

First Session – Forty-Third Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*

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
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	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
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, November 6, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

And before we begin, a couple of things. First, some of you may notice that there's someone in the gallery filming. That's a member of the Legislative Assembly staff who's doing things to make sure that things are recorded for our website purposes. And just a reminder to everyone else that no one else is allowed taking pictures in the Assembly.

With that, the honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Could you please canvass the House to see if there is leave to expedite consideration of Bill 41, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, as follows:

1. At the top of the orders of the day today, the House will consider second reading of Bill 41, with the following limited debate provisions to apply:
 - (a) First, the Minister of the Justice may speak up to five minutes;
 - (b) Then a question period may be held in accordance with subrule 137(5);

- (c) Next, a member of the official opposition may speak up to five minutes;
 - (d) Lastly, each independent member may speak up to five minutes; and
 - (e) The Speaker shall then put the question;
2. Once Bill 41 passes second reading, it shall then be referred to the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, which will meet at 3:30 this afternoon in room 255.
 3. The House shall then resolve into the Chamber section of the Committee of Supply to consider the concurrence motion.
 4. On November 7, 2024, the House will consider concurrence and third reading of Bill 41 during orders of the day, government business, with the following limited debate provisions to apply:
 - (a) First, the Justice Minister may speak up to five minutes;
 - (b) Next, a member of the official opposition may speak up to five minutes;
 - (c) Lastly, each independent member may speak up to five minutes; and
 - (d) The Speaker shall then put the question.

The Speaker: Is there leave for the House to expedite consideration of Bill 41, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, as described by the Government House Leader?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Honourable Speaker, could you please canvass the House to see if there is leave to 'expediate' consideration of Bill 41, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, and Bill 221, The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, on November 7, 2024, as follows:

At the top of orders of the day, the House will consider second reading of Bill 41, with the following limited debate provisions to apply:

First, the Minister of Justice may speak for up to five minutes;

Then a question period may be held in accordance with subrule 137(5)

Next, a member of the official opposition may speak for up to five minutes;

Lastly, each independent member may speak for up to five minutes; and

The Speaker shall then put the question.

Once Bill 41 passes second reading, bills 41 and 221 shall be immediately referred to the Committee of the Whole. Once the Committee of the Whole rises and the Chairperson reports, the House will consider concurrence and third reading of bills 41 and 221.

The following limited debate provisions will apply to Bill 41:

First, the bill sponsor must speak for—may speak for up to five minutes;

Next, a member of the official opposition may speak for up to five minutes;

Lastly, each independent member may speak for up to five minutes; and

The Speaker shall then put the question.

The following limited debate provisions will apply to Bill 221:

First, the bill sponsor may speak for up to five minutes;

Next, a member of the government may speak for up to five minutes;

Lastly, each independent member may speak for up to five minutes; and

The Speaker shall then put the question.

The House will not see the clock until all the House business outlined in this request has been completed

The Speaker: Is there leave for the House to consider Bill 41 and Bill 221 as described by the Official Opposition House Leader?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Speaker's Statement

The Speaker: And before we progress, I have another statement here for the House.

Before we continue proceedings, I wanted to make all members aware that as today is Take Our Kids to Work Day, and that throughout the day I'll be—we'll be joined in the gallery by a number of grade 9 students and their parents, caregivers and sponsors.

I, or one of the presiding officers, will periodically be drawing attention of all honourable members to the public gallery throughout the afternoon to welcome them to the Legislative Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: With that in mind, I would like to draw members' attention to the public gallery where we have with us a young lady by the name of Nikkita, who is the special guest for the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin).

And we have seated in the public gallery 30 students and accompanying parents from various government departments.

And we welcome you all here today.

I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us Cyril Ibrahim, a grade 9 student from sir Maurice [phonetic] school, who is here for take your kid to work day with his mom, Rania Ibrahim, who works in the minister's office in the Advanced Education and Training. And they are guests of the honourable member for Southdale (MLA Cable).

* (13:40)

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

Further, we have with us today in the public gallery, as part of take your kid—your child to work day, Jayda Isaacs, Nicolas Villeneuve, D'Angelo Irish, Lincoln Schott, who are guests of the honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses).

We also have with us Damian Smith-Barré, who is a guest of the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk).

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

Further, in the public gallery we have with us today Rob Nowosad, Nancy Eller, Ross and Kris Metcalfe, Ross Smith, Ian James, Rick Capri, Dennis Atamanchuck, Gary Farkas, Mary Ann Ellert, who are guests of the honourable member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook).

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

Further, in the public gallery we have with us Rylan Staska, Alex Lloyd, Falena Salyn, Brad Salyn, who are guests of the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

And we welcome you here today.

We also have in the public gallery visiting us today Barb Montalbetti visiting from Saskatoon, Kathy Pankratz, Vic Pankratz, who are guests of the honourable member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz). And sorry for the pronunciation.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills?

Committee reports?

Ministerial statements?

Tabling of reports—sorry, missed a step.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table the following annual reports for Manitoba Justice: the 2023 annual report of the Law Enforcement Review Agency; the annual report for the Manitoba Law Foundation for the fiscal year '23-24; the annual report for the Manitoba Law Reform Commission for the fiscal year '23-24; and The Intimate Image Protection Act, comprehensive review of the act.

The Speaker: Further tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Marie Paule Ehoussou

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I rise today to remember and honour the extraordinary life and legacy of Marie Paule Ehoussou, a remarkable student who left us far too soon at the age of 25.

I want to recognize and offer my deepest sympathies to Marie Paule's loved ones who are able to join us here today, as well as those who are in the homeland of Côte d'Ivoire, across Manitoba and around the world who are watching online.

Marie Paule's passion for justice and equality was evident in every organization that she volunteered and worked for. Her unwavering dedication to advocate for the rights of both Canadian-born and international students has left an enduring mark across our province and country.

As a member of the board of governors at the Université de Saint-Boniface, she brought a powerful voice to the table, championing the needs and rights of students with unwavering commitment. Her leadership as president of her university's student association and as Manitoba chairperson and international student commissioner for the Canadian Federation of Students demonstrated her dedication to ensuring that every student's voice was heard and valued.

After years as serving as a volunteer and chairperson, Marie Paule became the provincial organizer for the Canadian Federation of Students here in Manitoba. Her involvement extended beyond campuses and student communities. She served as vice-president of the Ivorian Association of Manitoba, where she was deeply beloved and known for her kindness, community-building skills and heartfelt engagement.

In addition, Marie Paule was a program manager for the Manitoba Métis Federation in the '60s scoop and residential schools department. Marie Paule was a beacon of hope and a source of strength. She was always ready to lend a helping hand and uplift those around her.

In her 25 years, Marie Paule accomplished more than many of us do in a lifetime. Her legacy is one of passion, commitment and an unyielding belief in the power of community. She leaves a profound impact on our province, reminding all of us of the important of standing up for what is right and building a better world for future generations.

Many members and staff of the Legislature had the privilege of meeting and working with her over the years, and she has left an indelible mark on each of our lives.

On behalf of the government of Manitoba, I extend my heartfelt condolences to Marie Paule's family, friends and everyone's lives who she touched. We will forever cherish her memory and thrive to continue the work she so passionately believed in. Her spirit lives on in the hearts of all who were fortunate enough to know her and be inspired by her remarkable journey.

I invite all members to honour Marie Paule with a moment of silence.

The Speaker: Is there leave to have a moment of silence once all speakers have spoken to this? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Marie Paule was born on April 25, 1999, and in her short 25 years, she made a profound impact on the lives of many. She made history as the first Black female chairperson of

the Canadian Federation of Students, a role in which she broke barriers and became a voice for countless students across Canada.

Marie came to Canada as an international student from the Ivory Coast, and like so many other courageous students who leave their home countries in search of a better future, she embraced the challenges of adapting to a new environment. From the moment she arrived, she dedicated herself to student advocacy, seeking to make life better for others in similar situations.

Marie was just 25 years old when she tragically passed away from sickle cell disease, a life-threatening condition that causes abnormally shaped blood cells and impairs blood flow. Over 6,000 Canadians live with sickle cell disease, and Marie, despite her own health challenges, was a fierce advocate for international students' health care throughout her tenure as chairperson for the Canadian Federation of Students.

Representation matters. It is essential to ensure that youth are inspired to pursue their goals and dreams. Marie was a role model for so many in her community and beyond. She was the first Black woman to sit on the pan-Canadian council of the students' association of Canada.

Marie's passion for social justice and activism began early in life. At just nine years old, she delivered her first public speech, and from that moment on, she never stopped using her voice for good. Her activism was rooted in her deep belief in fairness and equity. She used her platform to advocate not only for students, but for anyone who faced systemic injustice. Marie's courage to speak out, to stand up for what was right and to never settle for less than what was fair was a guiding light for so many.

Her friends remember her as, and I quote, an approachable and generous person, always ready to reach out and build bridges between different cultures. End quote.

Marie's compassion and dedication to others left a lasting impact, and it is vital that we recognize the profound influence she had in shaping the present and the future.

Let us honour her legacy here in Manitoba and across Canada. Marie Paule's work will continue to inspire youth and communities for years to come.

To quote Marie herself: I was born with something inside of me that refuses to settle for average. I don't know what it is, but I am grateful I have it.

We extend our deepest condolences to Marie's family, friends and colleagues. Her hard work, passion and dedication will never be forgotten.

The Speaker: Everyone rise now for a moment of silence to honour Marie's name.

A moment of silence was observed.

* (13:50)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Today I would like to recognize the incredible efforts of the staff and owners of the Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop, who have been devoted to supporting Manitobans struggling with addictions.

Through their charitable work, they have become a beacon of hope in their community, contributing to the establishment of a transitional housing location in Winnipeg called Riverwood House.

Riverwood House, Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop's latest investment, represents an innovative approach to bridging the housing gap. It provides residents with a supportive environment where they can gradually work towards independent living, with access to essential resources through on-site staff and a network of dedicated partners.

The funds raised by this small but impactful shop enable individuals ready to advance in their recovery journey to do so with active peer support and collaboration with neighborhood resources, developing the skills and education needed for independent living.

The staff and management of Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop are deeply committed to putting community first, with a mission to create a lasting positive impact by supporting initiatives and spaces that transform lives.

Their sponsorship of Riverwood House, along with fundraising efforts for organizations like RE/ACT Centre Winnipeg, highlight the importance of creating safe, respectful environments that support holistic healing for those battling addiction.

Organizations like Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop set a standard of care that empowers our Rossmere community and beyond, and I am proud to introduce this remarkable organization to the House today.

I would like to invite all of my colleagues to welcome two of their team to the House today: Amber Smith and Faye Schultz.

Thank you so much for your work.

Take Our Kids to Work Day

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, today is take your—our kids to work day.

Grade 9 students from across Canada will have the opportunity to spend the day at work, job-shadowing a parent, caregiver or a volunteer host. The program creates opportunities for career exploration and community engagement.

Organized by the Students Commission of Canada and sponsored by the RBC Future Launch, the program is the most recognized career exploration program in Canada and is a great opportunity for young Manitoba students to develop their career aspirations and work ethic.

The Student Commission provides leadership, tools and information to help facilitate youth and adult mentoring and opportunities through take your kid to work day.

The theme of this year's Take Our Kids to Work Day is Breaking Barriers and Transforming Communities.

In my office, we are fortunate to have two grade 9 students from École Edward Schreyer School in Beausejour participating in Take Our Kids to Work Day, and they are here today at the Manitoba Legislature. I am very pleased that Rylan Staska and Alex Lloyd have chosen to participate with us and learn about careers in politics and government. They are learning about our workplace and public service under the direction of Peggy Wazny-Staska, my constituency assistant, and we want to make their experience here today as impactful as possible.

Also, we have Falena Salyn, who attends MBCI, is here today with her father Brad who is no stranger to these Chambers, Honourable Speaker.

Damian Smith-Barré, a student at Virden Collegiate Institute, is also joining us here today under the direction of Shawna Smith, constituency assistant for my colleague, the MLA for Turtle Mountain.

Thank you to all the staff at the Legislature that have helped arrange for the students participating to attend the luncheon and enjoy a guided tour of our beautiful Legislative Building. I know they will learn

a great deal about the history of the building while they are here.

I thank Rylan, Alex, Falena and Damian for joining us here today and I hope they can take positive experiences from the Leg. back to their school to help inform their fellow students. I wish them all the best in their future endeavours and their careers.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Economic Initiatives

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): It's been a little over a year since forming government and we are making important progress in strengthening our economy.

Manitoba is a diverse province, abundant with opportunities, resources and home to skilled professionals brimming with incredible potential. Our economy is growing and consistently generating fresh opportunities for hard-working Manitobans. Today I wanted to share some of those initiatives and exciting developments.

We understand that successfully transitioning Manitoba to a low-carbon economy hinges on keeping the needs and the concerns of working Manitobans at the forefront of what we do.

We introduced the gas tax holiday as of January 1 of this year, extended it, and Manitobans continue to benefit from this tax relief. This measure saves Manitobans money and has directly contributed to helping lower inflation in our province.

To create green jobs and lower emissions, our government has invested in NFI's all-Canadian build expansion. This will create more green jobs for Manitobans and put us on the path to zero emission public transportation.

This, along with our Affordable Energy Plan and our critical mineral strategy, will foster economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Thanks to a thriving economy, Manitoba recently saw 5,100 new jobs added, including 3,300 jobs in the private sector, making Manitoba one of the fastest growing job markets in the country. Manitoba has a lot to offer, not only on the national stage but the international as well. Our government knows that there is a market for our energy, resources and expertise.

Manitobans deserve a strong, sustainable economy that empowers them to continue supporting their families and helps secure their future. Young Manitobans want to see this province as a place to

build a future in. Our government is helping build that future day in and day out.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Jim's Vintage Garages

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise in the House today to honour Jim's Vintage Garages, a heritage museum located in Headingley in the beautiful constituency of Roblin.

Jim and Vivienne Pearn were the owners of a very large and valuable collection of automotive and petroleum industry memorabilia which they had arranged and displayed in a building in their backyard in Headingley. They offered to donate the collection, worth approximately \$1 million at the time, to the Rural Municipality of Headingley.

This set the wheels in motion that culminated in the creation of Jim's Vintage Garages.

A community fundraising committee was struck in the fall of 2003 to raise money to build a facility capable of housing this incredible collection. They set to work applying for grants, organizing fundraising drives and knocking on doors.

In 2004, after acquiring donations from the RM, many significant grants and numerous very generous private donations, construction started. A natural choice was to build a structure that was attached to the new Headingley Community Centre, which was just in the process of being completed.

The Pearn collection was then transferred to the new facility in September 2004. It required 27 trailer loads to complete the move. A volunteer committee, made up of several residents, spent the rest of the winter of 2004 and into spring 2005 re-creating the displays.

Jim's Vintage Garages was officially opened on May 14, 2005, and after nearly 20 years, it continues on thanks to the hard work of a dedicated volunteer board that oversees the collection and museum, car shows and various events held at the museum.

Jim's Vintage Garages will be having an open house on Saturday, December 28 from noon to 4, and I invite all Manitobans to stop by and visit this amazing heritage museum.

Joining us in the gallery today are Nancy Eller, Rob Nowosad, Ross Metcalfe—who's one of the original board members from 2003—and Kris Metcalfe, Ross Smith, Ian James, Rick Capri, Dennis Atamanchuck, Mary Ann Ellert and Gary Farkas.

Thank you to the board for their ongoing efforts in preserving this valuable and very interesting heritage collection. I invite all honourable members to join me in acknowledging their good work.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before moving on, I have a couple more introductions to make.

First we have Carleigh Schmidt, daughter of the honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt); and Anna Wiebe, daughter of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) in the public gallery.

We welcome you here today.

* (14:00)

We also have with us today, for take your kids to work day, from the Legislative Assembly human resources and from the Office of Auditor General, we have three grade 9 students, and I met them earlier today in my office.

So, welcome to the Chamber.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Crime and Public Safety Concern for Government Approach

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitobans are less safe today than a year ago. They feel less safe. They are less safe.

Random, unprovoked attacks have become so commonplace that the Winnipeg Police Service is in the media encouraging people who find themselves downtown to be hypervigilant. One officer suggested to me that the safest thing people can do in downtime—downtown is to pretend they are the NDP and always look behind them.

Safer communities require more than just news releases.

Why is this Premier's only solution is to burn out our police service?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): As the leader of the provincial government, I want to take this opportunity to say that America is our closest friend and most important ally. I want to congratulate President-elect Donald Trump on his re-election and also to say to you, the people of this great province, you are always my No. 1 priority, standing up for you, for your safety and for your jobs.

We are going to continue to work with the people of this province to advance national security, economic security, Arctic security and energy security, and we will do so by strengthening the trade relationship with the United States of America.

Along the way, we will always ensure that we stand up for Canadian values. First and foremost, that most fundamental of all Canadian values: that every person should have access to free universal public health care.

And when it comes to public safety, we know that the members opposite froze funding for law enforcement for years. They turned a blind eye to the addictions crisis—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, police are burnt out, Manitobans are exhausted, and the Justice Minister sails around on the SS Minnow claiming mission accomplished.

Every day, Manitobans open the news only to read about some fresh new attack on a senior, on a child, on a newcomer or on a bus driver.

NDP told Manitobans it would fix the system. NDP told Manitobans that they would reform bail.

A simple question for the Premier, and hopefully he can stand up and ask this—answer this: In the last 12 months, of the hundreds and hundreds of assaults and thefts, how many criminals had their bail denied so they were not free to continue on their crime spree?

Mr. Kinew: Keeping people safe in the community each and every day is one of the top priorities of our government. And I want to take this opportunity to say that what our Attorney General and Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) has been doing is starting to show results after years of inaction under the Progressive Conservatives.

We go to the business community, and they say that the retail theft initiative that he undertook over the summer is helping to bring more business into the stores and keeping people safer in the community.

At the same time, we go to law enforcement, and what does law enforcement, the National Police Federation, say? Well, and I quote, they say: We call on the federal government as well as provincial and

territorial governments to follow Manitoba's lead on public safety and root causes of crime with concrete solutions. End quote.

The days of Manitoba being last under the PCs are over. There's still more work to be done, but we are making a difference for you, the people of this great province.

Mr. Ewasko: So, Honourable Speaker, I ask you, Manitobans, do you feel safer in your communities than you did a year ago? I don't think so, and I doubt that, because we, here on this side of the House, hear that each and every day coming from hard-working Manitobans.

The Premier doesn't like defence attorneys. The Premier doesn't like the police. The Premier doesn't like accountability.

The only thing this Premier likes about the justice system is when it fails to hold him to account.

How many Manitobans need to be bear-sprayed, stabbed and run over before this Premier realizes that his hug-a-thug mentality is failing Manitobans, Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Kinew: I want to say to all the young people who are here for Take Our Kids to Work Day that you belong in this Chamber, that you could serve the people of this great province so long as you go to school, you work hard and you put the people first.

Now, how do we do that on this side of the House? Well, we talk about the issues. When it comes to public safety, we talk about more funding for law enforcement, which the members opposite voted against last week.

We talk about more supports for young people to stay on a positive path, like a school food program, which again, the members opposite voted against last week.

One thing that we don't do on this side of the House is try to make it personal. When—you know you're losing an argument when you try to make it personal. So I'd encourage all the young people here: stick to the facts, stick to the issues; that's the path to winning in life.

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

Public Transit System Increase in Violent Incidents

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): So once again, Honourable Speaker, the Premier gets up and tries to dodge the question and deny the accountability that he should actually be taking for his failings.

I quote: Please don't shoot me. End quote. These were the words uttered by a Winnipeg Transit driver mere blocks from this very building and directly in front of the Winnipeg Police Service headquarters, when they had a gun pointed at their face.

According to the executive vice-president of Winnipeg's transit union, and I quote: The acts of violence on transit are rising. It's like the Wild West out there. Every—seems to be armed. His comment bears repeating: It's like the Wild West out there.

The transit union reports the number of violent incidents on public transit has almost doubled since the NDP took office.

Will this Premier—why is he unwilling to punish the criminals that at least protect the—so he could at least protect the City's staff instead of putting himself first once again as—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): But, once again, let's talk about the issues. The young people in the audience, guests who are watching today: What is leading to many of the challenges that we're seeing in our society today?

I'll go out there and say what everyone's thinking: drugs. The members opposite had two terms in government to bring the hammer down on drug traffickers; they did nothing. Our Attorney General (Mr. Wiebe) did within the first session. He is making a difference to give law enforcement more tools to prevent toxic drugs from coming into our communities.

What did they do? They voted against that bill. Now, of course, we also know that you have to prevent addictions and offer a path to treatment, so what is our team doing, led by the Minister of Health? There is a path to recovery, there is a path to staying alive and there is a path to a better tomorrow when Manitobans are ready for that.

But what we don't do on this side of the House is to resort to gimmicks and to slogans. We know that you Manitobans are smart. You are looking for comprehensive solutions, and we will talk to you in a mature,

adult fashion to ensure that you understand that we take your public—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, this Premier is handing out drugs with no plan to dispose of or pick up the used needles that are in our children's playgrounds.

Winnipeg Transit union president, Chris Scott, has said things have only gotten worse under the Kinew government. Quote: Incidents on buses are becoming more violent in nature and they are, in the majority of cases, unprovoked. Imagine that, Honourable Speaker.

You are simply trying to get to work for your appointments. Using public transportation has become the NDP's transit version of Russian roulette. Transit has become so unsafe that even the Premier avoids it, preferring his personal driver and security detail.

If the MLA for Fort Rouge has his safety getting to work guaranteed, why don't 172,000 Winnipeggers who use rapid transit and transit weekly to do what they need to do to co-exist in this great province of ours, Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Kinew: It's a shame to see that the member opposite is emboldened to bring rhetoric like that into the Chamber. This is a sacred and hallowed hall. This is the seat of our democracy. The rights which bring us here were forged and anointed with the blood of our veterans.

* (14:10)

We know that public safety is an important priority. We know that addressing the scourge of addictions in our communities is an important way to cut off these violent acts from having—from happening.

At the same time, if somebody does something wrong in the streets, they need to be stopped and they need to be held accountable. We are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. On the other side, all they have are slogans and catchphrases, and that's why they're sitting there.

We have been invested the opportunity to serve you, the great people of Manitoba. Our team is proving results. We recognize there's more to do, and that's why we keep coming to work, working hard for you.

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

Mr. Ewasko: So, Honourable Speaker, to you, Manitobans, you heard the Premier today. Are you feeling safer today than you did a year ago? I don't think so. Absolutely not, is what we're hearing on a day-to-day basis.

Apparently, power has its privileges, honoured—Honourable Speaker. And if there is one thing the NDP have shown, is that they enjoy their privileges. And what do transit users get? A snitch line. Wow. This is rich coming from this Premier. Transit users should not be second-class citizens when it comes to violence.

Will this Premier stand today in the House and assure transit users that they will have similar level of protection as he demands, or can he even see through those blacked-out windows of his SUV?

Mr. Kinew: Manitobans, did you feel safer with Heather Stefanson running the provincial government? All Heather Stefanson did was pick fights with police chiefs and cut funding to the municipal police agencies.

Heather Stefanson was a failure in public health, and when it came to the addictions crisis. Every single member of that team chose to run under the banner of Heather Stefanson, and what did she campaign on? Not searching the Prairie Green Landfill.

The idea that you would politicize the families of murder victims is completely offside and should never, ever be a part of politics. It's one of the worst things that's ever been done in politics in Canada, and they are guilty of it.

On this side of the House, we said we are going to be tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime. One year in, there's more law enforcement. There are more programs to help young people stay on a positive path, and there is food in every single school in the province.

There is more—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Bills in BITSA Legislation Request to Remove and Address Separately

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, it's now too late for the minister to do the right thing and let the public have input on his undemocratic and flawed BITSA bill. He rushed this bill through so quickly and without proper scrutiny that he had to make major amendments to his own legislation at the

eleventh hour. This is what happens when due process takes a back seat.

Will the minister commit today to, at the very least, let the non-budget items stand on their own merit and introduce them as separate bills?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): You know, for many years—seven and a half years, to be precise—Manitobans had to endure cuts: cuts to health care, cuts to education, cuts to child care, cuts to municipalities and on and on and on.

Finally, on October 3, they elected a government that understood the importance of the priorities they'd set forward. They wanted to see a government investing in health care, making life more affordable. We brought forward a budget that delivered on those commitments.

We're proud of that BITSA bill, because that BITSA bill delivers on our budget and those promises we made to Manitobans.

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

Mrs. Stone: The Minister of Labour made it clear: her bill on the back of BITSA was amended because of selective consultation.

The NDP are not only picking winners and losers, but they're picking and choosing who gets to have a voice in Manitoba. This is not how legislation in Manitoba is passed. The great bring about our democratic process is public committees, where each and every Manitoban gets the same 10 minutes to have their say, regardless of political stripe, occupation or geographic location.

Why is this minister hiding from Manitobans? Is he just too scared to face the Manitobans who disagree with him?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, again, we're incredibly proud of that BITSA bill, because that BITSA bill enacts a budget that we know Manitobans were waiting for, for seven and a half years, right.

One important thing that the members opposite fail to recognize here is that, what did they do with their BITSA bills? Well, one of the things that they did in 2020 was to bring forward a hydro rate increase in a BITSA bill for the first time in this province's history. Never before has a government tried to legislate a hydro rate increase on Manitobans. That's their record using new and novel ways of making life more expensive using BITSA.

What are we doing with BITSA? We're making life more affordable.

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

Mrs. Stone: The hypocrisy coming from this minister where he himself is allowing his Cabinet to set hydro rates at the Cabinet table by 4 per cent increases annually.

I get the minister's hesitation with wanting to go to committee. His fuel tax bill was deeply flawed and he had to sit late into the hours of the night while members of the public tried to fix his mistakes. This is exactly why we have public committee, and the public should not be disenfranchised just because this government has failed to properly plan their House business.

The minister should pull the schedules off the back of his bill for the sake of democracy.

So this is his last chance: Does he have the courage to pull the schedules off of BITSA, or will he put his party's secret agenda above democracy?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, we're proud. We're proud of what we brought forward in that BITSA, because that BITSA bill brings forward, again, things that Manitobans have been waiting for, for seven and a half years.

We know that the members opposite hear that from folks in their community, that they failed to do that important work of making life more affordable.

Here, they have an opportunity with that BITSA bill—they had an opportunity, rather, to support that work. They didn't want to support that. We know that they don't understand the challenges Manitobans are facing.

We do. That's why that 'bitsal'—BITSA bill reflects those important changes we're bringing forward to make life more affordable, advance investments in health care. That's the work Manitobans can expect from our government, and we're going to continue doing that work proudly.

Public Sector Construction Projects Consultation Concerns for Bill 7

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Yesterday, we confirmed this minister has no idea what she's talking about. We asked about the fact that she's hidden legislation from public input. What this minister fails to comprehend is that by avoiding public committee, she's picking and choosing who she listens to.

Why did this minister allow her legislation to be stapled onto BITSA and dodge public accountability?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Members opposite have accused us unfairly of rushing to legislation.

On the contrary, Honourable Speaker, workers across Manitoba, the people of Manitoba, have been waiting for this ban on replacement workers since the 1970s, and we're finally bringing in this historic legislation 50 years later under this Kinew government.

Honourable Speaker, this—members opposite are accusing us of hiding. Why would we hide when we are so proud of this historic legislation?

I was standing here day after day after day, trying to put in a stand-alone bill, and it was actually members opposite who actually stopped this. Have they forgotten—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Agassiz, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Byram: Not everyone has been waiting for this legislation. Not all workers have been waiting for this legislation.

The minister claims to respect that—all workers, but as Merit Contractors describe her Bill 7, quote, threatens the freedom of open-shop contractors in Manitoba.

Her legislation is a major threat to Manitobans' way of life. This government has appointed union leaders to major boards and won't even acknowledge open-shop contributions.

Why is there such a power imbalance in access to this minister?

MLA Marcelino: Honourable Speaker, members opposite are putting false information on the record once again.

We are proud as an NDP government here, the Kinew government, to put both workers and employers together working for a better Manitoba to build this province together.

Let me remind members opposite how they stood here day after day after day with false and frivolous—what's it called—frivolous matters of privilege. Matters of privilege that were all ruled incorrect by this same Honourable Speaker. Got it.

* (14:20)

And because they did that, we were not able to bring a stand-alone bill. We were not able to bring a stand-alone bill—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: Based off the minister's comments in this House, she seems to treat open-shop contractors in the province like her mother-in-law. She begrudgingly accepts the work they do is vital, but she still doesn't like them.

If we can't get the minister—[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms. Byram: —to focus on Manitobans' needs instead of her personal life, can she explain why one of her first of—first orders of business was to threaten the very existence of open-shop contractors?

MLA Marcelino: You know, members opposite, I'm not sure what they're doing right now, because they still don't have a leader, but that's okay.

On this side of the House we have a very, very strong leader, the most popular leader in Canada right now. It really is a new day for Manitobans. It's a new day for workers, and we're going to be building this province together, with bigger projects.

I think the member opposite is talking about the repeal on the ban on project labour agreements. That is actually going to be one of the things that we're going to be using to be able to build Manitoba together.

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Math Credit Hours for Teachers Concern for Educational Outcomes

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): With the minister's announcement on Monday, Manitoba will now have the lowest standard of required math credit hours for those pursuing the teaching profession in the country.

How does this minister think that that is going to improve educational outcomes for Manitoba students?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): As the acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, I would be remiss not to put a few words on the record, and to welcome the many, many grade 9 students that are here with us today. We are so very proud of all of you. We welcome you so warmly to what is the people's building. This is your building.

We had the opportunity—our caucus, just prior to question period, Honourable Speaker, had the great privilege of hearing from some of these grade 9 students directly. We heard some of their feedback about the education system. They're looking for a later start time, so something we'll consider. We'll certainly talk about that in the caucus room.

Happy to answer the question further in my next—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Jackson: I, too, would like to welcome all the students into the building. Actually, the first time I entered this building was take your kid to work day. I came with the former member for Riding Mountain, Leanne Rowat, and had a wonderful experience that day, the first time I ever set foot in this building.

But the minister didn't answer the question. With her decision on Monday, a teacher who applies for a K-to-8 job may not have taken a single math class since they themselves were in high school.

So how does this minister think that decision is going to improve math outcomes for Manitoba students?

MLA Schmidt: The truth of the matter is, is that after seven and a half years of a failed Heather Stefanson government, where teachers and educators were driven out of the system by cuts to operational funding, in some parts of our province, we are seeing a teacher shortage.

So these regulatory changes that we have made, that we are very, very proud of, are actually going to bring us in line with most other jurisdictions across Canada, and are going to remove barriers to allow more educators to come into our system to serve some of these amazing students that are here with us today.

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

Mr. Jackson: Everything the minister just said is factually incorrect. We required six credit hours of math learning for people pursuing education; that was in line with British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and some of the Maritime provinces. Quebec has more stringent requirements for educators.

Taking education and learning math, we will now be the lowest standard in the country. The minister says she's proud of the fact that she's addressing a teacher shortage by lowering standards for math learning for people pursuing a career in education.

How is that going to improve outcomes in mathematics for Manitoba students?

MLA Schmidt: Yesterday, the member opposite called me illiterate. Today, he calls me incorrect.

The fact of the matter is that he is incorrect. These regulatory changes, we are very proud of. They're going to remove barriers. We're going to see more teachers here in Manitoba, more internationally trained teachers, more French-language-speaking teachers, more teachers in the North.

Again, after years and years of a failed PC government that saw teachers walking out the door, we have now hired more than 630 educators back into our system. People want to work here in Manitoba. They want to educate students. We have reached a historic deal with teachers. We are serving Manitobans, and we are serving these kids here today.

MRI Technicians Local Training Programs

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Work hard. Accomplish what you want. Not today in Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, we have heard there are not enough technicians to run MRIs in our province. Yet the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the BC Institute of Technology are not only offering virtual classes but taking our Manitoba students, leading to job offers out of Manitoba. I know Manitoba colleges would love to help fill this need.

So why has this government refused to work with Manitoba institutions to develop a local program to keep students here?

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I thank the member for the question.

I, too, will acknowledge all of the grade 9 students who are up in the rafters here today. Please know that there are—

An Honourable Member: Gallery.

MLA Cable: Yes. Thank you. The gallery.

Please know that your government is working hard for you to make sure that there are opportunities for you to stay and work in Manitoba. We have a phenomenal cost of living, we have great things to do here and we have really excellent colleges and universities that are affordable and will allow you to get the education that you need here in this province.

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

Portage Hospital Foundation Diagnostic Staff Training

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, during Monday's private member's statement, I highlighted how the Portage hospital foundation has distributed over \$100,000 in bursaries to help medical staff with training.

Has this minister had any discussions with the Portage hospital foundation about opportunities to possibly help fund training for diagnostic staff?

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Honourable Speaker, I'm grateful for the question. I question the tone, though.

On this side of the House, we're proud to work with every partner. We know that the big things, we have to do them together. So we will work with foundations. We'll work with private donors. We'll work directly with our post-secondaries to get the work done.

We listen to students, we listen to educators, and we know that, in order to build this province together, we can't continue with the divisiveness that we hear from the members opposite, and we need to work together to get the job done.

I welcome conversations with anyone who is willing to invest in our post-secondaries and invest in the future of our province.

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

Portage Health Facility Breast Cancer Screening Hub

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, just to let you know, the hospital foundation has asked for meetings.

Honourable Speaker, with my colleague from Roblin's recommendation to reduce breast screening to 40 years old, our need for mammograms will continue to grow. If an abnormality is detected during a mammogram, the next step for the patient will be an MRI.

With a very well-respected breast cancer specialist right in Portage la Prairie, does this minister not see an opportunity to create a one-stop hub for breast cancer detection and treatment at the new Portage la Prairie regional health-care facility?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, just a few weeks ago, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and I had the opportunity to meet with that expert and to do the

work collaboratively of making sure that we understand how to build capacity here on our own province and make sure that women and those who need access to breast cancer screening, now and in the future, as we lower the screening age, are able to do so.

* (14:30)

We heard very clearly from this doctor and others that mammography services are a priority for them, which is why we're working directly with the experts, the community and the health leaders to make sure we're investing in more capacity here in our own province, across Manitoba.

We're going to keep—continue to build those relationships and not take a divisive, harmful approach like members opposite.

COVID and Flu Season Vaccine Availability

MLA Mike Moyes (Riel): Honourable Speaker, we know that cold and flu season is well under way. Our government has prioritized health care since Manitobans elected us to fix the mess the PCs made.

Part of that responsibility is making sure that Manitobans are aware of what they can do themselves. Their—to protect themselves, their families and their communities.

Can the Minister of Health tell us how Manitobans can help prevent cold, flu and COVID from spreading in our communities and the options for folks to do their part?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I want to thank my colleague, the MLA for Riel for that really important question.

COVID and flu vaccines are readily available and are essential tools to protecting yourself, your loved ones and our communities during respiratory virus season. Folks can get both the flu and COVID shots in one visit. That means one visit and two shots at that time. And I encourage all Manitobans to do that as soon as you can. This can be done at your local pharmacy, like the MLA for Kirkfield Park and I did just a few weeks ago, at medical clinics, ACCESS centres or at your family doctor when you're there for a visit.

On this side of the House, we take public health very seriously. We know that accessing vaccines is a fundamental, important part of protecting ourselves across the province and our health-care system. We're going to continue to do the work of making sure

Manitobans get access, and then we continue to fix the damage done and clean up the mess of the previous PC government.

Thank you.

Discarded Needles in Swan River Safe Disposal Inquiry

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Yesterday, the minister stated that she was recently in Swan River, Manitoba and had the opportunity to meet with local leadership.

Her answer to cleaning up the needle debris that has plagued this community is the formation of a crack commando committee.

Here's question so simple that this minister should be able to respond without looking at notes: Who is on her crack commando committee? And more importantly, how many of the half a million needles that are littering Swan River have they picked up and safely disposed of? *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): So again, that side of the House has learned nothing about—nothing about—learning to work with other people.

The sharps disposable committee is made up of local people from community and partners. We have nothing to do with this committee. We are working alongside them. The community actually put this committee together.

So we are actually just supporting the work that the community is doing, something that members opposite never know how to do. They only how to take a divisive stance. They can't work with cities, they can't work federally, they can't work municipally and they can't work collaboratively.

We will not take that stance. We will continue to work, and safety is our No. 1 priority and getting people access to the supports that they need. That's the stance—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Brandon West, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Balcaen: Daycares, playgrounds, sidewalks, parks and all open spaces are littered with the NDP's needle debris all throughout Swan River.

Half a million needles have been distributed in a town of only 4,000 people. But never fear, the minister is on the case with her forming the crack commandee-commando committee and feigning the outrage.

I've repeatedly asked the minister what steps the NDP government has taken to safely clean up the debris without a single answer.

So I'll ask again: What concrete actions has the government taken to support the safe disposal of used needles?

Ms. Smith: So let me remind members opposite: in 2021, they distributed 200,000 needles without any disposal plan at all; in 2022, they distributed 300,000 needles in Swan River without any disposal plan.

This came to our attention. We started working with the municipality right away on a disposal plan.

We will take no lessons from members opposite. We are working with the municipality. We have met with them, and we'll continue to work collaboratively, something members opposite doesn't know. We will continue to connect people with care, and we will continue to work on what's needed—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Provincial Tax Revenue Distribution Request

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Honourable Speaker, with the Premier (Mr. Kinew) speculating on higher taxes and fees at the municipal level and this NDP Cabinet increasing education taxes by \$148 million and school taxes by as much as 17 per cent, Manitobans are wondering when—where will the tax increases end.

This NDP government is getting billion-dollar windfalls from the federal government and has record revenue levels from PST and income taxes flowing in.

So will this minister and Premier say no to more taxes and instead, share more of these growth revenue streams with the City of Winnipeg and Manitoba municipalities?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Our government is doing something very important, and that is lowering taxes for Manitobans, starting with our fuel tax holiday, which again, it gives me such great pleasure to stand here in this House and talk about that measure we took right after getting into government, January 1.

Since that day, Manitobans have saved money every single time they head to the pump. And over the

course of the year that will—it will have been in place, we're estimating \$500 back into Manitobans' pockets.

That's the real work of making life more affordable. They made life more expensive for seven and a half years. We're going to keep doing that work every single day.

Food Price Inflation Request for Government to Address

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): If you're a Premier who drives around in a taxpayer-funded limousine, you may not be personally feeling the cost-of-living crisis, but Manitobans very much are.

Food Banks Canada reports that low-income, working Manitobans, renters, single people, racialized and disabled Manitobans are using food banks the most. This, at a time that major grocery store chains are making record profits.

The Premier said he's going to call the bluff of the big supermart chains to get them to lower prices, yet prices are at an all-time high. The Premier's been in office for a year and continues to take no action. Manitobans work very hard to pay for that Premier's limousine.

Question is: When will the Premier start working for them?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I would like to remind Manitobans, because it's something that I'm very proud of, that we continue to have the most popular Premier across Canada.

And that's for a lot of reasons, Honourable Speaker. That's because of the tone that he sets. That's because of the leadership that he provides. But it's also because of the work of our team.

And in Budget 2024, we've delivered not one, not two, but 21 ways to save, Honourable Speaker. Where the previous government failed to take action, our government immediately took action and on January 1, we implemented a—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: Harvest Manitoba says that over 50,000 Manitobans use the food bank every month. That's the highest number ever.

In Manitoba, 6 per cent increase over the past year with the Premier in office. Vince Barletta, CEO

of Harvest Manitoba, tells CBC: What stays with me is that we keep going in the wrong direction.

He says people are running to food banks because of high cost of housing and food inflation. This Premier continues to ignore the cost-of-living crisis.

Will the Premier listen to Harvest Manitoba and implement a food security strategy for Manitoba?

MLA Schmidt: Wow, am I glad to be able to stand up and put a few words on the record about the great work of Harvest Manitoba.

Many of our team were able to recently celebrate with them at their annual fundraising gala. The work that Harvest Manitoba does, the folks that work there, is absolutely incredible.

* (14:40)

They also partner with us on our universal nutrition program, Honourable Speaker.

Where under the previous government, schools had to rely only on the non-profit sector, with the new Premier Kinew government, we have partnered with schools; a \$30-million historic investment that is seeing kids across this province being fed. We will take no lessons from the members—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Wasyliw: The effects of high inflation on Manitobans depends on how much money they can earn. If you're driving around in a chauffeur-driven, taxpayer-funded limousine, you may not be feeling the effects as much as a single person living on disability.

We know that Manitoba is facing a food inflation crisis at the same time as a housing crisis. Together, they make up 46 per cent in the rise of inflation; 70 per cent of food bank users do not have children. The Premier has ignored these Manitobans. He's focused on tax cuts for the wealthy and corporate welfare.

Will the Premier finally commit on action on bringing down food prices today?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We're combatting hunger by making sure that there's food in every single school in this province.

I want to take this time to give a shout-out to my guest for take our kids to school day, Ella. And I want to share with the House that so far today, Ella has chaired a Cabinet meeting. She's delivered the opening

comments at our caucus meeting and she has handed down tons of new direction to our hard-working acting Education Minister.

Now to Ella and to all of the young people who are here today, I want to say that we have been so inspired by your smarts and all the passion and energy you bring to the building today. On behalf of our team and all the MLAs in the Chamber, we know that we're only keeping your spots warm until you're ready to lead.

The Speaker: The time for question period has expired.

Petitions?

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Can you resume—sorry, debate on the concurrence motion in the committee.

The Speaker: We will now resume debate on the concurrence motion in Committee of Supply.

If I could have one of the assistant Deputy Speakers take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Concurrence Motion

* (15:00)

The Deputy Chairperson (Robert Loiselle): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

The committee shall resume consideration of the motion moved by the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) yesterday, that the Committee of Supply concur in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, which have been adopted at this session, whether by a section of the Committee of Supply or by the full committee.

For the information of all members, on November 4, 2024, the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Johnson) tabled the list of ministers to be called for questioning in debate on the concurrence motion. In accordance with that list, all members of Cabinet will be questioned concurrently.

The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): While the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) was in opposition, he's on the record consistently criticizing any increases to hydro

rates, yet he's now given himself and his Cabinet colleagues the ability to raise hydro rates as high as 4 per cent annually.

Why is this minister wanting to raise hydro rates by 4 per cent, when Hydro themselves only requested a rate increase of just 2 per cent earlier this year? This is the exact opposite of what government should be doing to help make life more affordable for Manitobans.

The former PC government kept rates low for Manitoba rate payers, and to remind the minister, residential electricity rates were the second lowest in the country under the former PC government.

The NDP inherited low hydro rates, and now they want to raise them by 4 per cent annually on the backs of Manitobans, despite the minister himself consistently criticizing any increase to Hydro in the past. From Hansard on October 26, 2021, and I quote: Manitobans will never know if these hydro rate increases were actually required. We will not know because the rate increase is set at the Cabinet table instead of the PUB. Quote: The interference should stop.

These are the minister's own words, and the hypocrisy is astounding. Not only has the minister gone back on his own words of record, but now he has completely broken his election promise to freeze hydro rates.

So I'll ask the minister yet again, and I've asked this question before: When is—his promised hydro rate freeze will be delivered to Manitobans? How will he pay for the rate freeze? Is he going to stand by his own words and then reverse the 4 per cent annual rate increase that he and his Cabinet colleagues have approved? And how will it impact the summary budget?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): I love having opportunities to talk about Hydro in this House, so I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the good work that we're doing and to respond to the question that was raised by the member opposite.

We're talking about hydro rates, and when we're talking about hydro rates, we know that the members opposite have a dismal record over seven and a half years that they can't run from. And you know, I do appreciate that the critic was not there during the last government, but unfortunately she does still have to answer for the record of the previous government and the decisions they made as it relates to Manitoba Hydro, especially when it comes to rates and the work

that they did to make life more expensive for Manitobans.

They, over seven and a half years, which is, you know, a fairly long time to be in those seats—in the government seats—spent seven and a half years not focused on developing new energy to meet the needs of Manitobans who are businesses or to support the expansion of our economy. They had no vision when it came to moving forward with hydro.

And, in fact, the only thing that they have to show for seven and a half years in government when it comes to hydro is a long list of novel ways of trying to increase costs on Manitobans. And we know that one of those ways that they did that, which I think, you know, when most Manitobans hear about this, they're deeply concerned about, I would like to think that the members opposite and the critic would feel this some way, but they don't seem to have any degree of concern for this, which is, they legislated a hydro rate increase on Manitobans for the first time in our province's history.

That is—you know, we're talking about here, the critic in her question proposed that somehow we're undermining the Public Utilities Board, or there's some evidence that our work to keep rates low is undermining the PUB.

* (15:10)

The reality is, they—when they legislated a hydro rate increase, what they did is they forced Manitobans to pay a higher cost for hydro without us as Manitobans having the benefit of that rate increase request be in any way analyzed to determine whether or not it was needed.

And so, as a result, Manitobans were forced to see an increase, which we'll never know whether that increase was required because Manitobans didn't have the benefit of that rate increase being channelled through the Public Utilities Board, which is there for a very important reason, Mr. Chair, and that is to ensure that we pay as little as possible while ensuring the health of Hydro.

And so, you know, the—any talk about us as a government undermining the PUB, frankly, is ludicrous, and when we look at their record, we can see a number of examples where they actually did that.

And the real concern there, you know, is that not only were they not ensuring that Manitobans had the lowest energy costs possible, they did this in a way that, again, undermined the legal authority of the

Public Utilities Board, again, breaking the rules, breaking the law. That's something that we've seen repeatedly in a number of instances from the members opposite.

So you know, there's the instance of that BITSA bill, where they not only had a—they got rid of the healthy child act; they did a number of other huge changes in their 2020 BITSA, but among them they raised hydro rates. But another example of them undermining the Public Utilities Board is their bill 36, which, again, we're so incredibly proud to be making amendments to the—to that bill, specifically those that sought to undermine the PUB.

So their bill, what it did, was that it took away the traditional rate-setting role of the Public Utilities Board, their role of independently reviewing Hydro's financial needs, their debt servicing costs, that important work of looking at, you know, what rate increase was actually needed. And instead, that bill sought to set hydro rates at the Cabinet table. That is not where hydro rates should be set. Hydro rates should be set through an independent process managed by experts at the Public Utilities Board, not at the Cabinet table, as the members opposite sought to do with bill 36.

Our focus is ensuring affordability, and we know the most important way we can do that is by respecting the role of the PUB, ensuring they're empowered to their important work of reviewing rates and playing that role of ensuring costs are as low as possible for Manitobans. We're not going to undermine the PUB as they did for seven and a half years.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Narcan is not currently widely available in Manitoba. Manitoba has some of the worst public access to Narcan in the country. Ontario and Quebec far surpass Manitoba in availability with naloxone and Narcan being available for use freely in all public health facilities. Narcan and naloxone are immediate interventions in an overdose situation and unquestionably have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

Can the minister please share with the House how many public facilities in Manitoba have naloxone available for public use and how many public facilities, if any, have the far easier to administer Narcan available for public use?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): I want to thank the member for that question. It gives me an opportunity to just lay out the last seven and a half years of inaction from the previous government in not taking a

harm reduction approach, and just how far back it's put our province in terms of addressing the drug crisis that we're in in our province here.

We see people, you know, for the last seven and a half years, not having access to the services and supports that they need.

* (15:20)

We've heard that from, you know, so many people on the front lines of—so many organizations that were knocking on the door of the previous government, begging them to provide services. Begging them to, you know, increase the amount of RAAM clinics, to increase the amount of bed-based services that they were providing.

Our government is taking a different approach. We're actually listening to front-line organizations. We're actually looking at data. We're listening to experts. And we're actually working with those that are struggling with addictions, and working towards getting them the help and supports that they need.

So I know that this—you know, members across the way like to paint a picture of, you know, we're supplying folks, you know, needles, but we are actually supplying folks resources, something that the previous government didn't do.

What the previous government was doing was they were supplying folks in Swan River 200,000 needles in 2021 without a plan of disposal, without a plan of connecting folks with the proper supports to get into treatment, to get the services that they need, such as trauma-informed counselling. To get into, you know, reunification with their children. Whatever it was that was leading them to use what they were using.

The previous government turned a blind eye to anything that had to do with anyone that was using drugs. They seen it as a failure—a moral failure.

Our government doesn't see it as that. We see it as we are meeting Manitobans where we're—where they're at. And we heard loud and clear on the doorsteps that Manitobans want to help other Manitobans who are struggling. And that's exactly what we are doing.

We've heard for far too long that the previous government, you know, failed—time after time, we would walk out of this building and see people in bus shacks. We would see people on the street without the supports that they need.

We've invested in RAAM—the first Indigenous-led RAAM clinic ever in this province that's led by

Aboriginal Health and Wellness. We've opened the 'digital' front door, which is leading people to services and supports that they need, something that the previous government never did.

They continued to turn a blind eye and just had this attitude of just pull your socks up and get it together. Well, folks need supports. They need to get into treatment. They need transitional housing. You can't simply house a person and expect them to do well.

Our ministry was created to support people and meet them where they at, but house them with the supports that they need, whether they need mental health supports, whether they need addiction support and whether they need both of those to be housed successfully with wraparound supports.

We invested in drug-checking machines to ensure that people know what they're ingesting. And we are continually investing to ensure that people are getting the supports that they need so that they can live healthy, productive lives. Because we know people need supports to get, you know, trauma-informed, trauma-related counselling.

So, you know, back to the member's question, I'll give her the number. You know, there's Narcan that's being distributed across our province, and in 2023 there were 50,000 kits that were distributed through the Take-Home Naloxone Program.

And, again, this is a lifesaving medication that is reversing some of the effects, and we're seeing an increase—and you know, the previous government seen an increase and did nothing about this.

And again, we are investing. We are investing to support, you know, new initiatives—\$700,000, again, to support Sunshine House's—

The Deputy Chairperson: Order.

The member's time has expired.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Chair, thank you for the opportunity to ask a question. Again, a follow-up to some questions that were asked during Estimates from the Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation.

Highways maintenance and the safety of our highways is something that many Manitobans value immensely. The highways network is what keeps our economy moving in the province and it, as a result, keeps many Manitobans safe on their daily drive.

I had asked the Minister of Infrastructure a question on a substantial budget cut in this year's budget: \$57 million from specifically the highways budget there. Overall from her department's budget, there was \$157 million cut, \$100 million from Water Infrastructure, but in total, \$157 million, \$57 million a substantial cut from the highways budget.

And Manitobans in the committee were reassured during Estimates that vacancies were being filled within the department in maintenance, and that increases to highway safety and maintenance were being done.

Myself and many other Manitobans were skeptical of that, and recently that has been highlighted. We had seen, last winter, days of inaction by the department on maintenance of one of our major trade routes, Highway 75, leading into Winnipeg from the international border. This was a winter like we haven't seen for many years in Manitoba, a winter of nearly no snowfall and mild conditions, but yet the minimal maintenance that needed to be performed seemingly wasn't done.

We could chalk that up to a department that was new in managing the maintenance and addressing winter condition—winter driving conditions in our province. But recently we saw, yesterday, police closing off parts of the Perimeter Highway due to a substantial vehicle pileup, which resulted in one driver being rushed to hospital.

It was said by police that they were keeping that stretch of highway closed until Manitoba highways was able to address the slippery road conditions. Unfortunately, the very next day, we've had a Manitoban die due to slick road conditions. Today, on the 59 highway bridge, a 19-vehicle pileup resulting in a 55-year-old man from Tyndall passing away.

This isn't acceptable. The—we are right now in one of the nicest Novembers that we've seen in recent history, but as a result, we've got high humidity in the mornings and poor road conditions as a result. But it's seeming that this department is being reactive rather than preventative in its maintenance.

So I would like to ask the minister in committee today to answer to this committee and all other Manitobans: What reassurance can the minister give us and the rest of Manitobans relying on the safety of the highways to get their loved ones home each day?

What reassurance can she give Manitobans that a \$57-million cut and continued vacancies in the highways maintenance department, that the safety and maintenance of our Manitoba highways is going to be

addressed tomorrow, today, not years from now and not under socialist NDP ideology?

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chairperson: Before recognizing the minister, I want to draw the attention of all members to the public gallery, where we have 60 grade 9 students and their chaperones who are here as part of Take Our Kids to Work Day.

On behalf of all honourable members, welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, and we hope you have an enjoyable time here today.

* * *

* (15:30)

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): So to respond to the questions from the opposition, so we did talk about this quite extensively in our committee, and I would have thought that the member opposite would have understood the difference by now between the maintenance budget and the infrastructure capital budget. But I'll try to break down some of this.

To start with, because the member referenced the death of someone on the highway and some serious accidents or collisions that have taken place, I do want to stress to Manitobans that the role of this department is highway safety first. It's the most important thing that we do.

That is why one of the things we've developed since coming into office was creating a specialized team of experts to focus on data-driven improvements to increase highway safety.

Regarding the budget questions, the \$57 million that the member is referring to, he's actually referring to a cut by his—the previous government. This was a carryover amount that was underspent by the previous government. Underspent by them, and then not added to our budget for this year.

So they're calling this a cut, but it isn't a cut. It was a cut when it was underspent by the previous government. So we have committed to spend \$500 million on highway capital—on infrastructure capital in the province, and we will fulfill that commitment.

There were also questions, a lot of questions in that question. There were questions in there about the maintenance budget, and maybe the member is still unaware that the previous government sold off equipment—hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of

equipment, let maintenance equipment fall into disrepair and fired staff.

So absolutely, one of the biggest challenges for me coming into this role was to staff up this department and to start to provide the type of highway maintenance that the province expects from this government.

There was a reference to what happened on the Perimeter Highway yesterday, and I want to assure Manitobans that the highway department inspected that highway earlier in the day. Unfortunately, the icing that occurred led to the pileup that occurred later. That is a tragedy.

But I want folks to know that it was inspected earlier in the day and that it's really important to remind all drivers that we drive to the conditions of the road, because we won't always be on site every minute of the day to know what's happening on the highway, as hard as the department will try to be there.

I also want to speak to some of the really exciting projects that are going on in the province. You know, we have invested \$12 million into safety upgrades to the intersection at 1 and 5, over \$18 million to reconstruct 45 kilometres of PR 224. That was a road that was just brutally ignored by the previous government and fell into total disarray.

When I had the chance to drive on that highway, and this is no exaggeration, staff and I were like, wow, it's like a bomb went off here. That's what happened. It's like a bomb went off on our infrastructure with the previous government in power. So I'm very excited about the improvements that we're making there.

Investing \$8 million to scoping out a new airport for Wasagamack, something they've been asking for for 20 years. Implementing rest stops on Highway 6, which isn't just about convenience and comfort for travellers, it's about safety. It gives people the chance to take a break when they're driving, to take care of their personal needs, but also to just take a rest if they need to.

We're supporting infrastructure developments in the Port of Churchill. We are—oh, I know, the member also asked about flood protection. I guess he only gets one question, because he put everything into this one. *[interjection]*

The Deputy Chairperson: Order. Order.

Like to remind all members to please keep their thoughts to themselves while I'm trying to hear what's going on in the House.

Thank you.

MLA Naylor: Yes, I guess we're out of time.

Thank you, Chair.

The Deputy Chairperson: Order.

If the minister so pleases, she had 25 seconds left in her time.

MLA Naylor: There was a question about flood mitigation and about the budget, so I will remind the member opposite that the previous government put \$100,000 into the budget for a project year after year that they made no movement on and took no action on. They didn't work with First Nations. They never intended to spend that money.

So we're being more responsible with how we lay things out in the budget. We're budgeting for the projects we're doing this year. And unlike members opposite—

The Deputy Chairperson: Order.

The member's time has expired.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): It's a pleasure to ask the Minister of Economic Development and talk a little bit about the state of the economy.

We had the opportunity to speak in Estimates last week, and unfortunately we only had an hour. It's unfortunate for Manitobans, but certainly we'll see if we can get an answer today. The minister wasn't able to answer because we ran out of time. So I wanted to take a moment to put—and we do have five minutes today, and I know the minister will take his full five to explain this to Manitobans.

* (15:40)

I want to take a moment to put some of these facts on the record and then give the minister an opportunity to talk about what the NDP has done with respect to handling the Manitoba economy and what mess it's in. And I just want to put some things down now.

This year alone, just under the lack of leadership of the NDP government, Manitoba families face the highest food inflation in the country: fresh meat, veggies—prices have all jumped 8 per cent last month alone. Family budgets are stretched thin and Manitobans are being forced to choose between healthy meals and keeping the lights on.

Our international exports just—have just collapsed, down \$658 million year to date, which is over 13 per cent year over year. Fewer exports mean, of course, fewer paycheques for working Manitoba families and a weaker economy for everyone in Manitoba.

Construction of new homes has fallen by 3.5 per cent, or 200 new units. By the way, honourable Chair, that—and for the minister—that is rated 10th out of 10 in the country for housing starts. That means less work for trades, and even higher housing options and—pricing, pardon me—for young families trying to get a head start and a head up—and a hands-up start in life for their young families.

Business bankruptcies are up 25 per cent, consumer insolvencies have climbed to well over 6 per cent. Small business are shutting their doors and working Manitobans are simply drowning in debt under this NDP government. Honourable Speaker—honourable Chair, these numbers don't lie. Few can keep up with the rising costs of big, expensive—of this big, expensive NDP government.

Given the dire state of Manitoba's economy today under the NDP government, how can this minister defend a budget that punishes families and businesses with over \$150 million in new taxes, while abandoning essential investments in schools, daycares, homes, care homes, community services?

Why is the government choosing big, expensive bureaucracy over supporting hard-working, everyday Manitoba families?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources): Thank you, honourable Chair, for the opportunity to respond to the member opposite's question.

And I think it's important for us to continue to, you know, build a strong economy here in Manitoba—a diverse and strong economy. I think, you know, the member opposite has, you know, highlighted a few areas where he'd like to discuss, and there's quite a questioning around several areas today: about our economic performance, around inflation, you know, exports and some other things around small business as well, and so I'll touch on some of those.

And I think it's also important for us to talk about affordability as well, and Manitoba's challenges around affordability and what we're doing as a government to address them in real and meaningful ways. And so to get to some of the heart of what member opposite is talking about—I think, you know, it's too bad he's looking from, you know, the pessimistic view on our economy and our economic potential for the future.

I have some stats that I'd like to share with the member as, you know, key economic indicators for

Manitoba. These are from Q2 of 2024. A real gross domestic product, or GDP here, is \$69.3 billion, and that's up 1.3 per cent year over year. So that's an increase as well as annual exports, also up 19.5 per cent. Housing starts are also up Q2 of 2024 of 1,977. That's a 16.8 per cent increase year over year.

So, I mean, there are many metrics that are showing that our economy is moving in a very healthy rate. But I think, you know, a lot of times on Manitobans, things like GDP, exports, housing starts are a bit lost in terms of what that actually means in terms of economic success or not.

I think some things that Manitobans really can bank on and are really tangible numbers that are understandable, are digestible for folks, are how many Manitobans are employed. So when we look at that—and I think that's a real significant number—our number as of September 2024 was 718,300 Manitobans employed. That's an increase of 2.7 per cent year over year. That means that there are more Manitobans working today than there were a year ago under the former failed PC government. It's really significant, really significant.

* (15:50)

And so I think that right there, it's something that is very notable for Manitobans to understand, that we're getting Manitobans to work. We're a party that's supported by workers, that works for workers. We're a party that builds and gets projects off the ground.

And not only that, but we support good jobs. And in addition to the fact that we have higher employment numbers in Manitoba, an increase of 2.6 per cent year over year, we also are supporting good jobs. And so the average weekly earnings of Manitobans as—this is from July of 2024—is up: \$1,155.42. Again, a year over year change, an increase of 4.8 per cent, honourable Chair. So not only is our government prioritizing more Manitobans getting to work, we're also focused on getting Manitobans good jobs, family-supporting jobs.

That's why we're very happy to see that our economic plan is working. Our economic plan that's surrounded around affordability for Manitobans, affordability delivered by initiatives like our gas tax holiday that we brought in—began on January 1. Not only did it save Manitobans a little bit of money every time they gassed up, an average of \$500 over the course of a year for average Manitoban, but also the economic impact of that decision was that we have lowest inflation rate, and it drove down food costs and other

consumer costs for Manitoba. And those are real successes that we've delivered on our economy.

I also want to highlight that our government is also making very important and strategic investments in growing our economy with more good jobs. We recently announced an NFI Group support, which will add hundreds of jobs into our economy in the manufacturing sector, which is one of our largest sectors in our province.

Again, strong investments by our government to support more jobs in a clean economy.

Mrs. Cook: The NDP's Budget makes no mention of the future or continuation of the Alternative Response to Citizens in Crisis team.

Will the NDP expand this program to other major urban centres in Manitoba, or have the NDP completely cut this much-needed crisis response team?

Ms. Smith: I want to thank the member for that question.

* (16:00)

I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago to visit the DCSP downtown; downtown community safety patrol, and just see and listen from the front-line workers just—the tremendous work that they're doing to keep our communities safe, to work with the downtown BIZ, but also to work on the front lines with those who are experiencing—you know, whether it's mental health, addictions or just needing connection with supports; you know, often that's what folks need, is connection. They need to build a relationship, and that's what these folks are there to do.

So we've increased our investments to these community patrols. We're taking a different kind of approach in terms of working alongside police, something that we heard loud and clear from the police, that, you know, they want a collaborative approach to working with community.

We were also listening to community and listening to those folks when we were knocking on doors. Manitobans told us that they wanted a collaborative approach, a community approach; an approach that really responded to what we were seeing in the community.

So accessing resources was one of the crucial things that was missing from the prior government. So downtown community safety patrol is doing that—or partnership. They're actually—they have this amazing tool where they can pinpoint where the hotspots are, what is going on in which area, whether folks are

struggling with addictions in that area, whether, you know, there's some high crime rates that are happening, whether folks are experiencing homelessness, where the encampments are.

And these folks go and actually visit the encampments. They are communicating with the police and the fire paramedic service. They have a good relationship with them and they are sharing data, which is such a great tool for, you know, both of them to be doing that collaboratively.

We've made increases to the ARCC. They're now working into the evenings. They're working seven days a week. We've increased that by \$400,000. We're also working on a youth program in consultation with community to ensure that, again, it's responsive to the unique needs of what we're seeing in the community.

Working with front-line organizations, working with the police; we want to ensure that the needs of those that we are servicing are met. For far too long under the previous government, for seven and a half years, those needs weren't met.

We see that with what we're seeing today, with the addictions crisis in our community, with the housing crisis. The previous government sold off housing, didn't invest in housing, let the social housing go into disrepair, which is why we see, you know, people living in encampments. They didn't invest in harm reduction, which is why we see people struggling with addictions.

We're not taking that approach. We're taking a collaborative approach. We are working with law enforcement. We are working with community patrols to ensure that we are connecting people with care; a compassionate way of connecting people with care from a health-care perspective.

We see addictions treatment as health care. We see mental health as health care, something that the prior government didn't take an approach. They saw it as a forum—as a moral failing, and we're not taking that approach.

We are working alongside law enforcement and connecting people to care. And that's not just, you know, Monday to Friday, but again, that's seven days a week, and we increased that again with our investments. We are preventing—we prevented 29 per cent of people presenting in the emergency department for mental health issues.

We're working collaboratively across governments in investments. You would have seen the three

ministers collaborating; that's because we work across departments. No longer do you see a government working in silos like the previous government did.

The Deputy Chairperson: Order.

The member's time has expired.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I know there's a lot to discuss in relation to immigration and labour.

I know we have welcomed many great newcomers to our province through the MPNP, and many still are waiting in the queue. And these folks have chosen to come to our great province here of Manitoba. They've chosen to come to be educated; they've come to join the workforce; they've purchased homes and look forward to raising their families in Manitoba.

We also, like I said, have a great workforce across our province that contributes to our economy, delivering goods and services that of which, you know, helps to build our communities and all of which work hard to provide for their families that enjoy life here in Manitoba.

And just on that note, I want to say thank you to all those who contribute to Manitoba and continue to build a future here.

I'm going to base my question on a comment the Minister of Labour and Immigration made during Estimates, and I will quote: So it's not just that, you know, the government is here to try to make every single space unionized. It's to empower workers themselves to be able to do that in—when they need to, where they need to. Government can't be everywhere all the time.

That statement alone leads to many more questions, but in relation to today's discussion, I want to ask the minister to expand on that and tell me: Is the NDP government actively recruiting union membership and creating interference with Employment Standards, and is there going to be cuts to that department?

* (16:10)

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I'd like to first acknowledge the member opposite's last question, which was: Is our government attempting or planning to make any cuts to Employment Standards?

The answer is no. Employment Standards folks, they do a very, very important job. They have to investigate complaints to different types of violations of our employment standards laws. Under the previous government, this department was laid bare.

We came into government and I visited, multiple times, our department to see what it was like there. The lights were off. There weren't any workers there. We had a one-year wait when we first came in, from the time somebody files a complaint with Employment Standards, where a worker would file a complaint before it would get attended to and investigated.

So during this year, we've worked really hard to try to fill vacancies in that department to make sure that workers' concerns and complaints are being addressed in a more timely way. This will take time before we can get it up to the level that we need to. In particular, the proactive unit of Employment Standards was taken away under the former PC government, and this is an important part of the department that we have tried to staff up now.

So instead of just acting on a complaint, these workers will—workers from the department will be able to investigate in a proactive way certain types of businesses that we feel might be, you know, violating employment standards that are being held by the Province.

As for the member's other questions about our government trying to sign up union memberships, that's not how our government works. We do—like, each MLA and different folks in the NDP, we sign up NDP memberships. An NDP membership is \$10 and we can, you know, approach people usually in our constituency, community members, friends, family. We sit down and we, you know, have a meeting. We'll go visit them at their house. We'll talk about, you know, what the NDP stands for, what our shared goals and priorities might be. We would sit and get to know family members there, find out about their lives, and usually that was the way that people would open their hearts to us and sign up for an NDP membership.

So that's one of the ways that we have to do something like this when we're about to try to get a nomination process, you have to sign up NDP memberships. So the member opposite was not informed of this properly. We don't sign up union memberships; MLAs sign up NDP memberships.

But at that same time, though, we do have very close friendships with workers, and those, they're democratically elected by their fellow workers to lead them. And I do just want to shout out a few of them today: Gina McKay, who is a proud queer, Métis, feminist woman who has worked to advance the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ Manitoba, and she is the president of her union. Dieth Aquino, a proud member of Queer People of Colour, a young worker representative, mental health advocate

and diversity vice-president of their union. Vivienne Ho, an advocate for women, housing and food security and the president of her local. And Margaret Schroeder, who's a democratic elected—

The Deputy Chairperson: Order.

The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stone: The Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) continues to put inaccurate information on the record.

The NDP has no ground to stand on when it comes to keeping hydro rates low. The NDP raised them by 5 per cent in 2005, 3 per cent in 2006 and 2007, 5 per cent in 2008-2009 and another 4 per cent in 2015. In total, the NDP raised hydro rates by 35 per cent during their years in government.

The PCs, on the other hand, kept hydro rates low—the second lowest in the country. The minister repeatedly puts inaccurate information on the record so I will again table the information that shows that hydro rates in Manitoba were the second lowest in the country under the former PC government in 2021.

The NDP government previously maxed out Hydro's credit card and increased rates by 35 per cent. Now they're maxing out the Province of Manitoba's credit card, as Manitoba's debt is soaring to \$35 billion under this minister's watch. He gave himself massive \$9 billion in borrowing powers, billions more than in years prior; approved a \$710-million special warrant with high interest rates; took a \$373-million surplus and turned it into a \$2-billion deficit; and now he's running almost a \$1-billion deficit this fiscal.

S&P Global has indicated Manitoba could return to balance by 2025, yet this minister seems completely unconcerned about Manitoba's debt and debt-servicing costs, and is not even trying to return to balance. He's planning years of deficits and debts on the back of Manitobans.

Interest rates are coming down, yet fed transfers are going up almost \$1 billion this year from previous year forecast. I've asked the minister five times to commit to eliminating the deficit on record, and have yet to receive an answer.

With his property-tax-grab increase of \$148 million, how much additional revenue is the minister going to take in once property values are assessed at a higher rate?

The minister has also had a week to collect data on his income-tax grab. Can he tell us by how much his changes to the basic personal amount will change the forecast in the Estimates documents?

And with these additional tax revenue on the backs of Manitobans, will he commit to balancing by the 2026 Public Accounts?

* (16:20)

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Appreciate the question or questions from the critic. And, again, it always gives me great pleasure to be able to talk about Hydro and the important work we're going to keep rates affordable, something that we didn't see for a very long time under the former government.

I've already had a chance to talk a bit today about some of the work that they did to raise costs on Manitobans when it comes to energy. You know, of course, in this House, we have—we've had a lot of opportunities to talk about the good work we did in lowering fuel costs for Manitobans through our fuel tax holiday.

But, of course, you know, that work continues as it relates to working to keep hydro rates low, and our recently released energy policy will, of course, work to support that.

And that's very different than what Manitobans experienced for the seven and a half years that the PCs were in government. We've talked here today already about the work that they did to legislate a hydro rate increase on Manitobans through BITSA, the first time that's ever been done in our province's history, again, taking away that benefit from Manitobans of having that certainty of knowing that rate increase was required because there was no independent oversight.

You know, building on, again, their new and novel, creative ways of jacking up hydro rates on Manitobans, we saw bill 36, a bill that sought to set hydro rates at the Cabinet table by setting a number of impossibly hard-to-achieve financial targets for Hydro and doing away with the Public Utilities Board's historic role of being an independent reviewer of rates.

We respect the PUB, and we know that members opposite don't. We saw that time and time again, and that was really—their disrespect for the Public Utilities Board and their role of keeping rates low is really enshrined in bill 36.

Proud of the work that we're doing, the amendments we're making, to restore the role of the Public Utilities Board of being an independent reviewer of rates, knowing that that's the best way possible of ensuring that Manitobans have the lowest costs for hydro.

But you know, we know that that disrespect for the Public Utilities Board extends and is very far reaching when it comes to the members opposite. We saw that with Centra. There was a two-year period, Mr. Chair, two years, where they were being asked to file for Centra. And they, through their mismanagement, and again, a long chronicle of failures when it comes to Hydro and Centra, failed to honour the—that request from the PUB, failed to actually follow the law.

So what happened as a result of that, Chair? Manitoba, our government and Hydro were fined every single day for two years due to their mismanagement. And those fines, you know, those had to be paid by someone. And, unfortunately, their mismanagement, their inability to provide proper oversight to Centra and to Hydro, those fines ended up getting put back on Manitobans' backs.

That's the reality under their leadership is that we have this chronicle of failures, over and over again, and a long series of efforts to undermine the role of the Public Utilities Board. And we know how problematic that is and how that's hurt Manitobans and ultimately hurt affordability in Manitoba.

You know, when it comes to overall fiscal management, again, there was a chronicle of failures and mismanagement when it came to Hydro and Centra. But we can just extend that—you know, their mismanagement and that record, to their overall failure to properly oversee our provincial budget.

And we saw the impacts of that with, of course, the recent release of Public Accounts, where we saw that they left us a \$2-billion hole to climb out of. And again, the members opposite don't have to take our word for it, they can listen to the highly respected independent accounting firm, MNP, who had a lot of tough words for them in terms of their budgetary decisions or their—and their failure to provide good oversight over that budgetary process.

Of course, we know that they also sought to hide the realities of their decision making from Manitobans when they came forward with an update in late July before the last election and didn't disclose the direction of Hydro profits, didn't disclose the direction of tax revenues, all in a desperate attempt to stay in government.

Again, that lack of transparency, that lack of accountability, is a long thread we see in their behaviour, their decision making. That's not what Manitobans want. They want a government committed to fiscal

accountability, fiscal sustainability. That's exactly what they're getting from our government.

We're committed to that balanced budget, commitment in the last year of our mandate and Manitobans can expect that we're going to work every single day to deliver on it.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): As I stated earlier, my experience with Estimates has varied from one department to another, from not getting answers and to actually getting some distinctive answers.

So the—my question is for the Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism. And although my colleague from Dawson Trail and I both agree that our Estimates time was not long enough, I do appreciate the fact that we actually got some answers. So, hopefully, we can get an answer on this one.

No support has been outlined in the Estimates document for the incredible, successful and PC government-funded Signature Museum Sustainability Fund, a fund that supports the most important museums in the province. This fund supported the most important museums all across the province, including the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum in Brandon, the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, the Royal Aviation Museum of Western Canada in Winnipeg, The Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, and the Manitoba Agricultural Museum in Austin as well as St. Boniface [*phonetic*]—St. Boniface Museum in Winnipeg, and let's not forget the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre in Morden.

These museums are not only cultural keystones in our province, but also a major tourist attraction.

Can the minister confirm for the House if they have cut government support for this extremely important fund?

*(16:30)

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I want to thank the member from Selkirk for that question. It actually gives me an opportunity to speak about my favourite subject, Manitoba. Right? Hey, let's hear some applause for our province.

You know, well, I think part of—you know, it's all—the great thing about this department, you know, people waited seven and a half years for a new government. They've waited seven and a half weeks for the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to speak in the Chamber.

Because all—the only thing I get to share right now is the great news: the Bombers are in the Western Final. Hey, let's go. The Jets are 12 and one. You know, I'd love the record to reflect that you didn't even cheer for the Jets. But maybe you'll cheer about the following news I have to share about museums in Manitoba.

Just this last week, a number of letters went out to all of our community museums. We're proud to not only provide that funding but also top up funding to make sure that these museums continue to operate. And I really appreciated the question about the Signature Museums because I've been to them all and they're all fantastic.

You know, one of my favourite memories when I was coaching hockey was going to tournaments in Morden. You know, we'd show up on a Friday night. We'd have a game, so, obviously, we'd leave Brandon probably around 4 o'clock, we'd get in about seven. We'd have an 8:30 game.

So we didn't—we weren't able to do very much. But the next morning, what was our first stop? We went and saw Bruce, Bruce in the basement there of the arena; it's a really great spot. And it has great memories for myself and the boys. And every year we would book that tournament in Morden; it was actually a really great tournament, so a shout-out to the people in Morden for putting that on.

Then we would probably, you know, win a couple games, go out for supper and the next morning, we'd stop in in the Manitoba hall of fame for baseball. A shout-out to the Crocus Plains baseball team from the early 2000s who were just nominated to the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame, first high school baseball team to have that honour.

And we support museums. We support our cultural institutions with generational increases to the Manitoba Arts Council, with doubling dollars to the CCFM, with investments of a—extra half a million dollars to the MCCC, where the Manitoba Museum is located.

And we're committed. We're committed to building this province and telling the stories of this province—of the province. We had the opportunity to travel up to Gimli multiple times this summer, and I can tell you that the Icelandic heritage museum is quite an impressive spot to visit.

And being able to support these organizations through our Signature Museums projects is just, you know, rewarding as a government. And one of the great scenes from this summer—I was browsing through

my social media—was to see the minister of Crown lands wearing his cowboy hat in Austin. You know, I think it was a pretty hot day that day when you were out there, but it was nice to see my colleague out there meeting everyone from the, you know, really important museum that they have there.

And I would actually encourage my members opposite, while they're, you know, waiting for future answers or, you know, just caucusing, to take a look at the Fastest 2 Minutes in Tourism put on by Travel Manitoba. They actually do a really great job with that. And I believe that in that Fastest 2 Minutes, they actually talk about all of the signature museums that we do have in here.

And on top of that, the jewel that we have in the—Manitoba's provincial capital is downtown at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

So we know that in Manitoba, we have a really large capacity to be able to preserve our history, not only with the people who work in the archives, but the people that work in those community museums that we're so happy to support.

So, again, this question's all about the great news and the things that we're doing in Manitoba to be able to talk about our history in a meaningful way but also keep an eye on the future. And the future of Manitoba really is bright.

* (16:40)

And I would encourage every single person in the Chamber to visit one of our beautiful museums.

Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): So it's interesting that the member for Brandon East (Mr. Simard) took five minutes to consult with his staff for that answer just to, again, applaud the Bombers and the Jets. Of course, we're all very much proud of both, for sure.

My quick—my question's going to be relatively quick, and it's actually directed to—*[interjection]* I don't know who's talking on that side, honourable Chairperson. But, anyways, whatever.

So, honourable Chairperson, so the question's actually directed at a couple of ministers there, because they're going to have to probably team up and get this. So it's first directed technically to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt) because she is the de facto mayor of the Whiteshell Provincial Park, which I have the pleasure of

representing, and so we need to work together, as she's said multiple times in the past that we need to work together on various different things, because I'm the MLA for the area, and she's the minister. So that's good.

So I'm hoping that, whether it's the Premier (Mr. Kinew) that answers this question or even the member who is the Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations and Minister of Indigenous Economic Development (Mr. Bushie)—so, in the past, honourable Chairperson, various organizations within the parks—and as I mentioned, they're not part of any particular one municipality. So working with the minister, working with the local MLA in order for them to get certain funding—and I'm not going to bring up the, you know, the cut that has been done to Parks this year. So I'm hoping that we—there's other revenue sources that we can tap into.

So I'm asking the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to help out because, again, she's the de facto mayor, and we've actually—have quite a few mutual friends in that area, I understand, so that's sort of cool.

So precedent has been set in the past where some parks organizations have been able to access some Manitoba government grant programs. And so a couple organizations have reached out to the Manitoba GRO fund, and they've been denied because, of course, that's directed straight to municipalities.

So I'm hoping that—and I'll just mention one of them, but there's quite a few, because I know that we're on a shortened timeline here. The South East Whiteshell Fire Department had asked for a grant opportunity to be included in the Manitoba growth and renewal opportunities program, and so I'm just hoping that the de facto mayor, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, will work with me to hopefully ask the minister of municipal relations to grant the opportunity for the organizations within the parks—because they're not actually a municipality—to be able to apply for some of these programs.

And so I'm asking the member for municipal relations if, in fact, this particular organization—and there's many—but this particular organization, the South East Whiteshell Fire Department, can get that approval to be able to apply to the Manitoba growth and renewal opportunities fund.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I appreciate the question because it gives me an opportunity to put some words on the record about our amazing provincial parks here in Manitoba.

I do absolutely love the Whiteshell Provincial Park. This summer, I was able to spend time with my family out in the Whiteshell at several different campgrounds: Otter Falls, Brereton, Nutimik, Big Whiteshell—absolutely world-class camping and recreation that the Whiteshell offers.

* (16:50)

And as much as I love the Whiteshell and all of our provincial parks, I would never claim to be the mayor of the Whiteshell. I would like to think that the member opposite offers that as some sort of compliment, but based on his record here in the House, I know it's meant as some sort of derogatory punch or something.

But, anyways, happy to talk about parks. Happy to talk about the South East Whiteshell Fire Department, and we're very grateful for those workers. It's a very important work and a very important service that they offer to the cottage owners and the campers and the wildlife and the natural environment in the Whiteshell. The service they offer is incredibly important, and we honour and recognize their work.

The member opposite is correct that the GRO program, the Growth, Renewal and Opportunities for Municipalities program, is available to municipalities. The southeast Whiteshell—I mean, the Whiteshell generally, Whiteshell Provincial Park, does exist within a couple different RMs, so I think there's some great opportunity there to work together with the municipality—with the relevant municipality to take advantage or to apply for this amazing fund.

Forty-two million dollars put forward by our excellent Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations (Mr. Bushie), \$42 million invested right here in Manitoba for critical infrastructure projects that focus on community renewal, disaster mitigation, climate resiliency and recreation.

So my understanding is that the intake period is still open. So I'd be more than happy to hear from and work with both the South East Whiteshell Fire Department and the incredible Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations to explore opportunities to help

support this incredible partner that we have in the South East Whiteshell Fire Department.

But I'd like to take a little bit of time to remind the committee about the cuts that we saw for seven and a half years to our parks here in Manitoba. *[interjection]* So many. I—we could talk all night about the cuts that the Tories made to our parks.

Their agenda was to cut positions, to sell off our parks, to privatize our parks and our park services. They—you know, sent contracts down to Texas-based companies, causing scandals, privacy scandals that Manitobans remember, leaving Manitobans vulnerable.

But we have a different approach on this side of the House when it comes to parks. We are increasing staffing for our parks. We're working with partners. We're working with the federal government to obtain funding for our parks.

The Deputy Chairperson: Order.

The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wharton: No further questions.

The Deputy Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Deputy Chairperson: The question before the committee is the motion moved by the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), that the Committee of Supply concur in all Supply resolutions related to the Estimates of Expenditures for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, which has been adopted at this session, whether by a section of the Committee of Supply or by the full committee.

Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

The Deputy Chairperson: The motion is accordingly passed.

This concludes the business before us.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Speaker: Order, please.

The House is now back in session.

Committee Report

MLA Robert Loiselle (Deputy Chairperson): The Committee of Supply has adopted a motion regarding concurrency in Supply.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Seine River (MLA Cross), that the report of the committee be received.

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for St. Boniface (MLA Loiselle), seconded by the honourable member for Seine River, that the report—the committee of—the report from the Committee of Supply be adopted.

Is it the will of the House to adopt the report?
[Agreed]

Therefore the report is hereby adopted.

Just for clarity, the members—the Committee of Supply has adopted a motion regarding concurrence in Supply, and the motion is accordingly passed.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Is it the will of the House to see the clock 5 p.m.?

The Speaker: The will of the House to see it—clock as 5 p.m.? *[Agreed]*

Then the time now being 5 p.m., this House is recessed and—adjourned, and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, November 6, 2024

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