringing them together and for being a significant part of many a person's nostalgia for the local video store and for days gone by.

Thank you, Glen, and thank you, Honourable Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Upcoming Federal Carbon Tax Increase Request for Province to Oppose

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): First, the Finance Minister said the NDP would be fighting Trudeau on carbon tax on home heating. Then the Premier said no. Then the Premier met with other premiers and said yes. And then he came back to Manitoba and said no.

But while the NDP was flip-flopping, Saskatchewan took action. Premier Moe's budget yesterday revealed our neighbours to the west are getting over \$400 a year in relief on their home heating bills.

Now, the carbon tax is scheduled to go up again next week by 23 per cent. I hate to say it, but Manitobans could really use another NDP flip-flop. It's not too late.

Will the Premier join with Manitobans calling for a stop—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We've been very active on the subject of affordability, particularly on the energy file.

We know that on January 1 of this year, we took action to cut the provincial fuel tax to zero. That's something that the PCs never did, and as a result, we've had the lowest inflation rate in the country for two months straight.

The honourable member opposite might choose to ask the members for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler) or Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) or Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk) or any number of the colleagues who served in the past government, because they all ran two times on implementing a carbon tax in Manitoba.

You know who stopped them? We did.

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

Mrs. Cook: Here's a fact this Premier and Finance Minister have completely ignored: more than \$143 million in carbon tax revenues are owed to over 43,000 small businesses across Manitoba. Despite paying more than their fair share of the carbon tax, these small businesses haven't received a penny back.

Now, with a 23 per cent hike coming next week, the federal government is reducing the amount of carbon tax revenue it plans to return to small businesses by 44 per cent. Yet not a peep from the NDP.

Why is this Premier refusing to stand up for small businesses in Manitoba?

Mr. Kinew: Well, we took action to help small business on January 1 of this year. Every business owner with a fleet vehicle, anybody who puts their name on the side of a truck to be able to put their capital at risk to earn an income benefitted from our cut to the provincial fuel tax.

Tens of millions of dollars per month that is being saved by not only the average Manitoban but also small business. That's what we're delivering when it comes to relief.

However, I think back to 2018, when the members for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler) and Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) and Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk), Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), they all were lined up to bring in their PC carbon tax.

You know who stood up for Manitobans then and blocked that from becoming law? It was the Manitoba NDP.

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

Mrs. Cook: Seven out of 10 premiers are standing up for their residents and calling for a stop to the April 1 carbon tax hike.

I'll table an email I received last week from a constituent. It says, I'm a resident of your constituency. I'm watching the news and they have shown a list of all the premiers who oppose the carbon tax. Why is our Premier not on that list?

* (14:30)

Why indeed? Honourable Speaker, 70 per cent of Canadians and 76 per cent of Manitobans are saying no to the carbon tax hike next week.

Will the Premier indulge us in one last flip-flop, join the rest of the country, stand up for Manitobans and publicly call for a stop to this unfair and unnecessary carbon tax hike?

Mr. Kinew: One thing our government is about is consistency. Again, on January 1 of this year, we cut the provincial fuel tax to zero to save you money. When we were in opposition, we stopped the PCs from bringing in a carbon tax here in Manitoba, even though they tried to do so time after time after time.

When it comes to the actions of the other premiers, they're going to do what's in the best interests of their constituents. What I'm doing for Manitobans is saving you money.

The question that I'd ask for the member opposite is, if 70 per cent of other premiers engage in anti-trans rhetoric, should we join them on that too?

Gas Pricing Affordability Concerns

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Honourable Speaker, when the news broke that Imperial Oil was shutting down a line bringing oil to this province for three months, the Premier said, we only have a week left.

Then he flip-flopped, like he's done so many times before—no, wait, we have lots of fuel coming in—and assured Manitobans that all was well and he was, quote, bringing the full weight of the provincial government to bear.

Now, within 72 hours, the full weight has gas jumping almost 10 cents, gas stations are closing

early, they're rationing and they're putting limits on Manitobans.

Will the Premier simply acknowledge that when it comes to affordability in gas pricing, he is nothing but a showman, and his empty words have no meaning to Manitobans after so many flip-flops?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We've been hard at work on ensuring that Manitobans save money and to ensure that there is an adequate supply of gasoline, diesel and jet fuel here for the people of Manitoba.

Again, the member of—the member opposite wants to engage in talk of a flip-flop when his party brought in a carbon tax twice, and then now is trying to fight the last election campaign after changing their opinion on that. So we're not exactly sure where they stand.

I can update the House and let you know that, speaking to suppliers earlier today, we now understand that there's an 11-day supply of gasoline in most of the suppliers' situation, and a two-week supply of gasoline when we're talking to a few of those suppliers in the same instance.

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

Carbon Tax Request to Eliminate

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): The Premier led Manitobans astray when he said everything is under control. It's not.

I table this gas 'comparinon,' and Manitoba is not the cheapest gas in Canada. On April 1, the carbon tax will increase to 17 cents per litre, and on July 1, another 14 cents—a total of 32 cents, all thanks to this Premier and the NDP government.

The question is simple: How high will this Premier let gas prices rise before he realizes that his empty words and TikTok videos don't fuel our economy, but taking leadership does, like the other seven premiers across Canada.

Will this Premier join the other 70 premiers—70 per cent of premiers and call on the Liberal-NDP coalition to axe the carbon tax?

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Pretty simple answer: I'll never let the gas tax get as high as it was under his government.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Whyte, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Khan: Honourable Speaker, proof that what the Premier says is empty words and not true and all done with a cynical smile that Manitobans can see. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Khan: He talks about consequences and threatens local grocery stores. He has no plan for affordability other than taking credit for previous PC tax cuts. He proclaims the failed gas tax stunt is a win and acts like a showman. But it's more expensive to buy gas now in Manitoba than it was before the gas tax stunt.

Will the Premier stand up today and call for an axe the tax on this punitive carbon tax?

The Speaker: Before I recognize the First Minister, I'd just like to caution the member from Fort Whyte that some of his words were dangerously close to being unparliamentary, so I would remind him to please pay attention to what—saying, because words are important.

Thank you.

Mr. Kinew: We've taken immediate action to save Manitobans money on the price of fuel, and as a result we've had the lowest inflation rate in our province of anywhere in the country for two months in a row.

Even this week the price of gas here is 14 cents cheaper than it is in Saskatchewan, or in northwestern Ontario. I invite the member opposite to take a look at the charts which shows that Manitobans are still saving money because of the actions that our government has taken.

However, I do recognize that the member opposite is in a tough spot. He's trying to earn his way back in the good graces so he can go to Mr. Poilievre's axe the tax rally next week. And so he's trying to adopt the language, and so we encourage him to keep standing up in here and talk about axe the tax, spike the hike, bake the bread, butter the muffins, put on the shoes—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

High Food Prices in Manitoba Government Grocery Plan

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, this Premier (Mr. Kinew) gave Manitobans his word that their failed gas tax would do wonders to gas prices and will directly lower grocery prices. Well, maybe he hasn't stepped into a grocery store until he bought olive oil and Corn Pops for a campaign ad. Clearly this Premier has zero understanding of how the food industry works.

Will this Premier admit that this is just another broken promise?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): You know, as part of our prebudget consultations I was honoured, again, to have some great opportunities to speak with Manitobans across the province, and one of the No. 1 things we heard in those consultations was the struggles that they faced over the last seven years under the previous government.

They took no action to make life more affordable for Manitobans. We're taking actions with our fuel tax holiday. More good work to come, looking forward to bringing forward our budget on April 2.

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

Mrs. Stone: Honourable Speaker, this Premier said, and I quote: If we don't see those savings materialize, then that's when we're going to follow up on those further steps. I table an article to refresh his memory.

So I have a simple question for this Premier: What further steps has he followed up on to address grocery prices for Manitobans?

MLA Sala: We've got news for the members opposite: inflation is the lowest it's been in Canada for two months in a row in this province. That's because of the actions we're taking.

Not like what the previous government did, which was to raise energy costs on Manitobans, find creative and new and novel ways of jacking up hydro rates, passing legislation in the middle of a pandemic and an affordability crisis to raise hydro rates.

That's their record: no action. We're taking action. We're making life more affordable.

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

Mrs. Stone: Honourable Speaker, this Premier and this NDP government is doing nothing. He's giving struggling Manitobans false hope that dashes every time they see high prices at the grocery store. Last week on the NDP website, their grocery plan showed: page cannot be found. I table this page.

But now it has been taken down completely, just like their wait times data. The NDP has mocked Manitobans by pretending their promises no longer exist.

When will this Premier start taking accountability for his promises?

MLA Sala: The members opposite want to talk about raising food prices. They're not looking in the mirror. They raised the costs of Crown leases for farmers in Manitoba by 300 per cent. That's their record. They raised the costs of living on those folks by 300 per cent. That's a huge increase that contributes to the increase in costs of food. That's their record.

They also raised the costs of living on renters. Renters are folks who are on fixed incomes, seniors. That's their record, raising taxes on renters by \$175. Each and every single one of them have that on their record.

What's our record? Making life more affordable. More great news to come on April 2.

Upcoming Federal Carbon Tax Increase Request for Province to Oppose

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, families were promised action. Instead they just get empty promises. Gas prices are up. Were—gas prices were up and that was before the shortage—gas shortage. Grocery prices were up. And a carbon tax increase on April 1 is going to make that worse.

* (14:40)

Why will this Premier (Mr. Kinew) not stand up for Manitobans and oppose this tax hike?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): The members opposite just seem to be ignoring the reality in front of them. We have the lowest gas prices in the country.

Again, Manitobans finally have a government that's listening, that cares, that can actually understand the challenges that average Manitobans are facing. That's very different than what they had for seven years under the members opposite, a government that was disconnected from the challenges that they were facing.

We've got a new day in this province. We've got a new government that's doing great work to make life more affordable. More great news on April 2.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a supplementary question.

Mrs. Hiebert: It's basic math, Honourable Speaker. When Justin Trudeau adds 23 per cent to the carbon tax, things are going to get more expensive; that's the Liberal-NDP coalition's plan. Manitobans need relief, not punishing tax increases.

Why does this Premier represent Ottawa to Manitobans instead of Manitobans to Ottawa?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, there's something wildly embarrassing about hearing this theatre that they're bringing forward when they themselves brought forward a carbon tax proposal into this very House for this Legislature to vote on. That's their record.

So they're coming in here flip-flopping in this, then they go off to Ottawa and waste millions of dollars of Manitoba taxpayer money on unnecessary lawsuits. That's their record.

What's our record? Action, actually reducing cost of living for Manitobans.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Hiebert: Honourable Speaker, this shouldn't be a divisive issue. Most premiers stand united on this. Even Liberal premiers are putting their citizens first, but not this NDP government. Only in Manitoba and—only in Manitoba and BC are NDP premiers putting their allegiance with Trudeau ahead of their constituents.

Why does this Premier support a 23 per cent gas—or tax hike?

MLA Sala: The member's correct: this shouldn't be a divisive issue. We invite the members opposite to join us in celebrating the good work being done by this Manitoba NDP government.

Our upcoming budget is going to have a huge focus on improving affordability.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Sala: We are so excited to see the members opposite vote in support of our upcoming budget when they see all the great affordability news coming for Manitobans.

Upcoming Federal Carbon Tax Increase Request for Province to Oppose

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): The Liberal-NDP carbon tax is set to increase by 23 per cent on April 1st to 18 cents per litre of fuel, and the carbon tax is applied to everything from home heating to gasoline, and to add insult to injury, the Liberal-NDP coalition forces Manitobans and Canadians to pay GST on the carbon tax.

The carbon tax is nothing more than a tax grab.

Will the Premier (Mr. Kinew) stand up for Manitobans today and tell Justin Trudeau to cancel the carbon tax?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Look, I hope that the member opposite recognizes that members from—or citizens of our rural communities are very grateful for the fuel tax holiday that we brought in.

We know that folks living in rural communities drive a lot, they have further to go to work, further to go to school. Our fuel tax holiday measure has brought huge savings to folks living in communities like the one belonging to the member opposite.

We're bringing good news, Mr. Speaker, for all Manitobans. We're going to keep doing that important work of making life more affordable.

Mr. Guenter: Manitobans are getting hammered by this NDP government's property tax hikes and their—in the order of 18 per cent, and in a few months this NDP government will raise the price of gas another 14 cents as the temporary gas tax stunt expires.

The least this NDP Premier could do is tell Justin Trudeau to cancel the carbon tax.

Will he stand up for Manitobans today?

MLA Sala: You know what hammered Manitobans, Mr. Honourable Speaker? Seven years of living under this last PC government. Raising taxes on renters, raising costs on farmers, raising electricity rates for Manitobans, and not once in seven years did they reduce the fuel tax.

We did within months of coming into government. That's what Manitobans can expect from our NDP government.

Mr. Guenter: Seven premiers and nearly 80 per cent of Canadians oppose the carbon tax.

Why won't this NDP Premier find the courage to do the right thing, stand up for Manitobans and tell his Liberal-NDP friends in Ottawa to axe the tax?

MLA Sala: Look, Honourable Speaker, again: seven years, no action. Seven years, and what did they do—during that period? They didn't take action and they continued to introduce carbon taxes right here in this very House.

That's their record. They're flip-flopping back and forth; they don't even know what side of the House they're on anymore. What are we doing? We're taking action. We're bringing in affordability measures.

And there's going to be a whole suite of affordability measures coming forward on April 2. We can't wait to bring that good news, and we look forward to the members opposite supporting our budget.

Upcoming Federal Carbon Tax Increase Request for Province to Oppose

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): It's been 136 days since the Premier's carbon tax dance flip-flop began on the shores of Halifax Harbour, and Manitobans have lost count just how many times he's flipped and flopped back and forth since he returned back to friendly Manitoba.

With the 23 per cent tax increase looming, there's still time left to flip back, join his seven colleagues and call up his buddy JT to spike the hike.

Will he make that phone call today?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): You know, all these questions give me a great opportunity to talk about all the bad decisions Manitoba suffered under under this previous PC government.

I'll remind them, they brought in a bill—a hydro bill that was specifically designed to jack up hydro rates as quickly as possible. For the first time—the first time—in this province's history, they brought in legislation specifically focused on raising hydro rates during a holiday, Honourable Speaker.

That's their record. They don't have a leg to stand on when it comes to making life more affordable. We do. We're doing that work. More good news to come.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter), on a supplementary question.

An Honourable Member: The Premier may not have enough gas left in the tank to flip-flop one more time, but we've heard little from the Finance Minister before today on this issue.

Since he initially flipped when the Premier flopped and said he supported calling out Ottawa for giving unfair carbon tax breaks to Atlantic Canada, while western Canadians got nothing, clearly the Finance Minister wants to be on the right side of this issue—on history.

Will he give it one more shot, see if he can change the Premier's mind this—in the week that remains before Trudeau's 23 per cent increase hits Manitobans grocery bills.

Will he change the Premier's mind today?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are lucky to finally have a Premier (Mr. Kinew) that actually cares about affordability in Manitoba. We didn't have that for a long time.

Instead, we had a government that didn't understand the affordability challenges that Manitobans were facing, that didn't understand the impacts of the decisions they were making, like their decisions to raise electricity prices on Manitobans over and over and over again.

Once more, we are doing that important work of making life more affordable. I'm incredibly proud to be a part of a team that actually understands the challenges Manitobans are facing.

More good news to come, Honourable Speaker, on April 2.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter), on a—Spruce Woods, I'm sorry.

Mr. Jackson: In his earlier responses, the Premier—

The Speaker: Excuse me. The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Jackson: They flip-flopped on the carbon tax, they flip-flopped on the fuel tax for farmers, they flip-flopped on their hydro rate freeze, they flip-flopped on new school construction and they flip-flopped on MPI privatization.

We're so close to April 1, so there's still time for the Premier to flip-flop one last time, get on the right side of history, put this failed environmental policy to bed and join the growing calls to spike the hike and axe the tax.

* (14:50)

Will he call Justin Trudeau today?

MLA Sala: Again, Honourable Speaker, every single day for the seven and a half years that they were in government they charged Manitobans a gas tax every single day. That's their record. Each and every single one of those members who are standing up today, pretending like they care about affordability, charged the fuel tax on Manitobans every single day that they were in government.

What did we do? Within months of getting in to government, we relieved Manitobans of those costs because we knew that they were struggling.

We've got more good news. We look forward to the members opposite supporting our budget on April 2.

Children in CFS Care Minister of Families' Comments to Media

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Manitobans are losing faith in this government's mismanagement of the CFS crisis. The Minister of Families' comments yesterday regarding the Winnipeg chief of police seemed as if she was more concerned with controlling the media narrative than doing her job.

The minister was quoted in a CBC article, which I table now, and she said, and I quote: The vast majority of children in care are actually thriving and doing well.

Honourable Speaker, can the minister cite where she got this statistic?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Again, I want to share with the House that our department is working very, very hard in respect of CFS, in respect of ensuring that children get the best care possible and we respect and honour all of those individuals that are doing that sacred work of helping to take care of children that are in care.

I want to share with the House that I spoke with the chief of police today, and we are on the same page at wanting the best for our children and to ensure that children in care are getting the wrap-around supports that they need and the additional services that they need, and that's what our—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question.

Supports in Budget 2024

MLA Lamoureux: Promoting this idea that most children in care are thriving is incredibly misleading. Downplaying the concerns of many children in CFS care is the equivalent of this minister turning her back on her responsibilities.

It is shameful that the minister has not brought forward any tangible solutions, especially when the chief of police, AMC, MACY and foster parents have all agreed that the lack of resources and support available to kids in care and their caregivers.

Will the minister confirm today in what capacity will we see supports for children in care in the upcoming budget?

MLA Fontaine: I would suggest that the House is going to have to wait until April 2 to hear the good work and the good news that our government across

departments is doing in respect of the best for Manitobans. This is a government that cares about Manitobans—all Manitobans—and folks will see that on April 2.

I want to share again, in my conversation with the chief of police this morning, it was made very, very clear that he understands and I understand the importance of supporting those resources and those wrap-around supports for children that are in care.

He and I are going to continue to work together on ensuring that the children that he comes into contact with and that we come into contact with, that we are working together for the best—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

Review of the MACY Act Timeline for Standing Committee

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): It is very concerning that the minister is trying to downplay the concerns voiced by so many leaders. In fact, it is a disservice to some of our most vulnerable children here in Manitoba and the incredible people who are caring for them.

The minister passed the motion at the recent Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs to conduct a comprehensive review of the MACY act.

Will the minister let us know if she plans to start listening to caregivers and folks on the front lines, and will she provide a specific date as to when this committee will be called to order?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): This morning I hosted our first inaugural matriarch circle, made up of matriarchs across the province, matriarchs and women—Indigenous women—that have been doing work in our communities for 30 years, in particular in respect of child welfare.

And we had those discussions this morning in respect of the work that they're doing in the communities, the work that we're doing in the department. And, you know, one of the things that was brought up is that those matriarchs don't know any of these people in this Chamber. They've been doing that work for 30 years and have never seen one single member opposite show up at any vigils, any rallies, any memorials, any supports for our children in the broader community and certainly community—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Inflation Rate Manitoba Ranking

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): While the former PC government found new and creative ways to make life more expensive, our government is proud to be making life more affordable for Manitobans. Our fuel tax holiday is helping families and businesses across this great province. And I know our Finance Minister will have more good news to share for Manitobans on April 2.

Can the Minister of Finance please tell us which province has the lowest rate of inflation in Canada and which province is helping reduce inflation across this great country?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I'd like to thank my colleague for the question. I know the members opposite are eager to hear the answer to this.

Our government was very proud to take action right away to pause the 14-cent-a-litre fuel tax. And my colleague is right that there's more good news to come, but the good news is already rolling in. For the second month in a row, Manitoba has the lowest rate in—rate of inflation in all of Canada at 0.9 per cent. This is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

MLA Sala: That's right.

Our measure's bringing inflation down across the country and helping Manitoba families to make ends meet. The former PC government was all talk; our government is getting things done for Manitobans. I can't wait to share even more good news on April 2.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Perchotte).

An Honourable Member: No.

The Speaker: No?

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

Carbon Tax Food Prices

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): This Premier (Mr. Kinew) stands in the House and shovels material traditionally found on the floor of barns.

While he's taking a victory lap, families are taking another lap—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I would caution the member very strongly to apologize for using that kind of unparliamentary language. It certainly is not becoming of a member of this Legislature.

MLA Bereza: My apologies for that.

This Premier (Mr. Kinew) is all sizzle, no steak, because families had to put those prime cuts back.

Why does this Premier support a 23 per cent carbon tax increase?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): Well, thank you for the creative language by the member opposite, and definitely, I think, a little bit of a lesson on protocol would be appropriate, addressing parties across. So thank you for that.

But I—more importantly, I want to acknowledge the agriculture producers in the province of Manitoba for the great work they do. They provide food for everyone across the world and in the province of Manitoba. But more importantly, as well, they create 36,555 direct jobs indirectly throughout the province of Manitoba's economy and basically 9 per cent of the GDP.

And we will continue to work with the importance of agriculture producers, an added value that we have an opportunity to continue to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a supplementary question.

MLA Bereza: I'm glad we'd been talking only about the last two months.

Under this Premier, food prices are growing faster than the national average. I table an article where the Brandon Sun calls this a bluff.

His gas tax stunt was a failure, and thanks to this thumb on the scale of the market prices Manitobans are paying, why is he putting his pride before Manitoba affordability?

Mr. Kostyshyn: May I remind the members opposite and the party opposite, we are sitting in the Chamber with the No. 1 premier across Canada. And I don't really think—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (15:00)

Mr. Kostyshyn: And I really appreciate the members opposite indirect compliment of that being said.

But I do want to say about accountability and the opportunity, I suppose, unfortunately, the member opposite wasn't sitting with the previous government. But it's really unrespectable for a 300 per cent increase to Crown land lessees who are the generational farmers that want to continue the importance of agriculture in the province of Manitoba.

And yet, they turn around and they double—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Bereza: With the price of groceries, especially things like cereal and that, where grain is used, they're going through the roof, will the Premier commit to do the right thing, join the other seven premiers, stand up to Justin Trudeau, step up for Manitobans and spike the hike?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I don't know how many times it's been said this afternoon: Manitoba is the lowest as far as the cost of living in the—across Canada, and yet, we're not paying attention to the opportunity.

Grocery costs? We've been talking to the federal government and we are working in accordance to work toward opportunities to make life more affordable. But in this side of the House, this government has addressed the issues as far as the price of fuel, hydro rates that continue to grow. If this would have stayed in power—the government would have stayed in power.

I'm very proud to be standing on this side of the House, not that side of the House.

Carbon Tax Request to Eliminate

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Honourable Speaker, the carbon tax is a punitive tax, and I'm sure that we can all agree on that here in this Chamber. Manitobans have been under attack since 2018, and this needs to stop now.

The pandemic brought to light the precarious financial situation that so many Manitobans face on a daily basis: the affordability crisis, brought on by inflation and further exasperated by tax-and-spend governments. It's a tipping point.

This N-D-T-P government has the opportunity right now to truly help Manitobans, and all Manitobans, including seniors. This Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his ministers flip-flop on their position on the carbon tax.

Will—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Again, it gives me honour to rise in the House and to talk about affordability, something that the members opposite do not know anything about, Honourable Speaker.

For years—for seven years, they worked to make life more expensive for Manitobans. We keep repeating these same points. They don't seem to recognize their actions and the impacts they had on Manitobans for years with their efforts at raising taxes on renters, raising costs on farmers, raising energy rates.

They talk about spiking the hike. The only thing they spiked was electricity rates for seven years in a row.

What's our government doing? Taking action to make life more affordable. More good news to come, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: Honourable 'speake!', Trudeau, with the support of the government opposite and their comrades in Ottawa continue to try to suck every last penny out of all Manitobans.

Agriculture producers have no more to give. Manitobans have no more to give. They need relief now.

Bill C-234 gives farmers and Manitobans relief from the carbon tax. Even the federal NDPs are in support of Bill C-234. Niki Ashton, Daniel Blaikie, Leah Gazan and Jagmeet Singh all voted to support Bill C-234, more than once, in fact.

Will this Premier stand with his colleagues in Ottawa and make an honest effort to improve affordability for Manitobans—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Sala: Member opposite stands in the House and wants to talk about affordability. He was previously the minister for Agriculture at a time when their government raised costs on farmers by 300 per cent.

Shame, Honourable Speaker. That's his record as the Agriculture minister. They raised costs on farmers, they raised costs on Manitobans in every corner of the province.

Manitobans finally have a government that understands the challenges that they faced for many years.

We're taking important action to reduce costs of living. We're going to keep doing that work because our government understands the challenges Manitobans face.

More good work to come, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: Honourable Speaker, this government has done nothing to correct the underlying cause of increased food costs. It is expected that food prices will increase by 4 and a half per cent in 2024. We cannot continue down this road.

One easy and effective way to counter increased food costs is to reduce input costs on those who grow our—grow our food. Our carbon tax that the NDP voted against would have froze it at \$25 a ton. This NDP government supports \$80 a ton. Cut the carbon tax, reduce food costs; it's that simple.

Will this government do a common-sense thing and commit to cutting the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The honourable First Minister. *[interjection]*

Order. Order.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): It is an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Manitoba and to say that we did take action to reduce the price of gas on January 1 of this year.

But that wasn't the first action that we took on affordability. The first action of our government on affordability was actually to reduce input costs in the ag industry. We did that by freezing rates and cancelling the hike that that member had planned to bring in on beef producers. That helps to contribute to affordability.

Now, I also want to update the House that several of our colleagues, including the Minister of Health, were in the community of Lac du Bonnet today to share the good news that we're going to build a personal-care home to serve the residents of eastern Manitoba.

And I know that this is an important step for seniors that we can all get behind. The reason I know we can all get behind it: that member was at our announcement cheering for our good news. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Carbon Tax and Rising Food Prices

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) In 2022, according to Statistics Canada, there was an 11.4 per cent increase in food prices.

Staple 'froot' products such as baked goods, margarine and other oils, dairy products and eggs have seen some of the largest price increases.

(3) Agriculture and agri-food sector contributes close to 10 per cent of Manitoba's GDP.

There are increased costs added at every step of the process for Manitoba's agricultural producers. In order to make 18 cents from a loaf of bread worth of wheat, farmers are paying carbon tax at every stage of production to grow the crop and get it to market.

(5) Grain drying, fertilizer and chemical production, mushroom farming, hog operations, the cost of heating a livestock barn, machine shops and utility buildings are all examples of how the carbon tax on natural gas and other fuels cost farmers and consumers more and more each year.

(6) In food production there are currently no viable alternatives to natural gas and propane. The carbon tax takes money away from farmers making them less profitable and hindering rural agriculture producers' ability to invest in upgrades and improve efficiencies will make it reducing emissions.

(7) The provincial government neglected farmers in the six-month fuel tax holiday until the opposition critic and local stakeholder groups called for their inclusion.

Other provincial jurisdictions and leaders have taken action on calling on the federal government to remove the punishing carbon tax and/or stop collecting the carbon tax altogether.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge provincial government to call on the federal government to remove punishing carbon tax on natural gas and other fuels, farm inputs, for Manitoba agriculture producers and the agri-food sector to decrease the cost of putting food on the table for Manitoba consumers.

I'd like to read the names of some of the people that have stepped up to sign this petition: Eleanor Giffin, Winnie Duncan, Ida Miller, Shirley Munro—

The Speaker: Order, please. You're only allowed to read the top three names.

MLA Bereza: My apologies, Honourable Speaker, for going for—adding more than three names.

And this was also signed by many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Other petitions?

Removal of Federal Carbon Tax

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The federal government has mandated a consumption-based carbon tax with the stated goal of financially pressuring Canadians to make decisions to reduce their carbon emissions.

(2) Manitoba Hydro estimates that even with a high-efficiency furnace, the carbon tax is costing the average family over \$200 annually, even more for those with older furnaces.

Home heating in Manitoba—sorry.

(3) Home heating in Manitoba is not a choice or a decision for Manitobans to make, it is a necessity of life, with an average of almost 200 days below 0°C annually.

(4) The federal government has selectively removed the carbon tax off of home heating oil in the Atlantic provinces of Canada but has indicated they have no intention to provide the same relief to Manitobans heating their homes.

(5) Manitoba Hydro indicates that natural gas heating is one of the most affordable options available to Manitobans, and it can be cost prohibitive for households to replace their heating source.

(6) Premiers across Canada, including in the Atlantic provinces that benefit from this decision, have collectively sent a letter to the federal government calling on it to extend the carbon tax exemption to all forms of home heating with the exception of Manitoba.

(7) Manitoba is one of the only provincial jurisdictions to have not agreed with the stance that all Canadians' home heating bills should be exempt from the carbon tax.

(8) Provincial leadership in other jurisdictions have already committed to removing the federal carbon tax from home heating bills.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the federal carbon tax on home heating bills for all Manitobans to provide them much-needed relief.

This has been signed by many Manitobans: Ella Hamlin, Kensi Rainkie, Guruch [*phonetic*] Buttar, Madeline Wieler, Matt—

The Speaker: Order, please. You're only allowed to read the top three names on the petition.

An Honourable Member: Sorry, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram). I'll get it right one of these days.

Further petitions?

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The federal government has mandated a consumption-based carbon tax with the stated goal of financially pressuring Canadians to make decisions to reduce their carbon emissions.

Manitoba Hydro estimates that even with a high-efficiency furnace, the carbon tax is costing the average family over \$200 annually, even more for those with older furnaces.

Home heating in Manitoba is not a choice or a decision for Manitobans to make, it is a necessity of life, with an average of almost 200 days below 0°C annually.

The federal government has selectively removed the carbon tax off of home heating oil in the Atlantic provinces of Canada but has indicated they have no intention to provide the same relief to Manitobans heating their homes.

Manitoba Hydro indicates that natural gas heating is one of the most affordable options available to Manitobans, and it can be cost prohibitive for households to replace their heating source.

Premiers across Canada, including in the Atlantic provinces that benefit from this decision, have collectively sent a letter to the federal government calling on it to extend the carbon tax exemption to all forms of home heating with the exception of Manitoba.

Manitoba is one of the only provincial jurisdictions to have not agreed with the stance that all Canadians' home heating bills should be exempt from the carbon tax.

Provincial leadership in other jurisdictions have already committed to removing the federal carbon tax from home heating bills.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the federal carbon tax on home heating bills for all Manitobans to provide them much-needed relief.

And this petition has been signed by many, many, many Manitobans.

The Speaker: Further petitions?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to read the petition for the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen).

The Speaker: Is there leave for the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler)—

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Medical Assistance in Dying and Suicide Prevention

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for the petition:

Beginning March 17, 2024, a person struggling with mental health as their sole condition may access medical assisted—assistance in dying unless Parliament intervenes.

Suicidality is often a symptom of illness—mental illness, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadians between the age of 10 and 19.

(3) There have been reports of unsolicited introduction of medical assistance in dying to non-seeking

persons, including Canadian veterans, as a solution for their medical and mental health issues.

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

* (15:20)

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to stop the expansion of medical assistance in dying to those for whom mental illness is the sole condition.

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

This is signed by Mary Benson, Steve Ackerson, Val Dyck and many other Manitobans.

Removal of Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The federal government has mandated a consumption-based carbon tax with the stated goal of financially pressuring Canadians to make decisions to reduce their carbon emissions.

(2) Manitoba Hydro estimates that even with a high-efficiency furnace, the carbon tax is costing the

average family over \$200 annually, even more for those with older furnaces.

(3) Home heating in Manitoba is not a choice or a decision for Manitobans to make, it is a necessity of life, with an average of almost 200 days below 0°C annually.

(4) The federal government has selectively removed the carbon tax off of home heating oil in the Atlantic provinces of Canada but has indicated they have no intention to provide the same relief to Manitobans heating their homes.

(5) Manitoba Hydro indicates that natural gas heating is one of the most affordable options available to Manitobans, and it can be cost-prohibitive for households to replace their heating source.

(6) Premiers across Canada, including in the Atlantic provinces that benefit from this decision, have collectively sent a letter to the federal government calling on it to extend the carbon tax exemption to all forms of home heating, with the exception of Manitoba.

(7) Manitoba is one of the only provinces—oh, pardon me—one of the only provincial jurisdictions to have not agreed with the stance that all Canadians' home heating bills should be exempt from the carbon tax.

(8) Provincial leadership in other jurisdictions have already committed to removing the federal carbon tax from home heating bills.

So, we petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the federal carbon tax on home heating bills for all Manitobans to provide them much-needed relief.

This petition has been signed by Tyson Hale, Kolton Kowalchuk, Rhett Dodds and many, many, many other Manitobans.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Is there leave for myself to present the member of Brandon West petition?

The Speaker: Is there leave for the member from Interlake-Gimli to present the petition—

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: Leave has been denied.

The—any other petitions?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Can you please call to resume debate on Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act; followed by the second reading of Bill 24, The Intimate Image Protection Amendment Act; followed by second reading of Bill 17, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; followed by the second reading of Bill 11, The Statutes and Regulations Amendment and Interpretation Amendment Act.

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will continue debate on Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act; followed by second readings of Bill 24, the intimate protection—The Intimate Image Protection Amendment Act (Distribution of Fake Intimate Images); followed by Bill 17, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; followed by Bill 11, The Statutes and Regulations Amendment and Interpretation Amendment Act.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 9—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate; debate is in the—resuming second reading debate, and it stands in the name of the member for Fort Whyte, who has 19 minutes remaining. For Bill 9.

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): It's an honour to always rise in this Legislative Assembly and put some words on the record. I had 19 minutes, so I spoke yesterday a little bit this, but for those, you know, millions of people viewing in at home, or hundreds of people, or—watching this, I'll go back and recap a little bit for them, because they might not have read Hansard from yesterday.

So I'll go through a little quicker version of the 11 minutes of what I spoke about yesterday in regards to Bill 9.

Essentially, Bill 9 is calling for an extension of sick pay from 17 weeks to 27 weeks, to match the federal change that happened when they also extended it to 27. So, this minister's brought forward a bill that says they want to go from 17 weeks to 27 weeks here in the Province of Manitoba.

It sounds logical, and then when you ask the minister some questions, you actually wonder, whoa, hold on. How was this actually thought through? Where did

these numbers come from? But we obviously know it's from the feds.

But just because the feds say to do it doesn't mean that every province should do it. We can see a living proof of that would be the carbon tax; seven out of 10 premiers are saying, we don't want to do the carbon tax.

And yet this Premier (Mr. Kinew) here in Manitoba says he wants to do the carbon tax. He wants to make life more affordable for Manitobans, he wants to increase 23 per cent the tax here in Manitoba. The federal government is saying to do it, this NDP government is saying they want to do it.

Now, when it comes to this bill, the federal government did 27, this NDP government jumps right on board with Justin Trudeau and the Liberals and says, we need to do that too. And you say, okay, well if you want to do that, why? What's the rationale behind it? Have you consulted with businesses that are going to be affected by this?

*(15:30)

I think it's a logical question. I can see members opposite are interested by, you know, concern of, what's the answer? Yes, she would have for sure met with businesses. But the reality is she didn't. This minister didn't meet with any businesses. And the businesses are the ones that are going to be affected by this.

You asked the minister well, who did you meet with? And the answer was, I met with labour and businesses. And you said, which businesses? They couldn't give an answer. He said, did you meet with the largest business, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, representing over 97,000 members? And the answer was no.

Did you meet with any of the chambers? Winnipeg chamber? Manitoba chamber? The Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and this NDP government was a member of the Assiniboine chamber of commerce, and did you maybe have a conversation with that chamber? No.

So you had no conversation with chambers, you had no conversation with businesses, and yet they want to move forward with this bill of going from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

I apologize. I'm going to take a pause. My mouth gets dry; I'm still fasting—I think it's day 10 now, so only 20 more days to go, or 18 more days to go.

When asked who you did consult with, the minister says I met with the Labour Management Review Committee, a committee that is non-binding. They make recommendations to the minister, but ultimately the minister makes the decision. The minister is responsible for this decision, and the conversation or argument, well they'll say, well, the alleged Labour Management Review said this was a recommendation, but the minister's the one responsible.

On that side of the House, they want to pass the buck to someone else to pack to someone else, and say well, you take the blame, you take the blame, because they know this is not a good bill.

In reality, they should have consulted with businesses. They should have consulted with, you know, who else is this going to effect? And one of the largest groups in this province is AMM. Not any consultation with AMM. None. And yet they want to increase this to 27 weeks.

You say, okay. So they didn't meet with anyone, so it kind of sounds like this probably isn't the greatest idea. The feds say to do it, so just because the feds say to do it doesn't mean we should do it. We learned that with the carbon tax. Again, 70 per cent of premiers in this country say no to—they say axe the tax. Over 70 per cent of Canadians say axe it, and I bet you if you poll the businesses that are affected by this, over 70 per cent of them, if not 99 per cent of them, would say no; this actually doesn't make sense.

And another reason why it doesn't make sense, you say, well, what are other provinces doing, Honourable Speaker? I think that's a rational question to ask and say what are other provinces doing? Have they followed suit with the federal government? It's a logical question. And you would say, well, if other provinces did it, then yes, we should do it too, because, you know, we all—kind of makes sense. There's some rationale behind you. There's some consultation done.

And let's see what they did in Alberta. No. They're actually at 16 weeks. They're a week below where we are at currently.

Then you go, okay, well, let's look at what Saskatchewan is doing, because Saskatchewan's probably our closest comparison, other than—you know, their football team is terrible, but that's okay. That's another resolution we're going to bring forward in the next sitting, to talk about their football team. And they have a hard time even counting to 12. I mean they went to 13 and they lost the Grey Cup. It's really unfortunate for them.

But, I—remiss. I'll get back to this bill here. Saskatchewan's at 12 weeks. Twelve weeks, the amount of players they need on a football field, not 13, where they'll lose the Grey Cup. Twelve.

They are at 12. We're already at 17, and this minister wants to go to 27 weeks. So when asked for the—what's the rationale for going for 27 weeks, the only rationale that came back was the feds are doing it; we want to get in line with the feds.

Are other provinces getting in line? No. Nobody else has—I stand corrected, sorry. Quebec did. Quebec did years ago. Before this, Quebec was moved over and Quebec kind of operates in their own—they have their own way they operate their province, and then they make different decisions than, you know, I'd say a large part of Canada. But Quebec is the only one.

No other province is doing this. New Brunswick has had a consultation for years; I think it's been a two-year consultation in New Brunswick, and they haven't come forward with any recommendations because there probably are no recommendations. They don't want to move forward with this, and yet this minister and this NDP government, with no backing, want to move forward with this bill.

It is preposterous to think that we are even spending time talking about this when we could be talking about petitions. We could be talking about the carbon tax. We could be talking about this fake gas tax stunt that they've done and that they will be increasing on July 1st. We could be talking about that gas prices here in Manitoba are the highest they've been this year—the highest.

They want to talk about we lowered it; we lowered it. You didn't lower it. It's higher.

Now, when I circle back—

The Speaker: Order, please. The member tends to vector off from talking about the bill quite often. I would remind him what bill he should be talking about, and please stick to being relevant to that bill.

Mr. Khan: I always appreciate your guidance, and you do give me some leeway, so I appreciate that.

Circling back on this bill here, it simply doesn't make sense that this NDP government wants to move forward with a bill that they've had no consultation on. They've had no input, they haven't spoken to any businesses. It doesn't make sense.

And Manitoba is actually experiencing major labour shortages over the next five years. And yet this

government, with no consultation with any industry, wanted to extend sick days.

Now, to be very clear, Honourable Speaker, and everyone on that side of the House, no one on this side of the House is saying that people don't deserve or don't need the 27 weeks. That's not the conversation. The argument is not, well, we don't want to give them the 27 weeks.

If there are serious illnesses—there are serious injuries out there where people need time off, and there's nothing they can do about it; we agree with that. You might have cancer. My mom went through a liver transplant, I spoke about this little bit yesterday. You need extended time off. There's complications, there's family situations, there's injuries. These are valid concerns.

But to go forward with a bill that does not go into those descriptions of how it's going to be monitored, how it's going to be tracked, who is going to qualify, who is going to be responsible for paying for this. When asked the minister how much is this going to cost businesses in Manitoba, the answer was, shockingly, I don't know.

How do you not know what this is going to cost? You want to go forward blindly with a bill that you haven't had any consultation on, that you don't know the price of what it's going to cost businesses in this province, and the answer was, we haven't figured that out, we don't know.

Again, it's pretty simple to figure that out. You look at what the national average is, what the change has been since the federal government did this, what other provinces are experiencing, what their percentage of claim on this extended—well, no one else has extended sick time, so what their current rate is of employees that do max out their time.

These are rational arguments. This has nothing to do with NDP and PC and Liberals, this is not a partisan issue, this is a logical conversation.

And sometimes you wonder with members opposite, where is the logic? I don't know. I'm really hoping that they're going to see this and they're going to say hey, you know what, this actually makes sense. Let's take it back and do some more consultation, then bring it forward with a wholesome approach, and at that point, of course we can sit down and have committees, have consultation. But to force this forward makes absolutely no sense.

Serious illnesses do require time to heal. There's no doubt about it. And we need to look at what those are. But who is actually calling for this change? When I asked from the minister who is actually—and these were questions we asked, and the minister said, well, it was done by the previous government. They had done a review and we want to bring it forward now.

But where is the actual advocacy? Who is actually calling for it? I have a guess. I imagine it would probably be some of these union bosses that are in this NDP pocket, or vice versa. Just a guess if you were to figure out why. You can do the math on that.

Seventeen weeks, they want to bump it to 27 weeks, what does that do to the labour force, everyone? Oh. Well, now you might have to 'uzionize' to get more guaranteed labour force in there because there's already a labour shortage.

So, how are you going to cover that? Without consultation with independent businesses, with sector-specific business that'll be affected by this, and unions of course. You have to have everyone at the table. Then you go forward with recommendations.

What are the tracking requirements for this? How will it be tracked? How will it be monitored? What is the assessment? Do you have to go to your doctor and say, I—Doc, I'm not feeling well, I want 27 weeks off, and the doctor gives you 27 weeks off? What are the requirements for—what injuries, what surgeries, what medical conditions qualify for sick leave?

These are important questions that are going to cost a lot of money. We know from history the NDP don't care about spending money. They will spend it 'til they have no money and then they'll borrow more money just like they did in this upcoming budget; \$10 billion they borrowed.

I'll stay on track because you're going to wonder where I'm going with that. And where I'm going with that is, the concern is, who's paying for this? What is the plan to return to work? Is there a plan for return to work for someone that's been off for 27 weeks? How will they implement this? What is the legislation, the regulation around this? What is the cost to the employer?

* (15:40)

Another question was, did they meet with them? And I'll answer that right now: no, they didn't meet with them.

The government—this NDP government is very clear, they are not concerned with who pays for this.

They want to do something because this Premier's (Mr. Kinew) best friend Justin Trudeau did it, now he wants to do it. He did the carbon tax, he wants it.

It's clear where this government is allying, and that is with the NDP-Liberal coalition. Plain and simple. They do not care about the cost of what this is, just like they don't care about the carbon tax. It's abundantly clear that when it comes to spending money, this government will spend money. Keeyask, failed gas tax holiday, I'll leave it there because I don't want to get called out for getting off track. But these are important concerns.

Now, on the flip side of it, my good friend, the member from Burrows, brought up some very good concerns with abuse of the program and, you know, Manitobans are good people, Canadians are good people, abuse won't happen, the people will do the right thing.

And I would agree with the member. I would agree whole-heartedly that a majority—the vast majority of people are great people, great humans; 99 per cent of us are great.

But there still is that chance for abuse. There still is that chance for someone to look at this opportunity and say, well I can get an extra 10 weeks of pay on sick leave. How can I find a loophole within that system?

And again, to be clear, not everyone is going to do this, I think a very, very small percentage. But that small percentage has a significant impact on the businesses that it affects. It has an impact on the morale of the company. It has an impact of the attitude within the business of how they're going to operate.

These are concerns that need to be addressed. It's not addressed in the bill. The minister had no answers for it.

So when you look at the extensions in this country, you say, well, you know, I've already talked about this and no one else has done it. Alberta, Saskatchewan, 12 weeks from Saskatchewan, that's—so this, just to be clear also, this extension we're asking for, it's going to be 15 weeks more than what Saskatchewan's already getting. Fifteen weeks more.

No other province has done this. This is what they want to do. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), obviously, wants to heckle me down. And the member from Concordia, he has a lot to say, but when it was the member from Concordia's time to speak to this, he had nothing to say.

Because at the end of the day, the member from Concordia doesn't care about the bottom line for Manitobans. All he wants to do is protect his union buddies. He wants to just make sure that this costs Manitobans as much as—money as possible because it's not coming out of his pockets.

That's what it is. You know, and then the member opposite wants to, you know, make comments on private businesses that people are operating in Manitoba and it just shows you the ethical bounds of the member from Concordia that he has no idea what he's actually talking about.

The reality is this is not about the businesses, it's about the—it's about businesses, it's also about the people that are affected by these laws. And this Minister of Justice has no concept.

He promised bail reform within 100 days; we're over 150 days—

The Speaker: Order. I shouldn't have to keep reminding the very same member over and over to remain relevant to the bill before us. He's vectored off quite often. Please keep your comments in relation to Bill 9.

Mr. Khan: And again, I appreciate your guidance on these conversations as always. When I've been speaking for a while, it—you do tend to wander.

But in regard to the Minister of Justice, it wasn't a wander. And again, 30 seconds here. It simply points to the fact that this government—this NDP government and this Minister of Justice have no clue how to operate government.

He promised bail reform within 100 days; it's over 150. This bill, they have no clue how to write bills. This is why—so it is relevant to this, Honourable Speaker. The gas tax bill, it was poorly written; we had to amend it. This bill, we have to amend.

Now, in this bill specifically, when it talks about time off, you can go to the due diligence and consultation on this bill. Who have they communicated this with? And my time is wrapping up here, so I'll get to my closing remarks. I know, it's unfortunate. Members want to hear me to go on for quite a bit longer, but it is—everyone has time to speak.

The biggest concern with this is that there has been no consultation in bringing this bill forward. The minister said it herself—the Minister of Immigration said herself, there has been no consultation with businesses. Not AMM, not CFIB.

This is an important part of the employee amendment act that should be discussed. We need to look at it wholesomely and see, who does it affect? How can this province make it a better workforce for Manitobans?

But forcing legislation through without doing your proper due diligence is going to leave this province in a big, big hole. We have seen that historically. Previous NDP government did it; this one looks like it's on the same track.

What are the costs for this bill? How is it going to affect the workforce? How are we going to address the labour shortage that we are experiencing in this province, in this country we've seen? Does allowing 10 extra weeks of work off in sick leave, when no one's calling for it, no other province has done it, does that make it a more competitive work atmosphere? Does it make it one that wants to bring people here, or does it make it one that's just complacent and happy to go along? I mean, I think the answer's pretty simple when you look at what this legislation's actually setting to do.

Further to that, it's concerning that the minister said, well, the previous PC government had done all the work on this, we're just bringing it forward. So if the minister's just bringing previous work forward, I mean, there might've been a reason why the previous government didn't bring it forward. Does the minister not have any legislation of their own they could bring forward?

I won't divert off to what other announcements this government has done, but it seems to be a re-occurring pattern of taking previous and bringing it forward.

At the end of the day, serious illness, injuries, are something that we should all take very important—very seriously. We want to make sure workers are protected in the workplace; that if this does happen, they are safe and they will have a job to come back to.

But to force legislation through without doing the proper consultation, without doing the proper costing, really exposes businesses, the competitive market, attracting new businesses here. Why would businesses want to come here if they can potentially be opened up for an extra 10 weeks—or, 15 weeks more than Saskatchewan?

Honourable Speaker, this bill simply is not well written.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I appreciate the time today to talk about Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

The Employment Standards Code is amended to extend the length of leave for serious illness—serious injury or illness from 17 to 27 weeks. I want to make sure that I cover this with all the members that are here with us in the Legislative Assembly, because what I've been trying to find here, through the fact sheets and the employee standards is, what is considered a serious injury or illness?

So, a little bit of background: The federal government, under the Canada Labour Code, increased the maximum length of unpaid medical leave available to federally regulated private sector employees from 17 weeks to 27 weeks in 2022.

Currently, an employee working for a provincially regulated employer may be eligible for 26 weeks of EI sickness benefits, but they may not be entitled to an equivalent amount of unpaid job-protected sick leave under the applicable provincial legislation.

My apologies, Assistant Deputy Speaker, did I—the Deputy—or, Deputy Speaker, was—the Speaker was here—okay, sorry, I'll—it's been a long day for me. It's my age. It's my age, sorry. I'll try and get back on relevance on this. *[interjection]* Yes. I thought I missed something. Excuse me.

Alberta and Saskatchewan are: 16 weeks in Alberta and 12 weeks, respectively. Approximately 90 per cent of Manitoba workplaces fall under the Manitoba Employment Standards Code. The other 10 per cent fall under the Canada Labour Code. Manitoba would be one of the first jurisdictions to match the federal changes.

* (15:50)

Stable and consistent employment is critical in Manitoba to provide them—for Manitobans to provide for themselves and their families. We want all Manitobans to be—feel supported and their jobs to be protected.

I still didn't see in here too, and I want to go through these fact sheets here in a bit too, as maybe I've missed something here, but there doesn't seem to be a lot of support in here regarding mental health.

And again, coming from that industry, I think that we have to look at mental health very strongly. Businesses like the agriculture business that I was in provided a lot of mental health support, and I would hope to see some of that as we move forward.

Serious injuries and illnesses require time to heal and recover from with the supervision of health-care professionals. But again, as I spoke before, it doesn't really outline very much about what a serious illness is. These injuries and illness may require more than 17 weeks; however, there is potential for abuse of this program.

Employees can benefit from the extension of this time, but should only take the necessary time for recovery and care. At a time when there is pressure on the labour force, and the shortages across many sectors, this bill could potentially further exasperate the pressures that business and industry face with staffing.

Manitoba would be one of the first jurisdictions to match the federal program. Being a leader means being susceptible to some bumps in the road. Other jurisdictions have done consultation, but not implemented the policy at this time. Why are we rushing this policy through?

As my colleague talked about, do we have the proper and enough information on this bill to take it forward? When bringing in a new labour-related bill, it is critical—absolutely critical—that due diligence and consultation is done with both the public and employers. And that was one of the parts that I took very seriously, and I'm going to talk about a number of employers that I spoke to when we talked about this bill.

We have not heard from the minister whether or not a comprehensive consultation process informed this policy. Manitobans are rightly concerned about any legislation that impacts their rights as workers, and employers are concerned about changes that will impact their workforce.

Extending the leave can create uncertainty for employers on staffing. I'd like to now read some of the—from the fact sheets from the employee standards, and it does cover off a fair amount of different jobs, but I think it's very important that we talk about this so that we can all hopefully understand this bill better.

So, agriculture: The fact sheet that I read provides an overview of the minimum standards that an—that employers in agriculture sector need to be aware of: a guide to workplace rights and protection for foreign farm workers in Manitoba. The legal rights and protections ensured the government of Manitoba—for farm workers working in this province on a seasonal or temporary basis. The Manitoba government's employee standards office enforces these rights and protections, and has prepared this guide to answer most of the

common questions about working on a Manitoba farm.

Again, I'm not seeing anything in here of what a serious injury is, or what a serious illness entails. I know that dealing with some of the foreign workers that have come to Manitoba, that there is some questions over driver's licensing and things like that. So I'm glad to see that there is some in place, some guidelines for that.

Standards for employees in climate-controlled facilities: On June 30, 2008, changes made to the Employment Standards Code regarding employees working in agriculture came in effect. Different standards apply depending on the type of employment.

Standards for employees of agriculture service providers: On June 30, 2008, changes made the Employment Standards Code regarding employees working in an agricultural facility come into effect.

Child performers: I didn't know that we had so much legislation and what was there for child performers. A child performer, a guide for parents, guardians of child performers, which is very critical, I think, that we need to look at, as well, too.

Again, what entails a serious injury or a serious illness when it comes to—for parents or guardians of a child performer? The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act provides protections for children in the talent and modelling industry by making the agency and parents and guardians of the child performers jointly responsible for the safety and well-being of the child. Again, there was nothing laid out in there of what a serious illness or what can happen in those situations.

Child performer recruitment licence information: All businesses engaged in child performer recruitments are required to have a licence from the Employment Standards branch before they can audition, scout or recruit a child. This requirement results from The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, which provides protection for children in the talent and modelling industry. I think it's so important that we make sure that we are watching over our kids, that we're making sure that they're treated properly, that we make sure that they're getting the proper due to them.

Child performers permit information: All children promoted by a talent or modelling agency must have a child performer permit from the employee standards—*[interjection]* Yes, I know. I didn't notice that.

Child talent agency licence information: By April 1, 2009, all businesses engaged in promoting child performers are required to have a licence from the Employment Standards branch. Each child promoted also requires a child performer permit. The requirement results from the new Worker Recruitment and Protection Act.

The construction industry, which is a very important industry, and, again, entails both union and non-unionized workers: The construction industry has several minimum standards that are different from other industries. Employees performing construction work and their employers need to know the different rules for termination and general holidays. The Construction Industry Wages Act also sets a minimum wage in the industry trades person and other construction workers in the industrial, commercial, industrial sector and heavy construction sectors.

Heavy construction and wage schedule: The Construction Industry Wages Act, along with the Employment Standards Code, sets wages and working conditions on most Manitoban construction sites. The heavy construction sector has its own minimum standards—which I will get to—and wage levels.

Construction and wage schedule: The Construction Industry Wage Act, along with the Employment Standards Code, sets wages and working conditions on most Manitoba construction sites.

Employment agencies, business, temporary help agencies, employment agency businesses: Employment agency businesses help employers find suitable employees to hire. They may also help someone write a resumé and improve interview skills. They connect employers with individuals who are job searching but they are not the employer.

Again, I've run—I've ran through a number of these scenarios here, but there seems to be nothing speaking on what a serious injury or what a serious illness entails.

A temporary help agency: Temporary help agencies assign their employees to their client's worksite for temporary work. The temporary help agency is an employer, and must ensure—must ensure—all wages are paid properly.

* (16:00)

Ending of employment: And again, this can be a critical time as well, too, and I wondered, maybe it's during the ending of employment that they'll talk more about critical illness or critical issues that may happen.

Bankruptcies and receiverships: Employees who are not paid because an employer declares bankruptcy or goes into receivership can file a claim with Manitoba Employment Standards, and I would think that something like that is something that can be very critical to the people that are affected by that. Employees can also apply to the Government of Canada's Wage Earner Protection Program in these situations.

How do you file a claim? The Employment Standards Code establishes the right and responsibility of most employees and employers in Manitoba. Employers and employees are often able to resolve disputes by speaking with Employment Standards or finding information from our website.

I have gone over the website many times, as well, too, and I would suggest that there is many unanswered questions there. If the employers and employees still disagree on the employees'—what they should be paid, a claim may be filed with the Employment Standards. As a neutral third party, Employment Standards can investigate and make a decision of what is owed.

What is just cause? Employers have the right to terminate employees but must give notice in ending. An exception to the notice requirement applies where the employer can prove just cause. Just cause refers to conduct that is such a serious nature. Employment Standards investigates complaints to determine if the employer had just cause or not.

Other government supports that are out there to help us make this decision. Employment Standards legislation does not cover all issues in the workplace. Employers and employees often ask questions better asked by another government agency or department.

Paying wages and keeping records: Employers and employees need to keep accurate records of hours worked and the amount paid for these hours, which again, I think is very critical when we look at this legislation here, if we're going to amend to extend the length of the leave for serious injury or illness from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

Termination of employment: Employment relationships can be ended by either an employer or an employee. In most cases, the legislation requires the person ending the employment to give due notice.

Foreign workers recruitment: This was another part that I didn't understand either, is where foreign workers are covered in this. Because I know, again, in the agriculture industry, we saw a number of it at HyLife, when the member from Agassiz and I toured

the HyLife site, is where are foreign workers covered under this policy? And again, is there different criteria for foreign workers when we're talking about rights of employees, there?

Employee–Employer registration information: All employers wanting to recruit foreign workers other than Manitoba provincial nominees in Manitoba will first be required to register with Employment Standards. This requirement results from The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, which improves protection for foreign workers.

Foreign workers requirement for licence information: A licence is required from the Employment Standards for persons engaging in foreign worker recruitment in Manitoba under The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act. The act provides protection for foreign workers, and sets out obligation that recruiters must meet to be approved for a licence in Manitoba.

Again, where I think this could've been very helpful is the 64 Filipino health-care workers that have come to the province thanks to the former Immigration minister that went over and brought some of these people back—[interjection] Oh, yes, yes. Should be, yes. It should be, but yes, for some reason, we're not going down that path.

Foreign–general holidays: Again, a very important statement to make sure that everybody is protected that is working in our province. A licence is required from the Employment Standards for persons engaging in foreign workers recruitment in Manitoba under The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act. This act provides protection for foreign workers and sets out the obligation that recruiters must meet to be approved for licence in Manitoba.

Holidays: With Easter just around the corner, I think it's important that we talk about holidays and what holidays that people can use. General holidays are sometimes referred to as statutory holidays or stat holidays for short. There are days recognized by law in holidays. Employees either have the day off with pay or are paid differently if they work.

But again, it doesn't really talk about if they don't work. So again, I'm not sure there how that works and if the holidays, you know, the—from the 17 to the 27 weeks, if you have to take holidays out of there or if you have the 27 weeks, do you get an extra four weeks of holidays in there? I just can't find that information, and I can't move further with this.

A quick guide to employment standards: The Employment Standards Code provides employees and

employers with information regarding minimum wage standards, protection for young workers, paying wages and even more.

Filing a claim: The Employment Standards Code establishes the rights and responsibilities of most employees and employers in Manitoba.

There is other government support. Employment Standards legislation does not cover all the issues in the workplace. Employers and employees often ask questions better answered by another government agency or department.

I would like to—if I could, at this time, I want to take a break from that and just talk about some of the—

An Honourable Member: Carbon tax.

MLA Bereza: No. Well, the carbon tax is going to affect this, as well, too.

But one of the questions that I did ask the minister was, who did they talk to when they talked about this? Because I found that it was very important and then—that we must understand what the employees are doing here. Is there going to be an—is there going to be a question here is, if we move through with this legislation—again, The Employment Standards Code is amended to extend the length of leave for serious injury or illness from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

So, first of all, I asked every one of these employers if they could tell me exactly, specifically, or where they could give me the information of what was a serious injury, and they couldn't help me with that.

So some of the companies that I talked to in my constituency—Southport Aerospace, one of the largest, if not the largest, employer in my constituency. Currently they're under contract negotiations, they're looking for new tenants every day to bring into Portage la Prairie into the old CFB base; 25 years flight training, a hundred—and hundreds of employees competing against—

An Honourable Member: The air show this summer?

MLA Bereza: Yes, there is.

So again, we'll talk about that, because the employees, under these—this act, we have to look to see how those employees are going to be protected at the air show.

So one of the things that is a big concern for somebody like Southport Aerospace, that is competing for a 25-year flight training contract, is—Moose Jaw is also in the running. Saskatchewan, right now,

has 12 weeks. So again, they're very concerned what kind of an effect that will have.

* (16:10)

Southport Aerospace has a very strong safety program. I also talked to a few of the grain millers and grain companies, and just through those companies that I spoke to was Richardson International, Parrish and Heimbecker, and Paterson Grain, because they have been embedded in this provincial—in this province for years and years.

Yes, strong safety programs, state-of-the-art facilities, but, again, we are competing with Saskatchewan and Alberta. They said if it's tough to do business in Manitoba, we have to look at other alternatives.

I stayed with the agriculture industry as well, too, and I talked to some independent grow-independent ag dealers. I spoke with Sugar Hill Farm supply, which is based out of Brandon, which is one of the largest—if not the largest-independent ag dealer in Manitoba.

I talked to a smaller dealer, Catellier Seed at Letellier, Manitoba. I talked to Parallel Ag, who is a group of young guys that come to the province of Manitoba to try and create business, but again, little bit scared about what might be coming down the pipeline.

I also talked to Double Diamond, which again is a large ag retailer based in southwest Manitoba. These people are the lifeblood of their communities. That's where their workers come from, but their spouses also work in those little communities, too.

And they're worried. They're worried what this might do to them. What if one of the companies moves away? What happens to the other workers?

So again, I think we have to look at this very closely. Independent—sorry—how do they find employees in small communities? Again, it's one of the issues that we run into, where we're battling a lot of times with finding employees that are willing to stay in these small communities.

Again, they deal with safety programs.

I spoke with some grocery stores, in particular, Family Fare, Portage Supermarket and Stan's Groceteria. Small independents, low unemployment rate. In fact, they have trouble filling their jobs throughout the year. Strong community supporters. I can speak for Portage Supermarket in Portage la Prairie, they're always giving back to the community.

But I asked the owners of Portage Supermarket, what is a serious injury? What is a serious illness? And they said, is there some definition somewhere? And again, I'll continue on after going through these here.

Provide worker-work programs for high schools, vocational programs and food bank suppliers: Which again, they're going to find harder and harder to do with this April Fool's joke of a carbon tax that's coming through.

Another one of the employers that I spoke to was Shindico. Now I think we all know Shindico. They do business worldwide, but they do business from Manitoba. This is their home. They originally started out in Portage la Prairie in a grocery store and have built a conglomerate of businesses.

Very strong, philanthropical, huge employee base, very little turnover. In fact, one of their employees that I talked to had been with them for 33 years. I said to her, I said Sarah, have you ever had any problem with your employee getting time off or making sure that you're treated properly?

She said, I could not find a better employer than Sandy and Robert Shindleman. Why would companies like Shindico and that want to stay and continue to do business here if other countries and other provinces are easier to work with?

I also—I want to talk about a situation that I had myself. For the past seven years, before I was—had the privilege to be in this Chamber, I chaired the Municipal Board of Manitoba. In seven years, we never ever, ever, never had a full complement of staff. There was always somebody off on sick leave.

But wait; we couldn't hire temps. We couldn't bring in workers to do that, so it just slowed everything down.

For almost 30 board members, when we started out to 16 wanting to work, stress it put on other employees. And I can tell you, just for a little work here, the work that we did at the Municipal Board saved this province four to \$5 million.

An Honourable Member: You didn't work for minimum wage?

MLA Bereza: What it—minimum wage at the Municipal Board? I don't think so.

What is the plan for replacement workers? Well, I know what the plan is not for replacement workers: it's not to bring in any Filipino health-care workers to try and bring—to try and work at our hospitals.

This proposed bill will not affect employers, it will affect employees. It is very shallow. Nobody knows what a serious injury is. Nobody knows about time off.

Shall we change the name of the bill, maybe, to hard-to-do-business-in-Manitoba act; or, sorry, small business and communities, you're not important; welcome-to-Saskatchewan-and-Alberta act, where we are more open for business.

I'd like to continue with some of the labour standards here. And what is the Labour Board? So many people confuse the provincial Employment Standards and the Manitoba Labour Board, so again, we'll be able to clear this up here a little bit.

Employment Standards enforces minimum standards and investigates disagreements between employers and employees. The Manitoba Labour Board adjudicates decisions made by Employment Standards and gives employers and employees a chance to present evidence at a hearing.

Who's covered by the Employment Standards Code? Employment Standards legislation covers employees whose workplaces are under provincial jurisdiction. Almost 90 per cent—I didn't know this—almost 90 per cent of workplaces in Manitoba fall under provincial jurisdiction.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member's time has expired. *[interjection]* I know. I know. *[interjection]*

Is there leave for the member to continue?

The honourable member for Turtle Mountain.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Turtle Mountain): Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, sorry.

The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

It is really a pleasure to rise today to speak to this long-awaited, long-needed bill brought forward by our government's absolutely incredible Minister of Labour and Immigration (MLA Marcelino). I am so proud of our minister, so very proud to stand beside and sit beside this incredible Labour minister.

I'm incredibly proud of our NDP government and its vision for one Manitoba. Where the opposition would, and has and continues to divide Manitobans,

pit workers against employers, that's not what this bill is about.

Member after member after member has gotten up on this debate and expressed their distrust for workers, that as if workers are going to abuse this system. That's not what this bill is about, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

The previous government's record is clear. Workers know. Manitobans know. This previous government legislated against workers immediately, and they did so constantly during their time in government. That's one of the reasons they're sitting on that side of the House, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

Workers in Manitoba have suffered. Families in Manitoba have suffered. Public services in Manitoba have suffered. And ultimately our economy has suffered.

And I really hope and urge Manitobans to listen to this important debate, because this bill is an excellent one. But I hope that they are paying attention and listening to the nonsense coming from the opposition, the distrust for workers and some of the absolutely ridiculous arguments that are coming forward.

* (16:20)

This bill is about unpaid leave for sick and injured workers, sick and injured workers that need and deserve this House's support.

We seek a balanced approach on this side of the House, Honourable Deputy Speaker, and we're here to return that balance, balance that has been missing for far too long under this other—this previous, failed PC government, who, again, legislated against workers and their families constantly during their time in office. We're here to return balance to the labour market and fairness to workers and to employers.

We're ultimately the party of workers, Honourable Deputy Speaker. I myself come to this place and to this seat as a worker. That's what brought me to this House; that's what brought me to this excellent party that I'm so proud to be a part of. I came to this party after 10 years as a postal worker. I used to deliver mail here to many of your constituents, many of our constituents. It was a privilege and an honour to do so. And in my time as a postal worker, I became a shop steward and a worker advocate, a worker representative.

Postal workers have a very incredibly hard job, Honourable Speaker, and I give all of my respect and

admiration to the postal workers that serve this community here in Manitoba and across Canada. And because of how hard that job is, postal workers have many injuries. They have many acute injuries. They fall and slip and break their wrist or their ankle delivering mail on slippery roads. They also have cumulative injuries. It is a hard job; it is hard on the knees; it's hard on the back; it's hard on shoulders. People on this side of the House know this.

And one of the hardest jobs that I had as a shop steward and a worker advocate when I had to represent my fellow postal workers was when we were dealing with postal workers that were dealing with serious injuries, serious illness and they were off work. That, in and of itself, being injured, being sick is incredibly stressful—I think we can all agree on that—and workers don't need the extra additional stress of having to worry about whether or not they're going to qualify for EI benefits, whether or not the provincial legislation is going to help them qualify for those EI benefits. Workers don't deserve the extra and added stress of income insecurity. They need to heal and they need to rest, and this House needs to support that.

If members opposite had been in my shoes, on those files, and seen what these workers go through, they would support this bill, Honourable Deputy Speaker, and they would support the workers that this 'impil'—this bill will impact so greatly. When workers are injured they need the time off to heal; they should not have to worry.

The opposition has been speaking about the impacts to employers with vacancies and how are employers going to manage this. It's an absolutely false narrative; it's a paper tiger. Sick and injured workers are off work. That's already happening, and it's unfortunate for employers to have to deal with and we empathize with those employers, absolutely. But when workers are sick and injured, they are off work.

What we're talking about in this bill is whether or not they will be paid and compensated and their families can have support. That's what we're talking about.

As a former worker myself, I can attest that no one is getting rich on EI, as been, you know, asserted by the opposition, that lazy workers are going to lie so that they can sit at home and collect big paycheques. That's not what's happening, Honourable Deputy Speaker. No one has ever gotten rich off EI.

The opposition, instead of talking about how great this bill is, this bill that's put forward by our

absolutely excellent, dedicated, fantastic Labour and Immigration Minister, instead of supporting this important bill and the workers that it is going to help and the Manitobans that are going to benefit from this bill, which is what we all got elected to do—we're elected here to work in the best interests of Manitobans, all Manitobans.

And, again, on this side of the House, we're here to restore balance in Manitoba. We're here to work for employers and we're here to work for workers. We're here to work for all Manitobans on this side of the House, unlike the opposition.

The honourable Labour Minister has handed me a list from the LMRC, the Labour Management Review Committee, yes, which has representatives from employers and also workers. The opposition has wasted our time debating this bill, talking about how employers are not being represented.

Let's list the employers that are represented on the Manitoba Employers Council, which is represented on LMRC, which endorsed this bill, which recommended this bill to go forward.

So let's talk about the employers whose representative group support this important bill brought forward by our—I'm going to say it again, I'm going to say it many more times—our absolutely amazing, dedicated Labour and Immigration minister.

So endorsing this important work is the Canad Inns, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters; the City of Winnipeg; the association of Manitoba—Construction Association of Rural Manitoba; Credit Union Central of Manitoba; Keystone Agricultural Producers, one of our great friends; Manitoba Aerospace Association; the great Manitoba Chamber of Commerce; Manitoba Electrical League; the Manitoba Fashion Institute; Manitoba Home Builders' Association; the Manitoba Hotel Association; the Manitoba Pork Council—again, great partners of ours; the Manitoba restaurant and food-service association; Merit Contractors; the Mining Association of Manitoba.

Yes, I can keep going. Pinnacle; Princess Auto; Restaurants Canada; Retail Council of Canada. I could go on and on and on. There are many more on this list, but I know that the opposition cannot wait to hear themselves speak.

So I will end my comments with saying once again, on this side of the House, we are here to return balance to Manitoba. We are here to represent these fantastic worker—sorry, businesses that I've just read

out. We're here to represent workers; we're here to represent the best interests of Manitobans, and I urge the opposition to get onboard.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): And I just want to put a few words on this bill when it comes to the Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, the employment standards, extending the length of leave for serious injuries and illness from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

And when it comes to employers and employees, I take offence when the member for Rossmere (MLA Schmidt) basically says that, you know, we're against employees. You know, I have to say that, you know, I was an employer for many years, for over 20 years. And I had staff, and that staff became like my family.

And I take offence when somebody actually accuses us of treating employees terrible, or we don't respect employees. Well, the thing is, I just want to say that, you know what, when it came to my employees, you know, I've been in 20 years. And you know, we had one of the lowest turnover rates in our company. I think we had one person who actually decided not to come back after maternity leave because she chose to be with her child, to be a stay-at-home mom. And we respected that and the thing was, I believe that of all the 20 years that I was an employer, that was the only turnover staff that we had, was somebody who wanted to stay home with a child.

And, you know, when it comes to being in the insurance industry, I respect the benefits that I wanted to give to my staff. When it came to staffing the actual disability insurance, I wanted to make sure that was one of the primary insurance benefits that our staff got, because the fact is, if they were disabled anytime with long-term disability, they had coverage. And we knew that they were taken care of.

We would—I'd give them the amount of sick days, whatever we needed to make sure that they were—it would carry forward into EI, and eventually into long-term disability, depending how long the waiting period was to get those benefits.

And we were a private company. And when it comes to—a lot of times, when it comes to private companies like that, we do look after our staff. We respect them.

My daughter, she actually is working now with Meyers Norris Penny. She worked in finance for a period of time as a summer student for the co-op program and she felt that it was—when it came to the employees there, it was them and us. It was basically

the unions, with the attitude that they put toward employees sometimes, it's not we.

* (16:30)

And I feel that now my daughter's now working at Meyers Norris Penny as a summer student, and she just loves it there.

The Speaker in the Chair

She says it's like a team, Honourable Speaker.

And so this is how it's important that, you know, we don't—we do respect employees because, you know what? We need employees to drive this economy, to make sure that businesses are successful. And the fact is, I'm really scared when it comes to the amount of labour bills—are being introduced here, Honourable Speaker. That's my concern right now.

Because the fact is there's no consultation. There is basically no briefing—bill briefing—as our colleague from Agassiz had stated in her matter of privileges—that she never had a chance to get briefed on these bills.

And that is my concern about the agenda of this NDP government. We saw that in the past that the unions run this party of the NDP. And so that's my concern, is what's going to come to us next, as our private sector, who actually has to, you know, deal with growth in this economy, because at the same time, this is the same NDP government that got rid of the economic committee of Cabinet.

Where are we going to get the revenues to grow this economy? They say that we have the lowest inflation, but what about the growth of the economy? Inflation stays low when there's no growth, Honourable Speaker. That is my concern right now.

They're not putting—they're not saying that they're open for business, and that's my concern, because right now, I've been talking to many employers, people who are actually—provide employees' services to employers, and the big—the concern that they have, many employers are out there, it's—concern is what is coming next when it comes to labour bills coming forward here.

Like my colleague from Portage la Prairie had said, there's a lot more and better environment out west. And you know when I became an MLA, the reason why I became an MLA, Honourable Speaker, is because I saw the advantages. When Saskatchewan sends literature our way in the mailbox saying that—how much better it is to be in Saskatchewan, all the

benefits. And that was when the NDP actually increased the PST, put PST at 7 per cent—8 per cent—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the member to focus his comments on the bill before us.

Mr. Piwniuk: When it comes to the bills, Honourable Speaker, it's the concern that what's coming forward on this bill here, and the fact is, you know, when it comes to—when the member from Rossmere talked about, you know, the postal workers, and she was a postal employee, well, that's already covered under the federal bill that was put forward, and—for 27 weeks—the Canadian Labour Code.

And so, Honourable Speaker, it's really concerning that when it comes to the advantages and when it comes to this bill being put forward, there could be more advantages of going out west, and that's what—concerns I have right now because a lot of employers are looking that route.

Because, again, the last NDP government did not focus on the western—the new western partnership agreement. You know, they avoided it. But, at the same time, we have to be competitive with our neighbours. And why is it that we are moving this bill so quickly when no other bill is being moved in the other provinces? Why isn't there some more time to—consultation with employers?

And that was a concern that we have. I know they did a list, but I'm going to talk to some of these people that are on that list and see if they really—been advised and they've—actually support this bill, Honourable Speaker.

So that is my concern right now, and like I said, when it comes to employees, the—you know, making sure—the safety of the employees. You know, the other thing is, you know, I know the member from Rossmere also indicated, too, that oh, employees, they will never take advantage of the system and stuff like that. But how many insurance investigations are being done to look at what people abuse the system? It's always been abused over time. And it's not—like I said, 90 per cent, 95 per cent, 99 per cent of employees are not—don't abuse the system. They're here to be dedicated to their job, their career.

But there are some that are going to take advantage of it. And that's got my kind of concern right now is, too, is that right now we have—you know, I talk with my wife, who's in health care, who actually has staff, and it's—there's—always seems like the same

amount of people who abuse the system. And I think we see that in every industry, there's abuse.

And that's my concern right now, is that, as the member from Rossmere has indicated, there's—no abuse happens. Employees are all the same. They're all here to dedicate themselves to their cause.

But we're seeing a lot more—especially after COVID—a lot of people that want to come back to work, there's concerns about that. There's concerns about the work ethic that we have right now. And then in wondering why we need immigration; we need immigration because they're hard-working people that come to this country. And we want to make sure that, you know, what—we embrace our—the welcoming.

Like, the fact is, like, my colleague had said for the Filipino nurses who are coming from the Philippines, we went there. We actually had over 300 of them wanting to come here. They actually were trying to get their—all their papers in order. And all of a sudden, I believe this Labour minister actually has cancelled the program.

And, meanwhile, I was talking to Prairie Mountain Health CEO, Brian, and he was talking to me about how many Filipino nurses had come towards the end of the year. And this is what Manitoba, especially in western Manitoba, where sometimes it's very hard to get professionals to come out there, because our population's aging out there. You know, no thanks to the last NDP government, that kind of hollowed out our rural areas. We're—we were just trying to rebuild them again.

And that's where my dedication is, is making sure that we grow our industries. I'm working with many industries in my constituency to making sure that there is increased employment so that there's more families that come to these rural areas. And that's important, because the fact is, we do have to take care of them. We got to make sure that—I don't know—quite sure what we have to go on, from 17 weeks to 27 weeks, when they are taken care of. They are not taken advantage of.

Because employers know the importance of employees. But it's this NDP government that's basically working with the unions, union leaders, who are basically—are railroading these bills into play. And that concerns the business community right now. That—it concerns investment into our province, Honourable Speaker. And that's where, you know, I would say, you know, I just said it this morning, that when it came to Portage la Prairie, Roquette now employs over

300 people there. And that was from our government, while opening for business.

Create a better environment; that could have easily went to Saskatchewan, but we made sure it stayed here in Manitoba. And when it came to Simplot, we wanted to make sure that the expansion of potatoes, here. And we do have to have some talks with our potato producers because, again, we want to make sure that there is employment there, there is production there and they need more potatoes. They need more irrigations. And that is what we're going to be continuing to work, to make sure that this government—this NDP government—knows about that.

But it's—just seems like right now, their focus is on break—passing bills. Because again, they owe—I have to say—they owe the unions a lot when it comes to the amount of door knocking they had the unions out there. You know, they made sure that the union leaders are taken care of. You know, that's who ran the NDP government back in the dark days of the NDP; 16 years, Honourable Speaker.

And so these are the concerns that I had. I remember one of my good friends who works in the employment services, he said you know, back in the day when the NDP, in the 16 years that they were in power, we had to worry about what was coming at us. And then all of a sudden when we formed government, they say, now we can focus on our business, now. Because now we can focus on making sure that we grow our business, because we don't have to worry about the labour bills that are going to change things that puts us on a disadvantage.

Because right now, a lot of businesses can—they have choices. And with our clean energy of—green hydroelectricity, we had the opportunity to attract more of that business. But what do they do? They focus, they got their union leaders to go into their boards and they got rid of economic development board of—committee at Cabinet. They got rid of the boards that they put on—board members they put on are union leaders, especially for MPI. And it's like putting the fox in the henhouse, Honourable Speaker.

And that's my biggest concern right now. What is their agenda coming forward? How many more bills are they going to come up with that are going to try to sneak in to make sure that, you know what, we are at a disadvantage to this province. And, again, like I said, it's important that we actually continue growing this economy. And I'm going to make sure in my constituency that we work together with industry to make

sure that we have a good environment in rural Manitoba.

Because I'm really concerned what's coming here in the future. And like I said, you know, when we came to, you know, every—you know, we had one of the highest education costs in the country, but we came in 10th last when the NDP were back in government. You know, like my—said, my mother-in-law always says, history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme. And I think it's rhyming right now.

* (16:40)

And I know the good intentions. I look at—I think that that budget that they're going to come up with, I think it's one day too late, because I believe it should have come out on April 1, like an April Fool's joke. Because that's what it's going to be.

I feel that they have—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Once again, I would remind the member to keep his comments relevant to Bill 9.

Mr. Pivniuk: And like I said, Bill 9, when it comes to changing from 17 to 27 weeks, again, it's, you know, when it comes to employees, if it's cancers or if it's an injury, a serious injury, those things are legit. They need to be looked after. I know I—our staff, if we had a bill like this come in, we looked after them regardless. We wanted to make sure, like I said, we've always—lot of employers out there do have disability insurance, a group plan, for their employees.

And I, as an—as a broker, I used to make sure that companies that I used to deal with actually provided disability insurance for their employees because that is one of the most important things. To replace your income is the hardest thing. You can have benefits of dental and—but when it comes to disability and having—being off for periods of time, long periods of time, and like anything else, we've always had jobs ready for people if they ever were injured.

We want—if, you know, if they had—they were valuable to us. We wanted to make sure that they were taken care of. And we already guaranteed their income—they were on disability. We guaranteed their jobs.

And I'm not quite sure why this is—this bill has to be rushed so quickly, with no consultations. And I'm thinking there's a series of bills coming forward, and I'd be happy to speak on every bill that comes this way, because I'm—because—like, the thing is, I'm connected to the business community. I'm a capitalist.

And I feel that, at the same time, we do have to look after our staff. And it's so important, especially now with the competition out there.

The competition out there is taking care of the employees, their families, because at—in all my time when I was—as employer, my staff were always my family. We actually were a team. I didn't call myself as an employer, I called myself a team leader.

Because the fact is, I embraced the input that they—each of these employees gave us. I made sure that we give enough parameters to making sure that they can make decisions without feeling scared. We created an environment that we were—we all grew together. We were here together, and as we all grew together as a family, as a—for my staff, the company grew with it. And we had a profit-sharing program, Honourable Speaker, to make sure that if the company did well, they also benefitted from the growth of the company.

That's entrepreneurship. That is capitalism to making sure that people are looked after. And it's not like them and us, and that was where I'm concerned about, sometimes, about these bills. It divides the employees with the employer. And right now, when it comes—*[interjection]* So, health care is very important. We had an extended health-care program, too. Thank you for reminding me of that, the honourable member from Rossmere.

We had a medical—we had a extended health-care program. We had dental. We wanted to make sure that we had that—all that in our benefits. We had a group RRSP, making sure that there were taken care of when—on their retirement.

So this is why I'm not quite sure why this has to be rushed through without consultation, without briefing to our critic. And in the past, I remember being in here, Honourable Speaker, when it came to being here for the first time, when I came into opposition for two and a half years. And I remember any critic role that I had, the minister always gave us a briefing.

I'll give them the benefit of saying—of communicating that. When I had a bill, I had a briefing. I remember having the honourable member, Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) come into my office when he was critic. Or the honourable minister for municipal relations come to my office for a briefing. Or if he can't make it, his staff came in.

So this is why it's so important—it's disrespectful. That's why we—there's no trust right now with what's coming forward here. And we had a point of—matter of privilege here, and that's concerning that we have.

And this is why I feel that this bill is being rushed through without consultation, without the—this is why we're debating this right now. We want to make sure that anything else that comes up here, we make everybody accountable here in this Chamber, especially any bills that come forward here.

And I'll continue doing that and making sure that I look after my constituents, because a lot of my constituents are employers.

And I had a list—I'm doing an article—and I had a list of all the major employers that are expanding in my constituency. And they're expanding with manufacturing. They're also having challenges. They're trying to get people to come to small towns to do—to be—to have this—that skill that they need.

Especially when it comes to manufacturing, from welders to electricians to electrical engineers, when it comes to putting things together, like manufacturing goods and services.

And right now, I'm look—working on a case where a person is coming to from the States to do some manufacturing for travel trailers in the Boissevain area. And I look forward to that, because the fact is, the reason why he wants to come to Manitoba, to our area and do more expansion in Canada, because we have health care.

We don't have—they don't have to pay health-care premiums. So I know when I was in government and when I was in the economic cabinet, that was where the sale was is that we don't pay the premiums that we pay—that Americans have to pay for. There is that advantage to come here.

And like I said, this is why the bill—it's important that when it comes to employers and making sure that, you know, when it comes to, you know, amount of weeks, you know, a lot of these employers in my constituency actually have also disability insurance to make sure that their employees are looked after.

If they got injured, they can go on long-term disability. And they will make sure that—they're not—they're going to make sure of that, once that person's well, they're going to hire them back.

So I'm not quite sure why this has to be pushed through right away. I think there's more pressing issues that we need to deal with, especially when it comes to health-care workers to come to Manitoba to actually work in our health-care system.

We're challenging right now what the minister done instead of the—focusing on these—really, that critical

bill here, they should have never cancelled the program for Filipino nurses coming into this province. We need them. We need them in the worst way.

And a lot of our Filipino nurses, I have to say, a lot of them are in Killarney. A lot of them are in Russell. They're in Roblin. They're in Virden. And you know, our population—our Filipino population is growing in these communities.

Actually, Russell—in Russell, Manitoba, in the Western Region, actually has a dedicated grocery store for Filipino people. So this—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Once again, the member's vectoring off from talking about this specific bill, so I would remind him to keep his comments relevant to Bill 9. I realize it's hard to do sometimes, but just make sure your comments are always relevant to this bill.

Mr. Piwniuk: I know I was in the—we were in the opposite role there, and I remember I had to do that same thing to you too, so I understand.

So, anyway, I just wanted to get my point across that it's important that, you know, when it comes to this bill, that things aren't forced into—to get into passing here because the fact is, we have a lot more questions here.

And I have—I know there's a—we have—I have colleagues who also want to talk on this bill, so the thing was, I will probably leave it at that, but I want to say, you know, we are watching. We want to make sure that my constituents, my employers, my employees that work and have a great relationship with their employers, are all being taken care of.

But that doesn't split them. And this is what this bill sort of does, is it kind of splits the employees with the employers. Because a lot of employers and employees, contrary to the member for Radisson (MLA Dela Cruz) has said, have a very good working relationship.

And I don't want to jeopardize that, so this is why I'm speaking on this bill. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Yes, it's the Mountains to end the day here, first Turtle and then Riding. I'll try to keep this a little bit light for the rest of the way because my colleagues have said a lot this afternoon and I just want to tell a little story about you, Honourable Speaker, before I start talking about Bill 9.

I was telling some of my new colleagues here, and I'm sure most of the members of the—the new members of the opposition won't know this, but when the Speaker was a rookie in this House, he had unlimited speaking time given to him by the leader at the time and the Honourable Speaker went for two afternoons.

He was heckled from our side. He went for two afternoons. He just built on what we said, and it was amazing, actually. So the Honourable Speaker was a great debater in his day, and I'll always remember those two afternoons when he was speaking.

* (16:50)

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the member to keep his comments relevant to the specific bill we're talking about.

The honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk)—[*interjection*—the honourable member for Riding Mountain.

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, thank you, Honourable Speaker; I tried to give you a compliment, but now we'll get back to Bill 9 and talk about things. But I still admire you, even though you had to admonish me for what I said. Thank you very much.

I—there's been a lot said this afternoon, and I just want to assure the government—my government colleagues that, you know, on this side of the House, we're not opposed to labour legislation, good labour legislation. I think on—as—when it comes to employees, we certainly want to keep them safe, and we want them to have as much time off as they need to recover from a serious injury or illness.

I guess that—I think myself and our colleagues are concerned about, is this bill necessary right now? The federal government has just come in with these rules, and the other provinces in western Canada have far fewer weeks. And I'm not saying we have to follow Saskatchewan and Alberta on everything, but we are a part of the New West Partnership, so I would think there should be consultations on many of these things with ministers, premiers from other provinces, before something like this is put on.

Now, I have no problem with Manitoba being a leader. I think Manitoba leads in a lot of things, and—but in terms of this, I think that perhaps a little more consultation with our prairie colleagues would've been good.

I take exception to the members this afternoon on the government side saying that we're wasting their

time by debating Bill 9. That's the purpose of this House. We are in opposition, here—we'll admit, we're in opposition—they're in government. We debate bills. We're not wasting time. We want to tell the public we're not wasting time. We're making points. We're trying to get our points across. And they have time to get up and—like the minister did, of Environment and Climate Change; she got up this afternoon and spoke on behalf of the side—their side, which was really welcomed.

So I guess, like my colleagues had said—and I want to thank my colleague from Portage and my colleague from Fort Whyte and my colleague from Agassiz on their comments on Bill 9. I think they made a lot of great points and, you know, they've said a lot of things, and there's not a ton of things left for me to say on this bill. But it—I guess I—I guess—*[interjection]* No, no, no. I want to talk about the consultation.

Now, this afternoon it was revealed by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt), she read out a whole list of who they supposedly consulted with. And I guess my question would be, when there was a question period on Bill 9, and I think the question was asked on our side, why weren't those names brought out then? Because a lot of those names are familiar to us on this side of the House, and we could've certainly consulted with these groups ourselves to find out if they're completely in favour of this legislation. Maybe we are wasting our time talking about it.

But I think we'll want to check into that and just make sure that all of those groups have been consulted, and had time to consult with their members across Manitoba. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business represents small business all across Manitoba, and they would have to do a survey of those members to get a position on this. And I'd be interested to see if they did that, and we'll certainly be checking into that.

Honourable Speaker, I haven't been an employee since I was 18 years old, until I joined the Legislature here. So I was an employer for 40 years in various businesses and things. And I value my employees; I certainly do. And you know, I would want an employee that was sick, long-term illness, things like that, to have much time to recover as possible. I think most small business employers are compassionate and will certainly bend—

An Honourable Member: But not all, right? So Bill 9 is important.

Mr. Nesbitt: No, there's always bad apples.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change says not all of them. Well, of course there's bad apples. There's bad apples everywhere. But I think the majority of small businesses value their employees. Because they recognize how hard it is to find a new employee should they not value their employer.

You know, like I say, the one business I had, I have staff members that have been there 40 years—40 years, Honourable Speaker. That's a long time. And you know, I don't need any regulations to tell me what employees should be treated like. But in saying that, you know, 17 weeks to 27 weeks, why do we have to do it so quickly? Why can't we go up in stages? I mean, we're going to be, what, 15 weeks higher than our neighbour in Saskatchewan.

But again, Honourable Speaker, that is only used if people are sick or have a long-term disability, I guess, you know, and it's unpaid; according to what I see here, it's unpaid. Anything else, if it's not covered under a union agreement would likely be covered by EI.

So, on this side of the House, I guess we're not—we're certainly—it's certainly not—this side of the House we're not anti-labour, by any stretch of the imagination. I think we want to ensure that both sides are heard in this and continue to ensure that labour in Manitoba is protected and has rights.

But small businesses, you know, I'm concerned how this is going to perhaps affect them. You just can't go out in the street and find employees to replace good employees too, and I think that, you know, it's—a lot of times employers will try to hold the position with maybe not even filling it. So they do more with less employees to try to get through until this long-term employee recovers from their illness or injury.

And until you've been a small business owner, I think—I don't think you—perhaps this House and doesn't realize the stress on small business owners sometimes, you know, especially small business owners. And I'm talking, you know, six to 10 employees, that sort of thing, you know, to get a call in the morning that your employer's—employee's sick and—or anything. You have compassion, for sure. But it be still—it's still the stress of trying to fill that position or doing the extra work yourself as a small business owner.

So, you know, I appreciate the employee side of it, for sure, and, you know, there's no reason that provincial governments and federal governments shouldn't have regulations in place that allow the employees to

certainly take the time they need to recover from sickness or a long-term injury, that's for sure.

I guess the previous government would have consultations online a lot of times, and I'd be anxious to know if there was any consultations done on this with the average Manitoban that could put their views known, the average employee, because, I mean, there's employees out there that maybe like to comment on that. There's small businesses would like to comment that maybe aren't a member of CFIB. So I think that having this up on EngageMB for a 45-day consultation period would've been appropriate for the Minister of Labour to do.

Now, I know the Minister of Labour is—put this bill forward with all good intentions and things, and I congratulate her on putting the bill forward. And it's our job as an opposition to ask questions and talk about it, which I'm doing and my colleagues have done all afternoon and the afternoon before. So—and again, we would welcome any member from the government side to get up again when I'm done and, you know, fill in the blanks here if there's anything that I'm missing. *[interjection]*

I see the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) wants to speak here. I think I'll stay up here. I'm enjoying myself up here this afternoon, you know. I get to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Nesbitt: I think I'll stay up here. I have a little more time left, I think 20 minutes, on Bill 9, and—

An Honourable Member: You should use it.

Mr. Nesbitt: I'll use it, for sure.

So again, what's the rush? Is there not more pressing legislation that the government might have to get going here? I know there's a number of bills, Honourable Speaker, that are waiting to be introduced. We're anxious to see the contents of those bills, and unfortunately we have to take the Easter break here and just look at Bill 9 because we don't see bill 12 or whatever other bills they have; I don't know the numbers; it's kind of like a bingo over there. But I think that Bill 9 is well-intentioned by the minister, no question about that, and I think our side here has had a lot of time to talk about it, and we'll debate it more fulsome after the budget, I suppose, Honourable Speaker.

I think I'd like to wish my colleagues on the other side of the House a very happy Easter and a great constituency week, and hopefully they can enjoy reading about Bill 9, like I have, during that week, and we'll come back with a new attitude.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) will have 20 minutes—*[interjection]*—19 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until April 2 at 1:30 p.m., or at the call of the Speaker.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 21, 2024

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