

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a point of order.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There's been some discussion in the media about 19 bills that were introduced without text, and I know that the House leader for the official opposition raised a point of privilege and a point of order on this issue, and I think it's important to introduce some new and relevant information about these bills in the form of a post on Facebook by the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma).

And I'd just like to share it if I can; there's some highly relevant information. The filibuster—it says—last spring, during the opening days of the pandemic, the NDP refused to let government introduce any bills. This was a creative filibuster but unheard of in the history of any province in Canada or federally.

Just a point of correction—historical correction—that this House was delayed by weeks when there were attempts to bring in French language protections in the 1980s.

Now, it says: In response and in a defensive move, our government, quote, introduced, end quote, legislation early in the fall without distributing the copy to ensure the NDP couldn't prevent their introduction. The thing is, most of the legislation hadn't even been finalized at that point. The point of introduction in the fall was to parry the NDP's tactic of preventing introduction. Sigh.

This was all made eminently worse by the Liberals who, on the last day of session, refused to

allow unanimous consent to allow those bills to be distributed as they were finalized in the December, January, February time frame, when the House wasn't sitting.

This had the effect of preventing the government from distributing the bills until the House resumed session, which is finally happening this week. Note that under normal legislative practices, historically, in Manitoba and throughout Canada, these bills would not even have been introduced yet. They would get introduced and distributed over the next two weeks before the specified bill cut-off in mid-March.

As I said, if it weren't for the procedural gambit, these bills wouldn't have been introduced or distributed until March, after which they can be debated, brought to committee, et cetera, and follow the entire legislative process.

Now, Madam Speaker, I know this is under consideration by the Speaker. The fact is, these bills are not bills at all. There is no content. It is not acceptable to—that they should even be considered as bills, and we're hoping that the House and the government will agree to throw them out and reintroduce them properly, as they were supposed to be.

I will add that this is an incredible abuse of process and abuse of power, because these are not bills. And the fact is there is also a double standard when it comes to introducing bills, that we, as private members, when we have to introduce private members' bills, have to pass through Legislative Counsel and translation before they are presented. These are—the—it is outrageous that these bills have been presented as placeholders in an attempt to force them through—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order. Order.

I'm just going to remind everybody at this point in time that this issue is something that is under advisement, and therefore there is not to be discussion in the House on this.

But specific to what the member is raising, is there a specific point of order or a breach of a rule that he wishes to put forward? Is there a rule that was broken that he wishes to use as his point of order?

Mr. Lamont: The rule would be the same rule that the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) referred to in

her point of order, Madam Speaker—just to 'reinford' it—reinforce it.

Madam Speaker: And I would just indicate to that member that—[*interjection*]

Order. The member cannot raise the same thing, and those issues are under advisement right now, so caution to the House that, until those rulings come down, that specific issue cannot be referenced in the House.

* * *

Madam Speaker: So, I was going to say right after the prayer, good afternoon, everybody. Welcome back. It's good to be back, and I'm hoping I can still say that at 5 o'clock this afternoon.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a statement for the House on virtual sittings.

Welcome back to another hybrid virtual sitting of the Manitoba Legislature.

I would like to take a brief moment to remind members who will be participating virtually of some key points regarding decorum in this environment.

When members are on camera, this is the equivalent of sitting in their seat in the Chamber, and all the usual rules of decorum surrounding electronic devices, exhibits, eating and dress code apply. Members are only deemed to be in their seat if their camera is turned on and they are seated before it. To ensure that we can hear you properly, please always use your headset when speaking. To ensure that we can see you clearly, please make sure your room is well lit and that you are positioned in the middle of the screen. Please also ensure that there are no exhibits or improper backgrounds behind you.

Although virtual members who are not speaking may not appear on the House broadcast, their video feed is present and visible to all in the Chamber, and I ask that members kindly keep that in mind. If you need to attend to other matters during a sitting, simply step away from your seat for a moment and turn off your camera.

For recorded votes, you must be visible in your seat when the bells stop ringing or you will not be counted in the vote. Our moderators take a screenshot of the Zoom gallery as the bells end and the clerks then double check with them to ensure that only those members who were in their seats at that moment will be counted.

The chat function in Zoom is to allow our moderators to communicate crucial information to virtual members and for members to indicate they wish to speak. Please do not heckle in the Zoom chat, as that is—that just makes the job of the moderators much more difficult.

If members participating virtually wish to speak in French during routine proceedings and would like a refresher course on how to use the interpretation feature, please contact Tim Abbott or Kat Tefft prior to the start of that day's proceedings for a refresher on those settings.

As well, members may notice some improvements in our virtual infrastructure as our staff have been hard at work—and I will say tirelessly—over the winter break implementing improvements. In the Chamber, you will notice we have four new screens which have, thankfully, been lifted off the floor to improve visibility and avoid trip hazards. Virtual members will also notice that, in the Zoom gallery, there will be a new participant called Display 1. This gives you a direct live feed of the camera over the Speaker's throne. When virtual members are addressing the House, if they wish, they could pin Display 1 on their screens and, as they speak, they will be able to see the entire House.

It is our hope that this will enhance the experience for virtual members and make them feel more like they are in the Chamber when participating in debate.

If you have any questions about these arrangements, please contact our Deputy Clerk, Rick Yarish, and he or a member of his team will be happy to help you.

* (13:40)

And I just want to take a moment to also add that we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has this virtual option in all three rooms—in the Chamber and in the committee rooms—and it was our team of people here in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly that has made that happen.

So we have got other jurisdictions in Canada looking to see how we were able to do that, and it is because of the incredible team we have, the support from many, many people, as well, that made this possible that we could be leaders in Canada in having a hybrid system that incorporates both committee rooms and the Chamber, as well as having people in attendance.

And congratulations to everybody here for being part of that and helping to move this whole new way of doing things along, because it has taken everybody's co-operation to make this happen. But please feel proud of what we have accomplished here in Manitoba, because we have made history with what we have all been able to see and do here in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs First Report

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Chairperson): I wish to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on December 7, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2019*
- *Proposal to Modify the Voting Process titled "Vote Anywhere in your Electoral Division on Election Day" dated November 2020.*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. ALTOMARE*
- *Hon. Mr. CULLEN*
- *Ms. FONTAINE*
- *Hon. Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE*
- *Mr. TEITSMA*

Your Committee elected Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE as the Chairperson

Your Committee elected Mr. TEITSMA as the Vice-Chairperson

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020, Rule 83(2) was waived for the December 7, 2020 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

Officials speaking on the record:

- *Ms. Shipra Verma, Chief Electoral Officer*

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2019*

Proposal Considered but not Concluded

Your Committee considered the following proposal but did not conclude consideration of:

- *Proposal to Modify the Voting Process titled "Vote Anywhere in your Electoral Division on Election Day" dated November 2020.*

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Further committee reports?

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Second Report

Mr. Andrew Smith (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the second report on the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on January 11, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. JOHNSTON (Assiniboia)*
- *Mr. LAGASSÉ*
- *Ms. LATHLIN*
- *Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière)*
- *Mrs. SMITH (Point Douglas)*
- *Hon. Ms. SQUIRES*

Your Committee elected Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière) as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. JOHNSTON (Assiniboia) as the Vice-Chairperson

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020 and further amended on December 3, 2020, Rule 83(2) was waived for the January 11, 2021 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record:

- *Hon. Mr. GERRARD*

Officials Speaking on Record:

- *Ms. Ainsley Krone, Deputy Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth*

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020

Mr. Smith: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), that report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports?

Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

The honourable member for Swan River, we aren't hearing you. Are you muted?

Could the member for Swan River—oh, he doesn't have a headset? Do you have the microphone? Do you have a microphone attached to that that you can pull down?

Asessippi Provincial Park

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Okay, I think I'm good now.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Wowchuk: Today I would like to recognize one of the recreational gems of the Parkland, and more specifically within my own constituency: Asessippi Provincial Park.

Asessippi was designated as a provincial park in 1964 and comes with a rich history. The word Asessippi comes from the Cree language, which means clamshell river, and is a rather accurate depiction of the local landscape. Asessippi Provincial Park was named after the short-lived town of Asessippi, which was established on the Shell River in 1882.

Fast-forward to 1964: the park was established as part of the creation of the Shellmouth Dam and accompanying lake. Lake of the Prairies provided anglers with opportunities to fish for perch, northern pike and walleye, for both winter and summer fishing, as well as great camping spots.

In the 1990s, a site assessment was initiated. In 1992, a feasibility study was conducted. Focus groups spent hundreds of hours with dozens of people learning exactly what local people were looking for. Ski Asessippi was born.

This area now boasts the best snow-sports facility from Thunder Bay to Calgary, with 27 groomed runs ranging from beginner to expert, a 650-foot magic carpet and a tubing park. The area also prides itself in kilometres of great trails from cross-country skiers and snowmobilers alike.

A lack of snow does not limit activities or deter visitors during the summer months. Mountain bikers, hikers, campers and day trippers alike can all be found when the ski season is shut down. River tubing, kayaking and trans-Canada hiking trail are a few more attractions enticing guests.

So, as we look for things to do at home, let's not overlook this destination in our own backyards. Head to Asessippi and enjoy all that it has to offer.

Thank you.

Chris Young

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): What was your most memorable lesson in school? For many students at Kelvin, it will be the

time they spent with history teacher and Fort Rouge constituent, Chris Young.

In 2019, Mr. Young was inspired to create a four-week project for his students to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. The class went on a guided tour of notable locations. They also created a gallery of strike-related projects in the school library to educate their peers. To cap off the month, they had a day full of speakers, historians and guests visit the school, in which all the students were wearing period costumes to reflect the era.

Now, this all follows the impressive work Mr. Young has done teaching about Kelvin students who served at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the local impacts of residential schools and on the environment.

Recipients of this award that he was recently presented with—the Governor General's award for teaching in history—are selected for demonstrating best practices in history education, including creating authentic learning experiences, encouraging historic research and critical thinking and including the perspective of Indigenous people.

Now, this sort of critical thinking and creativity is exactly what we hope to introduce to our kids during their educational journeys. These are the skills that will carry them through the life in a world that, as we've seen in the past year, is constantly changing.

If we don't learn from our history, we are doomed to repeat its mistakes. Mr. Young's creative, hands-on lessons humanize our past and show our children how the challenges faced by previous generations can continue to guide us today.

Thank you, Chris Young, for always going the extra mile to bring history to life and congratulations on this well-deserved recognition of your achievements from the Governor General.

Bob Williams

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): Today, I acknowledge the life-long commitment of Mr. Bob Williams, a valued member of our St. James-Assiniboia community and our province of Manitoba.

Bob believes in being environmentally responsible and has made contributions to conservation on our land and water as well as the protection of our wildlife. That has become his path in life.

Bob has contributed his service to various Assiniboine Park boards and has been a major contributor to their desired projects. Bob chaired Polar

Bears International to rise—to raise awareness of climate change and its impact on northern wildlife. Bob spearheaded the nine-foot polar bear sculpture, entitled Mother Polar Bear and Cubs, located at the main entrance to our Assiniboine Park Zoo.

The Winnipeg Art Gallery announced the opening of their Inuit Art Centre, and Bob Williams donated time and resources to this worthy initiative. Bob was a contributor to this project and he strongly supports showcasing Inuit and Manitoba artists.

Bob has other interests. He is the honorary lieutenant colonel of the Fort Garry Horse, a military regiment which was the vanguard of the Normandy invasion in World War II. Madam Speaker, in February, the Honour 150 committee announced Bob was one of the recipients of the Manitoba 150 award, a well-deserved honour.

Mr. Bob Williams has distinguished himself and made many beneficial contributions to our province. I am pleased to bring forward and acknowledge Bob Williams' commitment to the province of Manitoba and be recognized by our Manitoba Legislature.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (13:50)

Bev Gray

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Sorry. Okay.

Today, I am pleased to congratulate Bev Gray on her retirement and highlight her 18 and a half years of service at Wolseley Family Place as the playroom supervisor.

Bev played an integral role at the playroom since its inception. She established a place of welcome, where children and families came to play, learn and grow together. Over her 18-and-a-half-year tenure, thousands of children and parents benefited from Bev's gentle, encouraging approach.

The unique drop-in structure of the playroom meant that some children visited only once, while others attended for six years, or longer for families with multiple children. No matter how long or short their time in the playroom was, they experienced the same care and connection that Bev consistently provided. This is frequently confirmed when former program participants, now grown up, come back to tell Bev about the difference she made in their lives.

Bev also had a major impact on the staff at Wolseley Family Place. She was a supervisor to the playroom staff and the centre's biggest cheerleader.

Through her modelling and mentoring of her staff, her calm, caring energy remains in the playroom and throughout the centre.

One of Bev's most appreciated gifts is her ability to see the best in people. Her favourite line is everyone is an artist, and through the Art in the Kitchen and the Art inK programs, Bev created a safe space for people who never would have considered themselves to be artists. Her influence shows up all over Wolseley Family Place through murals, the clothing depot bins and a land acknowledgment art piece, all created by program participants.

Bev always helped participants feel ownership of the space and feel included, connecting with people who might not have participated in any other program. Some participants would specifically watch for Bev to arrive, as she was the person with whom they felt most at ease.

She will be greatly missed by program participants, playroom children and families and her co-workers.

Congratulations, Bev Gray, on a wonderful legacy, and thank you for 18 and a half years of service to our Wolseley community.

Workplace Harassment Policies

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'm proud to rise today to highlight an important billboard outside Minnetonka School in my constituency that offers a simple message: be kind, be useful, do your best.

This school, like many others, recently participated in Pink Shirt Day to raise awareness against bullying and harassment. These students understand the importance of promoting a respectful workplace—or, respectful culture, regardless of difference.

That is something our government also understands and is why we introduced strong policies in 2018 to combat workplace harassment and bullying here in the Legislative Assembly and throughout the civil service. This policy was to ensure that all Manitoba employees work in an environment that is respectful and free of all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment.

This policy was referred to as positive start by the NDP, and applauded by the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union, and, as reported in the Winnipeg Free Press, intended to make it easier for all government employees to report instances of workplace harassment.

Yet, despite these policies being in place for nearly three years, we know that workplace harassment continues. Now we hear—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

I'm going to just remind the member that, as members—this is private members' hour—or, private members' statements, and members should be referring to constituents and not through their ministerial role or on government policies. This is all about having an opportunity to recognize somebody or a school in the community.

So just a reminder, for government members in particular, that this isn't the time that you're allowed to talk about government policy.

Ms. Squires: Madam Speaker, constituents of Riel often express disappointment whenever any type of harassment occurs inside the Legislative Assembly. They believe as elected officials we have a duty to set an example for the rest of the province, and I agree.

It is also unfortunate to hear members oppositely state that a policy should only apply to certain civil servants, but not others. I would hope that we could agree that workplace harassment policies apply to everyone, regardless of where they work, their sexual orientation or ethnicity.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity for—to highlight this important issue so that we can all learn valuable lessons from Minnetonka students: to be kind, be useful and do our part.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro Subsidiaries Privatization Inquiry

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, the Pallister government is moving full speed ahead with their plan to privatize Manitoba Hydro and to raise rates on the people of Manitoba.

You know, first came the announcement that they were cutting Manitoba Hydro International. That means fewer jobs and less money coming in the door.

Now comes a report that sets the stage for privatization. Should be no surprise Brad Wall is advocating that they break up Manitoba Hydro and sell off the pieces.

So we'd like to know, what are they going to sell off of Manitoba Hydro? Will it be the customer

services department? Is it going to be Centra Gas? Will it be Manitoba Hydro Telecom? Or is it Manitoba Hydro International?

I'll ask the Premier: Which divisions and subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro does he plan to sell off first?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Months to prepare and the old chestnut came out first, Madam Speaker. That's the best the NDP can do, is the old, tired bogeyman about privatizing.

Well, we have no intentions, Madam Speaker, never have had. But the reality of the situation is that the previous NDP government has a record of blowing billions of dollars without asking Manitobans for approval. They went ahead. They ignored the advice of their board at Hydro. They ignored the experts at Hydro. They ignored Manitobans entirely. They circumvented the Public Utilities Board. They went around the Clean Environment Commission.

Madam Speaker, they blew \$10 billion. It's a \$10-billion burden. And, like many things that we were left with from the previous NDP government, we have to clean it up. But I am so pleased that the so-called new Leader of the NDP is embracing old positions here in the House.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Madam Speaker, actions speak louder than words, and we have seen the actions of the member for Fort Whyte.

He was there when they privatized MTS. Now he's privatized Teshmont. Now he cuts Manitoba Hydro International. Now he calls in his role model, Brad Wall, to town and hears from Brad Wall himself that, yes, no, you should break up Manitoba Hydro and sell it off. That is shameful.

Now, the Premier is spinning and spinning away, trying to deflect from his privatization and deregulation agenda, but the question is really quite simple: Will the Premier stand today in his place and commit that they will never sell off another subsidiary or division of Manitoba Hydro like they did last fall with Teshmont?

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the member taking this tired position, Madam Speaker, I really do, because he is mistaken in every respect. The previous NDP government made choices. Those choices, some of them were wrong.

The choice to aspire to produce green, clean energy for Manitobans is fine, Madam Speaker, but they didn't do that. They decided that they would change Manitoba Hydro into an export firm and then they built it—not for us, not for the people of Manitoba—they built it for them, for themselves and for US buyers. And they tripled the debt of Manitoba Hydro.

They could have focused on building stronger seniors homes. They could have focused on putting fire extinguishers in seniors homes. They could have developed a communication system for our front-line responders.

But they didn't do any of that. No, they put \$10 billion into Manitoba Hydro investments that Manitobans will be paying for for generations to come, Madam Speaker.

We'll clean up the mess the NDP left us, protect Manitoba Hydro and strengthen it, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it's quite telling that the Premier chooses to dodge the question about why will he not commit to no subsidiary, no division of Manitoba Hydro ever being privatized again.

Again, it's quite troubling, Madam Speaker, because he refuses to answer the question. We know that he just heard from his role model, Brad Wall, that he should privatize aspects of Manitoba Hydro that he's broken off. We're concerned about Centra Gas. We're concerned about MHI. We're concerned about Manitoba Hydro Telecom. We're concerned about the customer service department within Manitoba Hydro.

So, again, let's see if the Premier will have the guts to answer the question this time, or will he dodge again. Will the Premier commit today to never privatizing another subsidiary or division of Manitoba Hydro like he did with Teshmont last fall?

* (14:00)

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member's research is lacking, Madam Speaker, and his pitiful attempt to harass and bully again with his preamble is pretty pathetic but illustrative of the customary trend that the member chooses to follow.

Madam Speaker, the NDP government previously kept Manitobans in the dark about the processes, the intent and the \$10 billion-plus that they chose to invest for their own benefits but not the benefits of

Manitobans. They ignored the wishes of their own board at Manitoba Hydro, the experts at Manitoba Hydro, the people they appointed to the PUB, and they kept everything in the dark.

Even Gary Doer admitted in his response yesterday that there were 10 years missing there where Manitobans didn't have any information and neither did his government have any information either, Madam Speaker. Because they decided they would build it, push it down the road on the interstate, take off the rear-view mirrors and no looking back, they were going to roll the dice with Manitoba Hydro and Manitobans are going to be paying the price. And we're going to do our best to clean up the mess, but the member shouldn't deny that there's a mess there, because it is real and it's big. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

School Division Funding K-to-12 Education System Review

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Shame on the Premier for leaving the door open to privatization. How easy would it be for him to rule out that he will never privatize Manitoba Hydro subsidiaries or divisions? Instead, he leaves the door wide open for us to see what his true secret plan is, operating under the auspices of Brad Wall.

Obviously this is a question about education, Madam Speaker.

We're very concerned that, throughout the pandemic, this government has been underfunding education at the same level by which they made cuts in the past years. Now, this has created a crisis in schools. Pembina Trails has a \$7-million shortfall; Brandon, it's over \$700,000; Swan Valley, they're talking about a \$170,000 deficit. And that's just to deliver the same quality education as last year, never mind all the additional needs that we've seen throughout the pandemic.

Will the Premier be transparent and accountable with Manitobans about where these cuts are coming from? Will he release his K-to-12 education review today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Shame on the member opposite, Madam Speaker.

No, actually, compliments to the member opposite for raising two issues, frankly, that need to

be raised: the incredible incompetence of the previous NDP government—to put the scandal of the century before Manitobans, to ignore the needs of Manitobans, is an issue that we do need to talk about and I thank him for raising it—and the incredible, incredible lack of attentiveness to the needs of Manitoba students. He needs to raise that issue again and again in this House, and I hope he sincerely does because we will sincerely address the issue of being dead last thanks to the NDP neglect.

We are going to reform our education system Madam Speaker. It is not delivering results for our children. That is clear, and that will be the focus of our reforms, released very, very soon, so that Manitobans can be part of the dialogue, as they were in the run-up to these proposals—thousands of them, in fact.

We are going to continue to involve Manitobans where the previous NDP government insisted on ignoring them and keeping them in the dark.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, that's the problem with this member for Fort Whyte's approach: he makes the cuts first and then he only answers the questions later.

So, they've already made the cuts that are forcing Pembina Trails to run a \$7-million deficit, that's forcing Brandon to have a \$700,000 shortfall, but he won't release the report today.

And so what evidence is it grounded in? What proof that these cuts are going to help kids at any time, much less during a period of additional needs, such as the pandemic? The proof is lacking. The accountability is sorely missing, Madam Speaker.

Now, we are saying that education requires more investment, not less. We think that the pandemic has led to greater needs in schools, not fewer. And yet this government and his newly appointed minister seem to disagree.

Why is the Premier choosing not to invest in our children's education?

Mr. Pallister: Months away, lots of time for prep, he comes up with a Hydro question on a boondoggle that will go down in the records of this province's history as the worst in its history, and a question were he clearly doesn't understand, Madam Speaker, that this government has prioritized education to the point where we are second in the country, per capita, in investing in education, where we've increased our investments, focused investments in education, by

hundreds of millions of dollars over what the NDP ever invested.

And, Madam Speaker, back to the Hydro thing, there is a referendum requirement, a referendum requirement we'll stand up for and strengthen, that says Manitobans get to decide, not the political people on the other side of the House anymore. Manitobans get to decide what they want to do with their utility because we know what the NDP never figured out. They thought Manitoba Hydro belonged to them; we know it belongs to Manitobans.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, I'm not surprised the Premier doesn't want to talk about education, Madam Speaker. After all, it's his cuts that are leaving a division in southwestern Winnipeg \$7 million in deficit. It's his cuts that are leaving the Brandon School Division with a shortfall of \$700,000.

That's going to translate to fewer teacher-librarians in the schools. That's fewer educational assistants there to help those children who are struggling and trying to make it work through remote learning. This is going to impact students with additional needs in the classroom.

I don't know who on the other side signed up for a government that would cut resources from kids in the classroom, but I can tell you that none of the members on this side would abide by a government direction in that way, Madam Speaker.

So I'll ask the Premier again: After introducing Bill 64 and refusing to distribute it, which shows us all that he's embarrassed of his legislative agenda, will he finally reverse course today, reveal Bill 64 and publish his failing K-to-12 education review?

Mr. Pallister: Investments in education: never been higher, Madam Speaker. We're approaching \$400 million more this year alone than the NDP ever invested in education—\$400 million—but focused, focused on preparing us so that we can reform our education system, which is—under the NDP, grew to be the most top-heavy administrative structure in the country; focus on taking those resources, moving them to the front line, moving them to the teachers, moving them to the students, moving them to the families so we can have a better system.

That's what our children deserve. That's what our system isn't providing. That's what the NDP leader is arguing, Madam Speaker. He's arguing we should

keep the old NDP system that's last, and we're arguing we need a new system that's first.

COVID-19 and Vulnerable Manitobans Access to Vaccination Centres

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I want to welcome the Minister of Health to her new role.

We all know the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on seniors in this province and that the Pallister government's response has only made things worse. For seniors and older adults and for all of us, we're all hopeful that vaccinations are effective and accessible. Yet, for many senior citizens, access to vaccination centres is a huge challenge. One family has told local media that they'll have to spend more than \$1,000 on stretcher services just to get the shots.

Many 95-year-olds don't have the appropriate transportation nor mobility, Madam Speaker.

What steps is the minister going to take to ensure that the most vulnerable receive life-saving vaccinations?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I thank the member for their question.

And what I will say is that all of those who are in personal-care homes across our province have not even received one dose, but both doses now of the vaccine. Those are the most vulnerable people in our province, Madam Speaker, including First Nations people as well, who have received one and two doses as well. And this is extremely important; those are the most vulnerable.

We have now moved into the age population, Madam Speaker, and as of today we've moved down to those who are 89 and over, who are eligible to receive the vaccine.

We do recognize, obviously, that there are some challenges with getting this vaccine out to people within their homes and so on; we recognize that. We are working with the Vaccine Implementation Task Force to address those issues.

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

Personal-Care-Home Staffing Request for Support for Bill 202

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, the toll COVID-19 has taken on our care homes is tragic. It has exposed the strain under which

these centres were operating, and, unfortunately, many centres didn't have the proper staffing before the pandemic, and the second wave only exposed how problematic the government's failure to deal with staffing shortages was.

* (14:10)

We heard it in their own report that staffing issues weren't communicated or dealt with to keep seniors safe. Tragically, the result of their mismanagement was that lives were lost.

So I'll ask the minister: Will she support our bill to ensure proper staffing in care homes and decrease staffing shortages immediately.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): The member opposite will know that we commissioned a report back in November. We asked expert Dr. Lynn Stevenson, to commission a report on Maples Personal Care Home, Madam Speaker, and the tragic situation that took place there. Dr. Stevenson came up with 17 recommendations, Madam Speaker, all of which we have committed to implementing.

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

COVID-19 Outbreaks at PCHs Request to Revoke Licences

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, too many Manitobans have lost their loved ones to outbreaks at personal-care homes in this province, and the deadliest outbreaks have been at for-profit facilities.

We're all deeply saddened by the events that occurred at Maples Personal Care Home and at Parkview Place last fall. Unfortunately, the previous minister believed that those deaths were unavoidable and that he questioned the motivations of health staff who were fighting for their patients. I'm hopeful that the new minister can and will do better.

That can be done by revoking the licences from Maples and Parkview, and moving away from a for-profit model for seniors' care.

Will the minister commit to that today?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Indeed, our condolences go out to all those who have lost their loved ones during this pandemic all across the province and, indeed, around the world, Madam Speaker.

What I will say to the member opposite is that it would be dangerous to take an ideological approach to this situation, particularly at this time, when we're discussing the most vulnerable people in our society: our seniors who are living in personal-care homes. So we won't take that kind of an approach, Madam Speaker.

We will work with those in the health-care field. I've already met with a number of them already. We've opened discussions and dialogue about how we can do better—all of us together. And those are the types of things that we will listen to, those are the people that we will listen to. And we'll continue to work on improving patient safety in the province of Manitoba.

Manitoba Hydro Political Interference

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): The Pallister government interfered at Manitoba Hydro, directing them not to bid on important government contracts. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) told media he did this. We have government documentation that reveals this, and this interference is contrary to the law. And yet, the Pallister government still refuses to come clean for their interference.

We're starting to see why the Premier is so secretive. Teshmont was sold off, Hydro International's lucrative consultancy is being wound down, and now the future of Manitoba Hydro Telecom and its valuable fibre-optic line is at stake.

I ask the Pallister government: Why do they continue to interfere in Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Certainly appreciate a question from the member from St. James on Manitoba Hydro, Madam Speaker.

We know the record of the NDP when it comes to Manitoba Hydro. Matter of fact, I can provide probably 10 billion reasons why the NDP cannot be trusted, Madam Speaker, when it comes to Manitoba Hydro. We are taking steps to ensure, along with—in collaboration with what the NDP did in their prior years—we are working collaboratively to ensure that our Crown jewel is protected for Manitobans.

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

Mr. Sala: The Pallister government's interference at Hydro is pushing us down the path towards deregulation and privatization. We know that means fewer good-paying jobs in Manitoba and higher bills for businesses and families. We just have to look to

Ontario and Texas to see what the future holds for Hydro under this government.

Manitobans need this Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet to be open with their plans for Hydro and it owes this duty of transparency to Hydro's workers, its ratepayers and the people of Manitoba. The Premier needs to be accountable.

Why did he break the law by hiding his interference in Hydro from Manitobans?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): I was hoping that the member opposite would take that opportunity to apologize, Madam Speaker—to apologize for the things that he has done over the last several weeks; to apologize to this Assembly and every member in this Assembly who stood—who he stood against a harassment policy that was approved by members—every party in this House. And he said that that is a policy that he won't stand behind.

I hope that he'll now apologize for doing that. It was a disrespect to you, it was a disrespect to this Assembly, and it's going back to the old ways of the NDP where they won't stand behind the person who was abused, but stand behind the abuser instead, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, I will not apologize for doing my job.

This government should be ashamed for abusing a process that's designed to protect workers for the purpose of shutting down the opposition from doing their job. Each and every one of them should feel ashamed about that.

The Wall report that was released last week sets the stage for even more interference at Manitoba Hydro. In fact, the Premier's hand-picked consultant and former right-wing premier even suggested that Hydro should look at selling off what he called non-core functions. That's what the rest of us call Manitoba Hydro, Madam Speaker.

The people who work in Hydro's customer service functions, who work on our power lines, who help to make sure we can heat our homes, they are essential.

So, will the Premier tell Manitobans which Hydro workers are non-essential? Who is he going to fire next?

Mr. Goertzen: It is not the member opposite's job to not defend those who have been harassed, Madam Speaker. In fact, it is the job of all MLAs in this Assembly, agreed to by all MLAs in this Assembly, to have that defence of those who are harassed. That is our job to do that.

And I would say to the member opposite, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew)—who had a party who had to do an investigation internally because of the harassment that happened—he said at that time, after their internal investigation came out, we have to tackle the more subtle forms of harassment, whether that's bullying or intimidation.

Clearly, he's backing off of what he has said. It's the same old NDP, Madam Speaker, and we won't stand for it. We'll stand with those who are being harassed.

Democratic Process Apology Request from the Premier

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): And yet, we all sit in the Chamber with the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

Well, Madam Speaker, the actions of the Premier have taken a serious toll on the democracy in Manitoba. He's made it harder for Manitobans to participate in our democracy. He's attacked civil society groups and taken every opportunity to stifle dissent and protest. He shut the Legislature for months. He's hidden his government's horrible cuts to our important services for no reason.

The Premier needs to stand up today and be accountable for his actions and apologize for his attack on democracy in Manitoba. Will he do so today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): Well, Madam Speaker, the Premier and members of this government have been accountable for decisions and actions that have been taken over the last many months, more so than any government probably in the history of Manitoba.

But what hasn't happened in the history of Manitoba before, Madam Speaker, is an opposition who would take weeks, sometimes months, to filibuster this Legislature, to not allow this Legislature and all of its members, not just the government members, to do their job. And it was led by the member for St. Johns, who took weeks and months to stop this Legislature from doing their job.

If she wants to know why the Assembly sometimes doesn't work, I'll send a mirror across for her and she can look in it, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Fontaine: The Government House Leader knows he's exaggerating. It was not months, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it's the fundamental right of Manitobans—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —to participate in the democracy of our province, but—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —the Premier has attacked the democratic rights at every turn.

The Premier's made it harder for people in civil society to express dissent and to protest the actions of his government. The Premier's undermined the ability of MLAs to do our jobs and he's undermined the fundamental principles of this Chamber by refusing to be transparent with Manitobans on the legislative agenda that he has before the House.

* (14:20)

Again, Madam Speaker, will the Premier stand up in this House and apologize to Manitobans for undermining our democracy?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, maybe we're getting somewhere now. The Opposition House Leader now admits that, well, maybe it wasn't months, but it was certainly weeks that she was filibustering this House.

Stopping members of this House from—oh, she was stopping her own caucus from asking questions because they wouldn't even allow question period. And after hearing the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) today, I understand why she didn't want question period to happen, Madam Speaker.

But there should be that democratic responsibility. The member opposite knows that through her actions, she has done more than probably any member of this House to stop this House from operating in a democratic way. She shouldn't allow it to happen; her leader shouldn't allow it to happen; we're not going to allow it to happen.

I hope she's going to turn over a new leaf, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Well, Madam Speaker, the Premier doesn't allow his ministers to speak. He can't handle any criticism. He hides his plans for months on end—plans that will make life very difficult for Manitobans. He shuts down—or, democratic venues like the Legislature to avoid accountability. And he uses the levers of power to side-step important independent accountability measures. And in the process, he costs on—extraordinary costs on ordinary Manitoba families.

The bottom line is, the Premier needs to stop his attack on our democratic processes.

Will he stand up in the House today and apologize to all Manitobans?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I welcome the criticisms of the member, Madam Speaker, and encourage her to continue along this vein. At least she is not trying to intimidate an abused woman for making accusations against her leader. I appreciate that she is not trying to accuse people trying to fundraise for a woman's shelter of being do-good, ignorant white people. I appreciate the fact that she is focused on me now, rather than going after the general populace or vulnerable people or harassed people. I thank her for that change in approach.

When the pattern of harassment by the former NDP government came to light, they covered it up, Madam Speaker. And their leader now said that, quote, political considerations were sometimes put ahead of doing the right thing, and that will change under my leadership.

Madam Speaker, nothing has changed. Nothing is new over there. Nothing is new with you-know-who. Nothing at all.

Rural Agriculture Services MASC Office Closures

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): On this side of the House, we have listened to farmers, ranchers, and municipal leaders across this province who are upset and disappointed with this government's closures of the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation offices.

They know that those offices provide invaluable services to producers who rely on them, and their

closure will mean the loss of good jobs and front-line services across rural Manitoba. In fact, after April 11th—sorry, April 1st, not a single MASC office will exist west of Highway 10, leaving rural communities in the Westman stranded.

I ask the minister today: Will he protect rural jobs and services by reversing this decision and keeping these important MASC offices open?

Madam Speaker: Is this going to be the Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development responding?

An Honourable Member: Yes, it is.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Thank you very much for the question. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pedersen: This is about modernizing the agricultural services. MASC was in many different offices providing different services. This is modernizing the service to farmers, something that the NDP ignored for years, that—they totally ignored agriculture. They had offices that had no staff in it, and yet they talk about trying to provide service.

We are going to modernize the service. We are providing better service to farmers, and this is what farmers have been asking for and we will deliver.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, this isn't about modernization. This is about walking away from rural communities and rural producers across this province.

We know that this cut to in-person services won't just affect older, more established producers, but in fact, it's the younger producers who are telling us they appreciate the one-on-one service and the advice that they gather from the MASC offices. In fact, it was the deputy mayor of Altona who noted this will not happen when there is no longer a designated employee to work with him, and that is to develop strategies with young—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —farmers and their ag rep.

I ask the minister, will he reverse this decision to close MASC offices across this province before April 1st?

Mr. Pedersen: Maybe when the member is pretending to talk to farmers, they'll talk about imposing a \$300 per ton carbon tax that the NDP wants to impose. Perhaps the member will remind the farmers that they're talking to, how they supported road and rail blockades that stop farm supplies from being—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pedersen: —either being delivered, or—delivered. Maybe the NDP can remind the farmers how they walked the picket line during the CN strike and, of course there—never hurts to remind farmers about the Manitoba Hydro burden that's been created by the NDP, the west-side waste line, and how farmers are reliant on electrical heat and how they're going to have—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: In fact, Madam Speaker, producers are telling us that it will not only hurt them but they fear for the communities than—that they come from. We know that this means good jobs are going to be lost across this province and this will have an effect. Many of these good jobs are being relocated, reclassified and displaced.

Meanwhile, a loss of those storefronts and the economic activity that rural communities count on will be severely hurt. Workers will now have to drive a greater distance. Some will be offered a lower salary. This is a major disruption, not only for the producers but for small towns and for our economic prospects across this province coming out of a pandemic.

Will the minister reverse this decision, stop the closures and apologize to rural Manitoba producers?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, again this is NDP myths that they continue to spread.

There are no job losses. Our staff have been working from home since the COVID outbreak started and they will continue to live in their communities and work at their jobs, same as they have for the past year. It continues to build on communities because they—these employees will stay living in their communities.

This enhances services too. Many—over 50 per cent, right now, of the MASC seeding reports and the harvest reports are done online now. We're enhancing the online services that farmers will be able

to have so that they'll be able to do even more online and we'll actually have people in the offices in our 10 service centres to be able to actually answer a phone, something the NDP never even thought of.

COVID-19 Outbreaks in PCHs Inquiry into Second Wave Response

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The Premier's been claiming that cost overruns on Hydro are the greatest scandal in Manitoba history, yet this government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in Manitoba having the second worst mortality rate in Canada. The government shut down the incident command centre in June and didn't reactivate it or created rapid response teams until after a 'full-bone' crisis in November. This government has spent over \$25 million in studies and investigations, but never to examine its own actions and failures.

Why won't this government call an independent inquiry into the failures of the second wave response that was such a disaster so we never make these mistakes again?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Right. The loss of life due to COVID and the pandemic is a tragedy, Madam Speaker, and undeniably so, but I would also say to Manitobans, thank you so much for bending the COVID curve.

We have much to look forward to because people in our province have been responsible and listening to the advice of our health leadership and not the advice of opposition leaders. And that's important because it is effectively allowing us to loosen some of those restrictions that were so necessary during the height of the pandemic and now allow Manitobans—not just small businesses, but all of us who depend on small businesses and all of us who want to resume some sense of normal social activity—to do some of that.

* (14:30)

But I would urge the member to encourage as—and I thank the Opposition Leader for doing this as well—encourage caution and encourage a careful, careful, measured recovery that is sustainable for all of us while we wait for the federal government to come up with some vaccines.

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

Mr. Lamont: I table emails sent to family members in the week where everything went so horribly wrong at the Maples care home. I received them from a friend whose father died the day of the crisis.

During the week, family members were told by the executive director at Maples, day after day, that everything was fine. On Friday night, the ambulances were called. On Saturday they learned their loved 'luns' were dead. Revera said there was a full complement of staff. That wasn't true.

I also table documents showing that the WRHA asked Revera who they should talk to for the Dr. Lynn Stevenson investigation, so Revera got to pick and choose who was part of that report.

Why won't this government call an independent inquiry into the second wave response so we can get to the truth?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): What I will say to the member opposite is that I had the opportunity—twice, actually—to meet with members of family—or family members of those who lost their loved ones in Maples—in the Maples Personal Care Home, as well as the staff that worked there. And it was very important for me and our government that we met with those families prior to releasing Dr. Lynn Stevenson's report, and we did so and had a very good, frank conversation about some of the challenges that they faced, as well.

And so I think it's very important that we look at Dr. Stevenson's report. We will be and have committed to implementing all 17 recommendations of that report. We have also put together an implementation plan as well, which we will be releasing shortly.

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

Mr. Lamont: In early December, there was a COVID outbreak at another Revera facility: Kildonan care home.

I table emails showing that two days after the outbreak happened, the executive director—the same executive director who was at the Maples a month before—wrote to Gina Trinidad at the WRHA to ask for an exception to the single-site rule because they didn't have enough nurses. Four minutes later, there was an approval signed off for a four-week exemption.

The single-site rule was established May 1st, seven months before, to keep staff from moving from—between homes. I can understand why making sure that residents don't die of hunger or thirst might justify that decision; the question is why in December we still weren't ready.

Is the reason the Premier doesn't want an inquiry because his own decisions might be examined and he would no longer be able to blame anyone else?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question.

Again, we have reviewed the recommendations of Dr. Stevenson's report. That is not just to Maples, Madam Speaker, it responds to and will be—changes that will be implemented across the province of Manitoba in all personal-care homes, So it's not just to one. So it will pertain to the personal-care home the member opposite is referring to, as well.

And so, again, we will be coming out with that implementation plan very soon.

Manitoba Bridge Grants Support for Small Business

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Throughout the pandemic, Manitoba businesses have made and continue to make extreme sacrifices in order to protect the health and safety of our province. As the Province now begins to safely loosen public health orders, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) announced yesterday that there would be another round of direct business supports provided to close to 15,000 small- and medium-sized businesses.

Can the Minister of Finance please update us on the changes to the Manitoba Bridge Grant and explain how this latest round of funding will further the relief provided to Manitoba businesses?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our supports for businesses have been broad-based, easy to access, flexible and based on consultations with the business community. We're pleased to provide a third payment to needed businesses to provide support under the bridge program. In fact, more than \$200 million of supports for the bridge program will be there. Over 15,000 businesses have been supported through the whole process.

All total, our government has committed close to half a billion dollars of supports for small businesses.

In fact, 32,000 individual businesses of the 125,000 businesses in Manitoba have gotten some direct support from this government.

We're going to continue to support small businesses.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: Are there any petitions?

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to read the following petition—out of practice here, apparently—to the Manitoba Legislature, and the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, the DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will impact the local economy.

(3) Approximately 80 families—sorry.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates over capacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans.

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

Does the member for Burrows have a petition?

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows.

Mr. Brar: I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates over capacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Quality Health Care Access

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government's program of cuts and restructuring in health care have had serious negative consequences, reduced both access to and quality of care for patients, increased wait times, exacerbated the nursing shortage, and significantly increased workload and the reliance on overtime from nurses and other health-care professionals.

(2) Further cuts and consolidation are opposed by a majority of Manitobans and will only further reduce access to health-care services.

(3) The provincial government has rushed through these cuts and changes and failed to adequately consult nurses and health-care professionals who provide front-line patient care.

(4) Ongoing cuts and changes appear to be more about saving money than improving health care.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government reverse cuts and closures that negatively impact patients' ability to access timely, quality health care.

(2) To urge the provincial government to make real investments in Manitoba's public health-care system that will improve the timeliness and quality of

care for patients by increasing the number of beds across the system and recruiting and retaining an adequate number of nurses and other health professionals to meet Manitoba's needs.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Vivian Sand Facility Project— Clean Environment Commission Review

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Vivian sands project is a proposed silica sand mine and processing plant to be built in the RM of Springfield. The overall project includes mining claims of over 85,000 hectares, making it the largest claim ever given to a single company in Manitoba's history. It is larger than the city of Winnipeg, which is 46,410 hectares.

* (14:40)

The amount of dry, solid sand mined or produced per year according to the EAP is 1.36 million tons, and much of this sand will be used in fracking.

A major concern of the proposed mine and plant is that, if developed, it could contaminate the Sandilands aquifer, including both carbonate and sandstone aquifers, which covers much of southeastern Manitoba. It has excellent water quality and is the water source for tens of thousands of Manitobans, including many municipal water systems, agriculture, industry, private wells and an abundance of wildlife and ecosystems. Further, people in the Indigenous communities that are potentially affected by this were not afforded the required Indigenous consultation from either federal or provincial government officials.

The sustainable yield of the combined sandstone and carbonate aquifers has still not yet been established by provincial authorities.

The mine could cause leaching of acid and heavy metals and pollute the aquifer, as it will go down 200 feet into the Winnipeg formation of the sandstone aquifer. There is concern that the shale, which separates the carbonate and sandstone aquifers—sand and pyritic oolite itself contains sulphides—will, when exposed to injected air from the CanWhite Sands extraction process, turn to acid.

An additional concern with the proposed mine and plant is the potential to pollute the Brokenhead

River and the aquatic food chain leading to Lake Winnipeg.

Residents in the area have also expressed fears of being overexposed to silica dust during production, as there has been a demonstrated lack of safety and environmental procedures by the CanWhite Sands Corporation during the exploratory drilling phase. Signage and fencing has been poor; identifying and required mine claim tags were missing; there were no warnings for silica dust exposure and no coverings to prevent exposure of the silica stockpiles to the elements.

Residents' concerns include the fact that boreholes, which should have been promptly and properly sealed, were left open for a year. The drilling of hundreds of improperly sealed boreholes yearly create significant risks of surface contamination, mixing of aquifer waters and drainage of surface fecal matter into the aquifer.

There is also a risk of subsidence around each borehole as a result of sand extraction.

There are also potential transboundary issues that need to be addressed, as the aquifers extend into Minnesota.

This project should not proceed, as no licensing conditions and mitigation measures will alleviate the risk to all Manitobans and the environment, since CanWhite Sands Corporation plans to use an unprecedented mining technique with no established safe outcome. The corporation has gone on record indicating that it does not know how to mine for the silica in the water supply and need to develop a new extraction methodology that has never been done before.

Contamination of the aquifers and the environment is irreversible and there are many surface sources of high purity silica that can be extracted without endangering two essential regional aquifers.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to undertake a combined review of the Vivian Sand Facility processing plant and the mining/extraction portion of the operation as a class 3 development with a review by Manitoba's Clean Environment Commission to include public hearings and participant funding.

To urge the provincial government to halt activity at the mine and plant until the Clean

Environment Commission's review is completed and the project proposal has been thoroughly evaluated.

Signed by Michelle Aguette-Gendreau [*phonetic*], Shirley Penner, Randy Scott and many, many others.

Cochlear Implant Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

People who suffer hearing loss due to aging, illness, employment or accident not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, relatives or colleagues; they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

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

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic, founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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

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

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, AADL, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket. Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of \$5,444, for a cochlear implant replacement speech processor.

The BC Adult Cochlear Implant Program offers subsidies, replacements to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years old.

The cochlear implant is a lifelong commitment. However, as the technology changes over time, parts and software become no longer functional or available.

The cost of upgrading a cochlear implant in Manitoba of approximately \$11,000 is much more expensive than in other provinces, as adult patients are responsible for the upgrade costs of their second-of their sound processor.

In Manitoba, pediatric patients, under 18 years of age, are eligible for funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program, which provides up to 80 per cent of the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As the—as of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates over capacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This petition has been signed by Sara Born, Karen Bouchard and Tricia Campbell.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

* (14:50)

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately demand Dynacare provide all phlebotomy blood sample sites existing prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency and allow all Manitobans to get their blood and urine tests done when visiting their doctor, thereby facilitating local access to blood testing services.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Sorry, Madam Speaker, maybe you can put me at the end. I'm still waiting for my petition.

Madam Speaker: Okay. I will call that member's name, then, at the bottom of the list.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this position is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates over capacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, with a petition.

Early-Learning and Child-Care Programs

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Early-learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

Licensed not-for-profit early-learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

High quality licensed child care has a lasting positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, as all operating expenses continue to increase.

The workforce shortage of trained early-childhood educators has continued to increase; quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

Accessible, affordable and quality early-learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

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

If not, I will go to the honourable member for The Maples.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plan to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates over capacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May of 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba justice system was already more than 100—or, sorry—250 inmates over capacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Early-Learning and Child-Care Programs

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Early-learning and child-care programs in Manitoba require increased funding to stabilize and support a system that is in jeopardy.

(2) Licensed not-for-profit early-learning and child-care programs have received no new operating funding in over three years, while the cost of living has continued to increase annually.

(3) High quality licensed child care has a lasting positive impact on children's development, is a fundamental need for Manitoba families and contributes to a strong economy.

(4) The financial viability of these programs is in jeopardy if they cannot meet the fiscal responsibility of achieving a balanced budget, at—as all operating expenses continue to increase.

(5) The workforce shortage of trained early-childhood educators has continued to increase, and quality child care is dependent on a workforce that is skilled and adequately remunerated.

(6) Accessible, affordable and quality early-learning and child-care programs must be available to all children and families in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase funding for licensed not-for-profit child-care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care in Manitoba, which will also improve quality and stability in the workforce.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: I have been notified that a member wishes to bring forward a matter of urgent public importance, so I will ask the member for River Heights to move his matter of urgent public importance.

* (15:00)

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I move, seconded by the MLA for Tyndall Park, that under rule 38(1), the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the poor management by the government of supports for those who are homeless during the coldest part of this winter, with the result that there were insufficient apartments and hotel spaces

available for those who are homeless, with the result that far too many were living in bus shelters.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), I should remind all members that under rule 38(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately. As stated in Beauchesne's citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion.

In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there's urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, helping those experiencing homelessness—our friends and relatives on the street—has been much on the mind of Manitobans this winter. We've seen individuals experiencing homeless living in bus shelters all over the city.

The serious of this issue and the fact that there have been deaths associated and the fact that the crisis situation of those who are homeless has emerged so clearly since the Legislature last sat demonstrate that this is being raised at the earliest possible time and is extremely serious.

As Ryan Thorpe has pointed out in his series, *Life on the Strip*, the problem which has plagued Winnipeg for decades is growing. Under the present government, which has been in place for five years, there are more people experiencing homelessness and on the street, not fewer. With many places to which people who are experiencing homeless can go being closed or unavailable during the COVID pandemic, there were many who sought out and stayed in bus shelters.

I talked, for example, to members of the transit union and I heard from James Van Gerwen and others that there were so many people experiencing homelessness that if bus drivers were asked to report everyone who is experiencing homelessness and in a bus shelter, they would be filing thousands of reports a day.

The costs of homelessness in Winnipeg in the fiscal resources now being used—because we address it poorly and in human misery—are enormous. The

extra visits to emergency rooms, the extra hospitalizations, the failure to help people achieve their potential are major adverse results of the poor approach being taken by the current government and, I will add, by the NDP government before them.

The cost, in terms of human lives, is real. From what we know, there are three individuals who've died this winter in Winnipeg. The first was a man who died from exposure in St. Boniface on February 6th. The second was a woman who died February 16th in a fire at a camp for those who were experiencing homelessness near Thunderbird House. The third was a woman who was found in a bus shelter on February 20th.

I want to speak briefly about the information I've received about the woman who died in relation to the fire, which happened in the camp near Thunderbird House. The information I've received is that she was 23 years old, from Sandy Lake in Ontario and that she was very involved in helping others in the camp. In fact, one person told me she was like a modern-day Florence Nightingale in helping others. I hope there will be more information coming out about her and her contributions to others. If the information I've received is accurate, it's a story which needs to be told.

The answer to ending homelessness is to ensure that there's an apartment or a hotel for those who are experiencing homelessness. This has worked in Medicine Hat and it's worked in Finland in ending homelessness.

I had an interesting conversation a few weeks ago with a person experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg during the coldest days of our winter. He related to me how he'd been in Medicine Hat three years ago. He said, and I quote, in Medicine Hat, they don't even let you be homeless. They immediately put me in a motel and gave me access to resources. What he described is the night-and-day difference between Winnipeg, where this is not happening and where there has been little progress in ending homelessness today, and Medicine Hat, where they have ended homelessness.

On February 7th of this year, Manitoba Liberals released a report entitled *All the Way Home: Ending 40+ Years of Forced Homelessness in Winnipeg*. We called for 10 actions: that the government open community centres and other City buildings as warming shelters; that the government ensure people can get prompt access to addictions treatment—the waiting time for detox is too long and services are not co-ordinated; that the government create a single web-based dashboard of resources for those who are

homeless with access point for services and wait times for each service as listed; that the government ensures there is signage and maps to help people, and that these are present in bus shelters and in gathering places; that there should be free masks present for those who are in bus shelters; that there should be a central dispatch and co-ordination centre for mobile help units; that the government fast-track those who are experiencing homelessness into an apartment and, if no apartment is available, into a hotel; that the government use Indigenous cultural approaches to welcome people in from the cold; and that the government help people all the way to a sustainable life path that is to help take people who are homeless all the way home.

Madam Speaker, yesterday there was a government announcement of help for those who are experiencing homelessness. Now, this is a government which has been in government for five years. It took five years and after the worst of the cold weather before the government brings this forward. This is hardly swift action, and it comes after the coldest period of the winter instead of before and in preparation for the really cold winter.

But, worse than this, the government is only planning to help 250 people. We know from the street census conducted in 2018 that the number of people experiencing homelessness is at least 1,500, and it's probably much higher than that.

The government is only proposing to help a small fraction of those who are experiencing homelessness. This is the crux of why we need an urgent debate today. We need something that's much better. The government's actions this winter were clearly insufficient. The government's actions yesterday are only a fraction of what's needed.

Let us make a comparison. When people are homeless because of a forest fire or because of a flood, the government puts them up in hotels. Why are people who are homeless in Winnipeg treated differently?

We know many who are experiencing homelessness do so because of a family breakup, or because they've lost a job, or because they've aged out of care in Child and Family Services, or because they've been evicted, or because a family member has died, or because there's been a natural disaster or because they have a mental or physical illness. They should be treated the same as those who are homeless because of fire or a flood. There should be no difference.

The government must get to work. There are lots of empty hotel rooms which could be used today. Why is the government stalling when action is possible right now? This government has been in place for five years. The concerns of those who are experiencing homelessness have been raised around the year and, in particular, when it's coldest each winter. Each time after the winter is over, the government has forgotten about those who experience homelessness.

I'm asking for this debate today because the government needs to be held account for its shortcomings and for its inability to adequately help those who are experiencing homelessness. The people experiencing homelessness are like us. They are human beings. People experiencing homelessness have had challenges. They should be treated with dignity, and they should be helped. The government has not done enough and is not doing enough now, and that is why we need an urgent debate today on this in this Legislature.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Merci. Miigwech.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I want to first thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for acknowledging the important announcements that have been made by the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) over the last several days and few months—that he acknowledged that there are 50 new units that have been announced for those who need immediate shelter who might be experiencing homelessness or for other reasons, Madam Speaker.

In addition, the Minister of Families announced two and a half million dollars for wraparound services for those who were in need, Madam Speaker, an important announcement, and I think the member for River Heights acknowledged that it is a significant announcement. He didn't mention the Spence Neighbourhood Association partnership with the government which opened a 24-hour shelter service that will provide 2,500 meals, that it will—I think it's providing 500 coats.

There are a number of different initiatives that are happening on this very topic, and so while the member opposite, you know, acknowledged some of the good work that the government is doing in partnership with many organizations in Manitoba who are really on the ground doing that good work, he did miss some of the other announcements, but it all speaks to the fact that this is very important to this government.

* (15:10)

Now, when it comes to the MUPI in particular, Madam Speaker, you will be quick to remind me if I go on much longer that I need to speak about the specific rationale, whether or not there is no better time for debate, whether there is no other opportunity for this debate to happen.

And it's not about whether or not this is an important issue. It clearly is an important issue. That is not in dispute. I think every member of this Legislature would agree that the issue of homelessness or the ability for people to get appropriate shelter at all times, but especially during winter, is a very, very important issue to every member of this Legislature.

But to rise to the standard of a matter of urgent public importance in this Assembly, it has to be shown that there is no other time for debate, no other opportunity for this issue to come forward, Madam Speaker. And as you would know, and as all members know, there are other opportunities.

There is question period. There was an opportunity for the Leader of the Liberal Party to ask about this very subject during question period. He didn't take the opportunity to ask about this during question period. There might be other opportunities during debate as it relates to the things that are before the Assembly. Of course, there are grievances. The member didn't raise a grievance or members' statements at different times, if they're eligible. It wasn't raised in a member's statement.

So it's not to say that this isn't an important issue, but there are many times during this legislative day where this can be debated in another way. And so I applaud the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) and all other related departments within our government for taking strong action, for having partnerships with the community organizations who are on the ground doing such good work. And while this is a very important issue, it doesn't meet the qualifications under our rules in the Assembly for a matter of urgent public importance, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): This is a matter of urgent public importance. Manitobans are concerned about the safety and well-being of those living in bus shelters and on streets, living in tents beside rivers. They're concerned about the three deaths that happened due to the cold this summer—or this winter that the member from River Heights had mentioned.

You know, shame on this Pallister government and their housing minister for their poor management of supports for those who are homeless or were homeless, especially during the coldest part of this winter. We know that during this pandemic there's been less and less resources available due to space and having to, you know, adhere to the health orders. And there hasn't been as much resources out there to help support and get people into homes.

The government's been insufficient in ensuring that there's hotels and apartments that were made available for those who were houseless or under housed.

And, you know, the Pallister government talked about their investments. Well, they made investments into, you know, making sure COVID isolation units were there, but what about the homeless population that didn't have COVID? They had nowhere to go.

So this government, you know, has continued to say, oh, we're making investments, we're making investments. Well, in fact, they've been in government for five years and they have not built one single unit of social housing.

You know, this—they just spoke about 50 units. Well, we don't even know when those units are going to be ready. And they, in fact, have over 900 units that are available sitting empty that they could be fixing up to ensure that 900 individuals that want to be housed can be housed.

They've continually cut the maintenance budget to fix up these social housing units. And they've done nothing but sell off these social housing units since they've taken government. No wonder why there's so many people that are homeless.

Not to mention, you know, not being able to access EIA in a timely manner. We've had constituents that have come to our office that are trying to get shelter benefits from EIA so that they don't have to live in bus shelters.

And, Madam Speaker, one only has to leave the Manitoba Legislature and drive out the parking lot and see, right across the street, people living in that bus shelter—not one person, not two persons, but multiple people. And with COVID-19, they're being put at risk because this government is not doing their job in ensuring that there's enough housing for individuals.

We have a shelter, Main Street Project, that is no—has low-barrier, no barrier. So folks can go there, but they're only—they only can take 100 people. They only

get funding for 100 people. And right now, according to the census that was done in 2018, there was over 15,000 people that were homeless in Winnipeg. So you can imagine that number's been exasperated with COVID-19 and with, you know, people being cut off of their EIA shelter benefits.

And this government wonders why there's so many people that are homeless? Well, it's because of this government that they are homeless, because they're not putting money into the housing that they have. They're not making investments into the shelters that are there to provide shelter.

And let's face it, Madam Speaker, shelters can only provide so much support with so much money, and this government is not providing enough funding for these shelters to be able to shelter more than 100 people.

So what the shelters have been forced to do—or I'm just speaking about Main Street Project, because that's the only no-barrier shelter in our province—they are taking 20 to 30 extra individuals every night, especially during the cold, to shelter them so that they're saving lives, while this government sits on their hands, you know, or puts their fingers in their ears and covers their eyes, whatever they do, pretends not to see it, and turns a blind eye to it.

These are Manitobans. These are human beings. These are someone's loved ones. These aren't just disposable human beings like this government has—basically, you know, had no political will behind actually helping folks get into housing.

We also have a government who's pushing individuals to go to work. So what they've done is they've set up a ready, set, work program where they don't provide any shelter benefits. They don't provide any clothing benefits.

Well, if you're living in a shelter, how are you supposed to be seeking work? You don't have access to a phone. You don't have access to Internet. They'll take messages for you. Sometimes you can call back. Like—and this government wonders why there's so many people that are homeless?

I spoke to—with the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) a couple of weeks—and I provided some solutions, Madam Speaker, like immediately fixing up the existing social housing stock that they still currently own, that we know that is slowly dwindling as they sell it off, essentially making it harder and harder for Manitobans to find safe, affordable housing in Manitoba.

I also asked that rent moratorium be reinstated. When that was lifted, so many Manitobans were put out of homes and are living on the street now.

I asked for folks to be able to access EIA in a timely manner. It takes a month to get a phone call. You get that phone call and they set up a meeting, and then it's a week or two before you actually go in and see someone in person, and you may or may not get a cheque, or they may send you to ready, set, work, where you wait another few days to get an appointment to get into that, and that doesn't even provide shelter benefits.

I asked for them to quit cutting off people from EIA during a pandemic. Essentially, you know, they're asking for bank records and not everybody's able to get those, so they cut them off and then they have no shelter benefits and then they're put on the street.

I also asked for the minister to set up transitional housing for children aging out of care because we know there's a high percentage of those children that are in—on the streets, homeless that have aged out of care, and basically they're given a, you know, garbage bag and sent on their way, and they're not given access to housing.

I also talked to her about transitional housing with wraparound services for people that are in shelters so that they can get out of shelters and stay out of shelters and not have to, you know, continually bounce between shelters and maybe a rooming house and then back to a shelter, and putting them at risk.

But all of these things that I've spoken about, this government has the capacity to do, but yet they won't do it. What they've done is they've led—this has led to the increase in people being homeless in this province.

This government, in fact, has directly made the homeless crisis in Manitoba worse: a total of 387 Manitoba Housing units have been sold to the private sector, and another 727 units have been sold to non-profit sector. That's over 1,000 housing units, Madam Speaker.

*(15:20)

We're talking about over 1,500 people in 2018 that were homeless. A thousand people could have been in those units, but yet this government thinks that there's no housing crisis in our province, and they sell off this housing and leave 900 units empty where they could be fixing them up.

This government's not built one single new social housing, and there's eleven hundred and—or 1,770 units sitting vacant. How can we allow that to happen? And there's over 9,000 people that are waiting on that list to get into housing. Why aren't we fixing that up? Make sense.

So when this government talks about making investments, I've given them a few examples of investments that can be made so that we can really look at tangible things that can make sure that people aren't living in bus shelters, that aren't putting their health at risk of possibly getting COVID, and that may not—or that may, you know, lose their lives due to the cold. And we saw -40° in this province. Thankfully, it's warming up now, but this government has a responsibility to act and they need to put the resources into place.

And lastly, I just want to thank those who stepped up and helped, you know, those vulnerable people and came out and, you know, put up a camp at Thunderbird House to ensure that no other people had froze to death. This government needs to match those same kinds of things that people are doing and start investing so that people can be in homes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on the motion proposed by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). The 90 minutes notice required prior to the start of routine proceedings under rule 38(1) was provided, and I thank the honourable member for that.

Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter. I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward, and although this is indeed a very serious matter, this motion does not fit the criteria as a matter of urgent public importance as there are other opportunities that can be used to raise this issue including oral questions, member statements, petitions and grievances.

Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I have to rule that the motion is out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I have a leave request that I'd like to entertain before the House.

Is there leave of the House to temporarily waive rules 30—sorry—62 and 63, and to replace the process for dealing with condolence motions in those rules with the following process:

(1) Condolence motions for deceased former members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba shall be called as part of routine proceedings, prior to petitions or matters of urgent public importance, if the Speaker has received written notice from any member 90 minutes prior to the start of the sitting day.

(2) Written notice to the Speaker should include the names of the members to be commemorated that day and should be copied to the two House leaders, the member for River Heights, the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk.

(3) The category of Condolences will not appear on the daily Order Paper.

(4) For each motion:

(a) Ten minutes of speaking time will be allocated to members from the deceased member's political party.

(b) Five minutes of speaking time will be allocated to members from another political party.

(c) Five minutes of speaking time will be allocated to independent members.

(d) Within those speaking time allocations the parties or independent members may assign as many members as they wish to speak.

(5) At the conclusion of the speeches, the Speaker shall put the question and ask members to signify their approval of the motion by rising in their places to observe a moment of silence.

(6) Following the passage of the any condolence motion, the Speaker's office shall send to the deceased member's family the Hansard transcript from that sitting day, along with a personal letter of condolences from the Speaker, as well as

letters of condolence from any other members who were unable to speak during the tribute. These letters must be received by the Speaker's office within five days of the passage of the motion in the House.

This agreement expires on June 1st, 2021.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to temporarily waive rules 62 and 63, and to replace the process for dealing with condolence motions in those rules with the following process:

(1) Condolence motions for deceased former members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba shall be called as part of routine proceedings, prior to petitions or matters of urgent public importance, if the Speaker has received written notice from any member 90 minutes prior to the start of the sitting day.

(2) Written notice to the Speaker should include the names of the members to be commemorated that day and should be copied to the two House leaders, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk.

(3) The category of Condolences will not appear on the daily Order Paper.

(4) For each motion:

(a) Ten minutes of speaking time will be allocated to members from the deceased member's political party.

(b) Five minutes of speaking time will be allocated to members from another political party.

(c) Five minutes of speaking time will be allocated to independent members; and

(d) Within those speaking time allocations the parties or independent members may assign as many members as they wish to speak.

(5) At the conclusion of the speeches, the Speaker shall put the question and ask members to signify their approval of the motion by rising in their places to observe a moment of silence.

(6) Following the passage of any condolence motion, the Speaker's office shall send to the deceased member's family the Hansard transcript from that sitting day, along with a personal letter of condolence from the Speaker, as well as letters of condolence from any other members who were

unable to speak during the tribute. These letters must be received by the Speaker's office within five days of the passage of the motion in the House.

This agreement expires on June 1st, 2021.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Thank members of the House for that.

Could you please call for debate Supplementary Appropriation?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will now deal with supplementary—The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021.

Messages

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I have a message from Her Honour Lieutenant Governor, as well as the Supplementary Appropriation document, which I will like to table.

Madam Speaker: Please stand for the reading of the message.

To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Lieutenant Governor transmits to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Estimates of additional sums required for the services of the Province for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2021, and recommends the Supplementary Estimates to the Legislative Assembly.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolution respecting the supplementary appropriation bill, 2020-2021.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

* (15:30)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Supplementary Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We have before us our consideration for three resolutions respecting the supplementary appropriation bill.

The first resolution, 21.1–21.6(a), pertaining to part A of the Supplementary Estimates, reads as follows:

21.6(a): RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$100,000,000 for the Health and Seniors Care, Health Services Insurance Fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Does the minister have any opening comments? Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments? No.

Does the honourable minister—okay, the floor is open for questions. Any questions? So there's no questions. Is the committee ready for the question?

Shall the resolution—the question before the House is resolution 21.6(a), resolved that there be—okay. Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

The second resolution is 26.2(a), pertaining to part A of the Supplementary Estimates, reads as follows:

26.2(a): RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$300,000,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Internal Service Adjustments, COVID-19, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Does the minister have any opening statements? No. Does the official opposition critic have any opening statements?

Does the honourable member—okay, the floor is open for questions. Any questions?

There's no questions. Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: I have a question, if I may.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, we have a question from the honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Question relates to this: How much of this program will be matching federal dollars which are provided? And I know there's a lot of federal dollars which haven't been spent. Why is the minister of financing holding back on spending the federal dollars?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Sit down or do I have to stand up?

Mr. Chairperson: You can sit down.

Mr. Fielding: Our government has committed over \$2 billion—in fact, \$1.8 billion of COVID-19 expenditures. Have you looked at our second-quarter report? Obviously, we're projecting expenditures to increase by \$1.4 million.

We have partnered with the federal government for—in the tune of 600 and—close to 640 or above \$640 million, which represents about 20 per cent of our spend on COVID-19. We spent about \$3.2 billion, and as you can see, considering the fact that we're running a \$2-billion deficit, the money will be spent and more from the federal government.

Mr. Chairperson: Another question from the honourable member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: My question is this: Will we be provided a breakdown? For example, will the minister provide the breakdown on how much it is costing to do the testing each day, and how much of this is going into personnel salaries, and how much is going into masks and other supports for the COVID pandemic?

Mr. Fielding: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I refer you to the second-quarter report, which we tabled, that outlines all expenditures, but later on in my speech and later on in the other parts of the question period, I can outline that, but I would refer the member to the second-quarter report that identified all expenditures health-related to things like COVID. That would be health or education or things like supports for people as well as businesses.

Mr. Gerrard: The Minister of Finance may know that we are getting lots and lots of people very concerned about expenditures related and the need for expenditures related to people who have type 1 diabetes who need continuous glucose monitoring; the people who have and need cochlear implant changes and need software up-to-dates, and these are, of course, things which are very important—hearing and good glucose-control even during a pandemic.

I wonder if any of these expenditures will go to those sorts of expenditures. And also there's tremendously long waiting lists for people with eating times—eating disorders. I think it's now two years.

Is the minister going to address these things, because these are results in part of the COVID pandemic, the eating disorder increase that's been seen elsewhere as well.

Mr. Fielding: And obviously there's a number of groups that are speaking of these issues. They are

important issues. We do consider that during our budget consultation. We're happy that we've consulted close to 50,000 Manitobans in our virtual as well as town hall types of sessions as well as individuals, so decisions can be considered through the budget process, and that will be coming up.

This budget bill is to deal with more COVID-related expenditures, as well as emergency expenditures that would be associated with it, but future decisions will be made. I think I have an opportunity to meet with a number of the groups that you're referring to on Friday, and so I'll personally have an opportunity to listen to what their concerns are and evaluate that, and of course the Minister of Health would be involved in any of those types of decisions.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further questions? Is the committee ready for the question?

Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

Now we'll go on to third resolution, 16.6(a), pertaining to part D of the Supplementary Estimates, reads as follows:

16.(a)–16.6(a): RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$50,000,000 for Education, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Does the minister have an opening comment? No.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

The floor is open for questions. Any questions? As I hear no questions—

An Honourable Member: I have a question.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), on a question.

Mr. Gerrard: I would ask the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) for a little bit of clarity here. Why is this expenditure on Education being singled out in this instance?

Mr. Fielding: This is related to—an announcement was made on January 21st by the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen) that talked about Manitoba government invests additional \$50 million in

kindergarten-through-grade-12 school capital programs. A vast majority of the money goes to land acquisitions. We've got a commitment to build 20 new schools. That's a part of it, as well as other things such as replacement—structural replacements, roof replacements, new mechanical systems and accessibility upgrades to kindergarten classes, as well as a number of the infrastructure items that I had talked in respect to.

So that was a commitment that the Minister of Education made an add-on to the budgets. We need a budget appropriation to make sure we can get the money to the school divisions to make sure these important upgrades are happening.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further questions?

Mr. Gerrard: This, clearly, is not something which is specific to the COVID pandemic. I just want to get that clarified. I mean, it is, nevertheless, very important, of course, that the capital expenditures be made for schools, but this is not specifically a COVID-19-related expense. Is that correct?

* (15:40)

Mr. Fielding: It's a commitment that we've made to Manitobans to make sure that 20 new schools are being built. It's a commitment to acquire land to do this. It's a commitment to make improvements, structural improvements, roof replacements, new mechanical systems, accessibility upgrades. It also does things like future K-through-8 schools in West St. Paul; future K-through-8 schools in Waverley West; \$10 million to access projects such as elevators, wheelchair lifts, grooming, room improvements for students; \$21 million for mechanical services; \$16 million for replacements—\$16 million for structural replacements and \$8 million for bulk builds of new molecular classrooms, that's a part of it.

Mr. Gerrard: Just a follow-up. I just want to get clarity. We've got most of the money being asked for today relates to COVID, this is a separate educational piece related to a separate announcement. Are there other pieces related to separate announcements? For example, there was an announcement yesterday related to homelessness and housing people who are homeless. Is the money for that included in this supply request or not?

Mr. Fielding: We have done two budget appropriation bills beyond the budget. One was for 100—or \$1 billion, and one was for \$577 million. The latter was for the Safe Restart Agreement with the federal government. We had to flow money out to

school divisions; you need the appropriation to do as such.

Since the last budget appropriation bill, we've made \$280 million in additional spending that's needed for spending authority, things like the Manitoba Bridge Grant program, \$200 million; long-term recovery, \$50 million; pandemic staffing support of \$10 million and northern airports for \$12 million.

So there's 100—there's 800—or, rather, \$280 million of supports that are very much needed for Manitobans since the last budget appropriation bill, as well as \$120 million of contingency funds that are really important. As we all know, the pathway of the pandemic has been something that has been unpredictable, so provides additional budgetary support to the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Chairperson: There's no other further questions—one more question.

Mr. Gerrard: Just to clarify, this appropriation does not include money for the announcement yesterday related to homelessness. Is that correct?

Mr. Fielding: This budget bill provides appropriate dollars that—announcements that have been made on additional supports for businesses, for long-term recovery—that was the \$50 million to things like the Chamber of Commerce to come up with some long-term strategies for it—the pandemic staffing support program and the northern airports support programs, as well as others.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further questions? Since there are no further questions, is the committee ready for the question?

Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

That will conclude our alphabetical order roll call for—oh, sorry. This concludes the business before the committee.

The committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered

and adopted three resolutions respecting to Supplementary Appropriation.

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

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen), that this House concur in the report of the Committee of Supply respecting the resolutions relating to the supplementary appropriation bill for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Motion agreed to.

Supplementary Supply Motion

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that there be granted to Her Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of Public Service for fiscal year ending March 31st, 2001, out of the Consolidated Fund, sums not exceeding \$450 million as set out in part A and part D of the Supplementary Estimates.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that there be granted to Her Majesty on account of a Certain Expenditures of the Public Service for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021, out of the Consolidated Fund, sums not exceeding \$450 million as set out in part A and part D of the Supplementary Estimates.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 69—The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen), that Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-21, be now read a first time and be ordered for second reading immediately.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021, be now read a first time and be ordered for second reading immediately.

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

SECOND READINGS

Bill 69—The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen), that Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-21, be now read a second time and referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021, be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Fielding: I will be providing some of my comments now for kind of the whole section.

The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-21 provides supplementary spending authority for the 2020-21 fiscal year. These supplementary appropriations are required in order to pay for health and other expenditures related to COVID-19 and for the capital investments into schools.

The amount of supplementary authority for operating expenditures is \$400 million, as specified in subsection 2 dash-or bracket (1). These expenditures are broken down into \$300 million for enabling appropriations. These funds will be utilized to pay for additional costs that government is incurring as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

* (15:50)

This appropriation is provided as an enabling appropriation to provide some measures of flexibility during these extraordinary times; \$100 million for health and seniors' care: this provides additional funding for health care and related expenditures in response to COVID-19, including for vaccine efforts.

Subsection 2(2) of the bill includes the amount of capital investments for new school construction by school division of \$50 million. This has provided some immediate funding towards our commitment to build 20 new schools in the next 10 years.

Subsection 2(3) provides the authority for the school divisions to borrow the \$50 million provided in subsection 2(2) in accordance with the subsection 223.1 of The Public Schools Act.

Section 3 affirms the money will be expended under the authority of the act may be made through whatever department has become responsible for the

program of activity. This is consistent with the past appropriation acts and makes allowance for when a new department is established.

Section 4 merely states the act comes into force when the bill receives royal assent. Mister—Madam Speaker, these comments—I'll present to the bill, and thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Do members wish to ask questions on the bill?

An Honourable Member: We do.

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

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I'm wondering if the minister can tell us whether this money—the entire \$450 million—will be spent in the month of March 2021.

Mr. Fielding: There is over \$280 million of commitments that the government has made. In respect to the Manitoba bridge program, for \$200 million; Long-term Recovery Fund at \$50 million to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce; pandemic staffing supports, \$10 million; northern airport supports for \$12 million, adds up to about \$280 million of supports that are in place. There is another \$120 million of contingency. One thing that we 'knewed'—know about this pandemic is we don't know the whereabouts of where it goes and you always need support. So that provides additional support to make sure Manitobans can get the support they need during the pandemic.

Mr. Wasyliv: Thank you.

Minister, I'm wondering if you can tell us, of the billion dollars that was appropriated and the \$577 million in the second appropriation, and the almost \$900 million in the rainy day fund, what is the status of all three of those funds? Has all the money been extinguished in all of them? Or is the majority—or even a significant amount—still remaining that has gone unspent?

Mr. Fielding: This year, we're projecting a \$2-billion deficit, and so that is something that we are on track

for. I would say that we're probably closer to that number when year comes in, but with that being said, there is still time left in—within this year to do the appropriation. We have committed to tapping into the rainy day fund. Decisions will be made later on in the fiscal year, which is later on in the month, to expend that. What we have committed is make sure we're not making the same mistakes like the NDP did, that we drain the rainy day fund. It was drained, of course, from over \$800 million to about \$120 million.

We replenished that; good thing we have that on hand, Madam Speaker. We will be tapping into it.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question relates to the expenditures, and I'm wondering in terms of the health expenditures—or other expenditures—where there's any expenditures which relate specifically to personal-care homes, which relate to increasing staffing of personal-care homes, increasing the support for personal-care homes and, if so, in what way will that support be increased?

Mr. Fielding: I'm going to refer you to page 13 of the mid-year report in respect to that. That outlines all our expenditures in terms of things like PPE and pandemic responses. That includes things like face shields where there's \$258 million associated; gowns and coveralls, \$104 million; things like naval and test kits, millions of dollars being spent there; supports for individuals, over \$29 million; gloves and other items in respect to that. These are all important investments. That also does not include our capital investments. We had to make sure there's visitation shelters that are in place to support the personal-care homes.

Mr. Wasyliw: Minister, if you haven't touched any of the rainy day fund, why is it necessary to seek another \$450 million when you can pay for every single one of these disbursements through the rainy day fund?

Mr. Fielding: Well, it's disappointing that the member has been a member already for a year and he doesn't understand our legislative process. You need the appropriation, and that's what we're here debating. Once we get the appropriation, then we can make the decision of where the money comes from, whether it comes from the rainy day fund or other means that's there. We use a variety of sources by money that we raise through our taxes and everything else like this, get financing for certain things in rainy day fund. But the member should know the fact that we need to appropriate money before we can make a decisions where the money comes from. I wish he would understand that.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can explain why he's doing this when he's about to release a budget mere weeks from now, and what's the hurry, and why can't this just be incorporated in next year's budget.

Mr. Fielding: We have already appropriated over \$280 million in supports that are in place that have been announced since the last budget appropriation bill. As people may know, with finances, until the money has run out, you don't need additional appropriation, so we're able to make those announcements and have appropriation that comes here. What this will support, again, is the staffing support, things like the vaccine rollout and other things that would be associated with this. We have a budget that's coming up, but we need the supports in place right now to provide the funding for the \$280 million additional supports, the ones I've identified already—I can go through the list again—as well as contingency, \$120 million of contingency, to address any related COVID issues.

Mr. Wasyliw: Minister, does this money include the \$7.5-million purchase of Providence Therapeutics' non-refundable vaccine?

Mr. Fielding: Those supports will be something that will be in place for next year's budget.

Mr. Wasyliw: You indicated, I think, breaking down the \$50 million in education capital funding. Actually, no new schools are being built. You're only using \$8 million to build portables. Is that correct? And if it's that—correct, how many schools are going to get portables, and how many portables are getting built for that \$8 million?

Mr. Fielding: Well, again, the member's wrong. He doesn't understand the details when we provide them. This is a news release that was put out on January 21st where Manitoba invests additional \$50 million in K-through-12 supports. Close to half this money is funding to acquire school lands. We've got a commitment to build 20 new schools; that wasn't done under the NDP government. We're definitely not going to make mistakes in that, Madam Speaker.

The rest of the funds go for structural repairs, roof repairs, new mechanical systems, accessibility upgrades, which I've already identified the listings of this. That's what these monies go for, so the member's completely wrong.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), and I'm just going to remind the member that questions should go through the Chair in

a third-party fashion so that I would ask the member not to direct specifically questions to, you know, you, the—you know, you, and—but instead, could the minister please, and in that way we can maintain this address through the Speaker.

Mr. Wasyliw: Yes, I apologize, Madam Speaker. I'll govern myself.

I'm wondering if the minister can tell us, over the budget town hall, he indicated about 50,000 people were listening. They were actually able to vote on the government's education priorities. And each and every one of them—and I had to listen to every one of those town halls—building new schools came in dead last, and Manitobans spoke loudly and told this minister that they wanted more direct funding to the schools that we actually have. I'm wondering why the minister isn't actually following the advice of his own town halls and if he can explain why is he ignoring 50,000 Manitobans.

* (16:00)

Mr. Fielding: Well, it sounds like from the member's statements that it's a burdensome to listen to Manitobans and, quite frankly, I went to a number of the consultations, budget consultations, when the previous government was in power, and they certainly didn't listen to Manitobans, Madam Speaker. It's completely disappointing.

Also, we know that the NDP did not build schools or did not build schools that was appropriate there. That's why we've taken appropriate action to build 20 new schools, Madam Speaker. We think it's really important. We think that if you talk to Manitobans, they'll very much support that. We introduced our budget, our funding, to schools. The minister of—was an announcement that was made by our government just recently in terms of the funding. The supports are in place are some of the highest in Manitoba's history.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how much of the money that's already been appropriated has gone unspent?

Mr. Fielding: Well, Madam Speaker, we wouldn't be here trying to appropriate additional monies if money was unspent. So that's why it's important to support this.

The reality is the member has a choice: either he wants to support additional dollars, additional funding—\$400 million for things like vaccine replacements, things like support for programs, the wage subs—or rather, the bridge gap program, a

\$50-million fund with the Chamber of Commerce to help Manitoba businesses grow and prosper; the pandemic support program, northern airports at \$12 million or, quite frankly, he doesn't.

We also have \$120 million of contingency that's built into this budget because we don't know the nature of the pandemic. You could have a variant that comes along; we may need additional supports.

Mr. Wasyliw: We've heard, Madam Speaker, from Louis Riel School Board that they are facing a \$7.8-million deficit from a arbitration ruling from the government's unconstitutional Bill 28. Pembina Trails, I think, is looking at \$10.1 million. I think if you add up the judgments around the process—province, it'd be well over \$50 million.

Given that this is a problem of this government's making and not of the school boards, is the government prepared to reimburse the school boards for the government's illegal actions and the tens of millions of dollars that are now, you know, due to be paid to workers who basically had their salaries illegally docked?

Mr. Fielding: Well, [*inaudible*] that law is, of course, being appealed right now, so I won't comment on that. The member should know—he's a lawyer—but maybe he doesn't. We are in discussions, obviously, with school divisions in respect to those areas. Obviously been a number or few of—a few of the decisions of the arbitration that have come forward and the two school divisions that he had mentioned, and one is—additional one as well, so we are in discussions with the school boards in respect to that.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us. Pembina Trails School Division in my area is running a \$7-million deficit from government cuts and underfunding and their ban on property tax raises. And Winnipeg School Division in my area is running a \$5-million deficit from education cuts and bans on raising taxes. And I'm wondering if the government would be prepared to commit today to backfilling that funding given that they're running deficits because of the policies and actions of this government.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I know when the member was the chair of the Winnipeg School Division, they ran into a lot of financial problems just because of the management that was led for—that led to the Wiens report that actually had talked about the management over there.

What I can tell you is we've provided a lot of funding, in fact, the most amount of funding, to the

school divisions just announced by one of our government just in the last number of weeks. We're excited about the education reforms that will be coming down. We're excited to build 20 new schools that should've been done a long time ago by the former NDP government.

Mr. Wasyliw: I wonder if the minister can tell us. Pembina school division, because of these cuts—and it's the fastest growing school division in Manitoba; has 350 new students this year. They need 19 teachers to teach those kids and they can't hire them because of this deficit. They're also cutting teacher librarians from high schools and enlarging class sizes. I'm wondering if he can tell the—us whether he prioritizes vacant land purchases over teachers and classrooms.

Mr. Fielding: Well, No. 1, we're cleaning up the mess that was left by the NDP. They should've built a lot more schools. That has been a big priority for our government. We're going to continue to work with the divisions; we're going to continue to make sure that appropriate 'nounts' of schools—funding for schools is there.

One thing we, as a government, will be very proud of is that we think that there's education reforms that need to happen under the former NDP government. We are last in terms of outcomes. That's not acceptable to Manitobans. We're not going to stand for that.

That's why we're making these investments in terms of these areas and we're going to build the schools the NDP forgot to do.

Mr. Wasyliw: Yes, I'm wondering if the minister can tell us why his government keeps funding—or, underfunding education below the rate of inflation?

Mr. Fielding: The member obviously doesn't read public accounts because, if he did read public accounts, he would know that we're investing more than 450-some-odd million dollars in the education system; more than the previous NDP government ever did.

We're very proud of the fact that our investments in health, in education and in things like social services are about \$1.3 million more each and every year than the NDP ever did.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can confirm for us that of that \$50 million in education funding, none of it is going to build portable classrooms. And if so, how many and how much is it's

going to cost and how many schools are going to get these portable classrooms?

Mr. Fielding: No, that's not at all what he said. He clearly was not listening to the debate that's being had here.

The \$50 million I've identified, over half the dollars goes to pay for land 'aquisitions' for schools; \$21 million goes to pay for mechanical system upgrades that were left by the NDP; \$10 million for access programs for elevators, wheelchair lifts, grooming room improvements; \$16 million for structural projects such as foundations; and \$8 million for bulk building for new molecular classrooms.

Yes, \$8 million is there, but we're going to get 20 new schools built for Manitobans. That should've happened long time ago, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for the question period on this bill is over.

Are there any members wishing to speak in debate?

Debate

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Again, where do we start with this government and this minister?

They've now come back a third time this year seeking financial expropriations. We gave them \$1 billion almost a year ago. Then they needed to match federal government funding and they got another \$577 million there. And then now, they're coming asking for \$450 million.

They—minister has been cagey with the Legislature. He has not told us how much of the existing money he has not spent and his government hasn't spent. And he certainly hasn't made the case about why this money is needed if he hasn't even spent all the money that they have already borrowed, which, certainly, is concerning and should raise a red flag to all Manitobans.

The other sort of red flag here is, the minister said at the town halls that he had every intention of dipping into the rainy day fund this year, but—by the end of March 31st. And so, he—clearly, from his statements in the House today, they haven't touched the \$900 million that's sitting in that fund and they may, at the end of March, use some of it—and how much is unknown—which begs the question, if you have \$900 million in the fund, it can cover absolutely every single penny of the \$450 million that you currently have.

The minister is very sensitive these days and he snaps at the opposition member; says, well, you don't understand about appropriations. Well, you know, the rainy day fund is an internal appropriation fund and he can move money in and out of that with internal Treasury Board discretion. He understands that. It would be obtuse for him not to.

And so, it again begs the question, why are they hoarding—and that's what they're doing. They're hoarding money at this time and—at a time when there is incredible need in Manitoba.

We've heard that downtown Winnipeg has lost 40 businesses. It's completely hollowed out. It's actually sad when I walk around some of the high streets in my riding. I walk down Corydon, once a very vibrant street, and I think there's five, six empty storefronts, when, you know, it just wouldn't happen. And you go down Pembina Highway and you see places that are now empty that weren't before, and we know that there are businesses that are still struggling.

* (16:10)

We know that this government has taken a hands-off approach to helping small business. They somehow don't view it as their responsibility, and they basically have set a signal to Manitoba business community that they're planning to sit this pandemic out.

And that's really unfortunate because at one point they criticized the federal government but then sort of come with hat in hand to the federal government saying, well, you should be doing all this. So, it begs the question: If the business community is telling us that they're not supported, that their members are in crisis, and that a significant chunk of small businesses are going under by the day, and the supports that this government have been given have been, you know, editorial boards have been saying that they're inadequate, it's not just us, and the small business community is certainly saying it's inadequate.

Why are they hoarding all this money? What is the purpose for it, and why aren't they helping Manitobans?

We know that many Manitobans right now are suffering from a lack of shelter. There's a crisis in Manitoba when it comes to housing, and again, this government is sitting that one out, and they somehow don't view that that's their responsibility.

And they are—we're being told today that they are sitting on a pile of cash, you know, the whole

Scrooge McDuck thing, and we have the minister on top of the pile playing with all the coins when Manitobans are suffering.

And that's concerning. There seems to be a disconnect here, and a lack of urgency with the needs that we're seeing right now in Manitoba and this government's lack of response.

And, of course, now we have the vaccine rollout, and we certainly have concerns about how fairly and 'equitably' that's going to be done, and we know this government didn't plan for the second wave, we know that they are not essentially good at planning, and they have taken the approach of sort of putting their head in the sand and hoping that COVID will just go away and somehow leave them alone.

And we've had devastating consequences in Manitoba because of that. We've had the second, you know, highest infection rates, and we have horrible deaths and going through our long-term-care home, and that's on this government.

And, of course, we haven't seen any commitment to repair the damages to the health-care system, and now we look at the education system. It seems to be the government's in the crosshairs, and that's their spring agenda, is to do what they're going to do to the education system.

So, they've set aside \$50 million for school construction, they say, but when we hear from the minister, not one school is getting built out of that money. It's disingenuous to refer to it. At most, \$8 million is being set aside for modular classrooms or basically portables in a handful of schools, and the minister won't even tell us how many schools and what schools are getting modular classrooms.

He certainly—he says he wants to buy vacant lots and that's fine, but when you come to the Legislature saying you need emergency money to be authorized, that's not an emergency. He couldn't even commit that the \$450 million would even be spent in the month of March, which begs the question, again, is—he's about to release a budget in literally a handful of weeks. And there's nothing preventing the minister from releasing a budget at the end of March. I mean, for whatever reasons they want to do it in early April, that's their prerogative, but all of this could be included in the upcoming budget.

And there seems to be absolutely no urgency to any of this and—including the flyer and sort of the—that they're going to take the \$7.5 million that they're basically throwing out the window to a non-existent

vaccine company in Calgary, which Manitobans will never see the benefit from or get the money from, or get the money back. That's going into next year's budgets, not going out of this \$450 million.

The other problem I see here is that the minister spent a lot of time during the town hall budget process—and it was a very flawed town hall budget process, and they seem to be getting worse under this minister. At one time, you could go to this government and—unfiltered—and you would have your time in front of them and say what you need.

Now, what happened is the government calls you, and if you're lucky enough to pick up, you can put your name on a list and ask questions. Of course, they screen the questions so, you know, some Manitobans who have serious questions that they don't want to answer aren't going to be allowed to ask their questions. And then there's poorer 50,000 Manitobans who started the call—I doubt they ended the call, for the whole thing—had to be subjected to the minister's propaganda slide show.

And, but there was several lessons from that which I think we have to take from that. They did polls—interactive polls—during the slide show; it was one of the gimmicks. And what was really interesting about these push polls is that they included a section on education and they had a number of topics, and one of them, of course, is their preferred topic of building new schools.

And the other topic was whether or not they should be putting more money into the schools that we have and supporting schools that we have currently. Each and every single one of the town halls, building new schools came in dead last in those polls. Manitobans—50,000 of them—told this government that's not a priority right now, and what they did tell them, a priority—overwhelmingly—was obviously the NDP position here—and I think that's why minister might be a little sensitive about that—is they overwhelmingly want more money going directly into schools. Because they can see what the cuts have done. We're talking about five years of year-over-year cuts to our education system.

We had the Premier (Mr. Pallister) today in, and CUPE talk about, you know, having the worst results in Canada, leaving the torqued-up hyperbole—that's because of him. They've been in government for five years; they own that.

The PISA test scores—if—that's not a great measure, but if you're going to use it—have actually

gone down under this government. There hasn't been any new education initiatives in the past five years. So if this government is complaining about how bad the education system is in Manitoba, it's their fault. And what we're seeing here is that they're doing nothing to help it.

That \$50 million can take away every single one of those deficits that these school boards are running. And these deficits they're running is because of this government's underfunding and this government's insistence that these school boards can't tax in order to replace the money that this government has taken out of the education system.

So education costs have increased with inflation, much like the health-care portfolio, and over 80 per cent of the expenses in a school board is salaries and they get cost-of-living increase even though this government doesn't like that. That is the, you know, cost of living and people deserve to have cost-of-living increases because if they don't have cost-of-living increases it means that their salary is getting cut and they're getting paid less each and every year.

This government somehow believes that that's okay. This government believes that they can actually take the wages of hard-working Manitobans and lower it, and they somehow think that's both good politics and good economics; it's neither. But the year-over-year average for a school board and inflation rate is 2.5 per cent.

So, when this government for five years in a row gave zero per cent increases, that's cutting a school board 2.5 per cent over five years, that's a significant 'crut'.

We see increased enrolment in many of the school divisions, we see increased costs from pandemic, and then now that their wage theft bill was found unconstitutional, they—school boards are left holding the bag. And it's tens of millions of dollars.

And instead of, you know, standing up and saying, you know what, you know, we believed in something, we were wrong about it, it's our fault, school boards, you shouldn't have to suffer for this we're going to pay for our mistake, they turn and run. This is the deadbeat dad of school funding, this Pallister government.

So—and now, we're seeing that the quality of education in Manitoba is taking a huge hit. So in my neck of the woods of south Winnipeg, there's a huge mass of immigration; we have a lot of students there

who—English is not their first language. The school board, because they have no money, have to cut English as an additional language support. And what's scary about that is that these children need that extra support because they don't—they're not native English speakers—to catch up with their peers.

And without those supports, they will always be behind, and it will chronically affect their education career and it will hold them back and their future prospects are diminished. And that is in nobody's interest. That is incredibly callous. And this government knows that they're doing this, and they obviously agree with it because they have the money because they're hoarding cash. They could fix it 'tonay' if they wanted and they're choosing to let newcomer families have their children with a diminished 'level' of education.

* (16:20)

And for all those kids in southwest Winnipeg now who are going to be packed into 40-, 45-kid high school classes—try getting any attention from your teacher. Imagine if you are struggling, but you're quiet and you don't cause problems. Nobody will notice. And you're just going to sink and get worse and worse and worse until whatever problem you have becomes critical.

And that teacher is going to have an incredible workload. They're going to be burned out. We're going to see higher rates of illness among teachers. We're going to need more subs. We're going to see higher burnout rates of really experienced teachers because of this.

Nobody thinks that you get to a better education system by cramming kids into a classroom like they're at a Costco. And that seems to be this whole approach of the Pallister Conservative government.

And, again, this is a choice. They know they're doing this and they don't care. And they have the power to change this and stop this today, but what we've heard from this minister is that he wants to roll around on a pile of cash that he's not going to spend and all these massive critical needs in Manitoba are going unaddressed.

And then, of course, we know that in Pembina Trails they're also cutting teacher-librarians in high schools. This is just shocking to me. Teacher-librarians are critical. They help students learn how to do research, analytical reasoning. There's study after study showing that sort of high-end educational skills are best taught by a teacher-librarian. And they're

going to be replaced by a non-professional technician, and that's really going to hold back a lot of students. They're not going to be getting the skills that they need if they want to go on and do sort of, you know, complicated work in research and high degrees in university.

And why would a government do that? Why would they hold back students in Manitoba, in southwest Winnipeg, and not give them the same opportunity that other students get in other parts of the city and the province? And we want a knowledge economy. We want our students to be prepared for post-secondary education, and one of the tools that we do is teacher-librarian.

And again, this government knows this is going on. They obviously agree with this policy. They're not doing anything about it. They have the power to stop it and reverse it today, but their solution is to hoard money and to make the school boards be the bad guy and carry out their dirty work and do the cuts to Manitoba schools that are going to hurt their family.

We know that Winnipeg School Division has a \$5-million deficit, and they're being forced to cut nutrition programs—nutrition programs. And, you know, you could ask yourself, well, why are schools involved in this? Well, because they have children who are starving.

And it just—in a Pallister recession, things have gotten worse in Manitoba. There are more vulnerable families, people are desperate, they don't even have money for essentials and children go without food. In large swaths of our province, in large swaths of our city, we have children coming hungry to our schools. We have the government side mocking this, saying that, you know, it's a bad idea to feed children. We don't agree.

This isn't even about morality. This is about having a child being unable to concentrate in a classroom because they're distracted by hunger. This is about a child being unable to learn because they're falling sleep in the middle of the day because they don't have enough energy because they're hungry. And this government knows full well that this is going on, and they're ignoring it, and they're turning their back on it and they are basically condoning it. And that's shocking.

The other big sort of cut that we're seeing from the Winnipeg School Division is occupational therapists are being cut. And again, who's using these services are our most vulnerable children. These are

children with severe special or additional needs that need this type of programming just to get through the day, just to make their life worth living, that they can't get to anything else until those basic needs are met.

And it's critical, for any learning to happen, is that there has to be some level of, you know, just basic comfort for a child who is in distress. And this is critical, essential help that these children are no longer going to get. And our health-care system is not funding this properly. And so schools have to fill it in, and of course, when they're underfunded, they cut it.

So, like everything with this government, all their cuts roll downhill and they hurt the most vulnerable amongst us. And for short-term gain of a budget item, we are going to see long-term devastating impacts for these people and it's really going to chase—change the course of their lives.

This government knows that school boards can't run deficits and so they have to cut. And so this is all intentional. The government knows that their actions are causing these cuts and they're directly responsible for each and every single one of them. And it is an affront to Manitobans that they are sitting on a mountain of cash when these very real needs are going unmet. I don't know—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Just a reminder to the member. He's made a couple of references this afternoon, one being Pallister recession, and that is not allowable, or Pallister Conservative government—that is not allowable either. So I would ask the member to make proper references when he is using terms. And the proper one would be Pallister government. But the rest are not allowable under the rules, so just a reminder to the member.

Mr. Wasyliv: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that.

So, now, we also—I think I talked a bit about Pembina Trails needing 19 teachers just to keep up with the 350 new teachers that they—students that they have this year, and they can't afford to hire them this year. So that means, you know, more kids per classroom, less attention to—from the teacher and less level of quality of education.

So this budget document is a moral document. It tells us what this government values and what this minister values and what it doesn't.

So, what they've said here is they want to purchase vacant land but not actually put money into

the schools that we have. And they want to help future kids but not the ones that are currently in our schools.

They're prepared to allow children to come starving to our schools; they have no issue with that. They have no issue with cramming, you know, 45 high schools students into a classroom during COVID; they have no issue with that. They have no issue with newcomers struggling with the English language and having that disrupt their school career; they have no issue with that.

They have no issue with the school boards being in a funding crisis, and they take no responsibility for their own actions when they've cause that funding crisis and basically have caused massive deficits for school boards.

They have prevented school boards from doing their democratic job, which is to ensure that their schools are run properly. They've 'tooken' away the only tool that they had, which was to raise taxes to make up the cuts.

So, apparently, that's more important to—you know, most of these school boards would've raised people's taxes \$30 per house, or something marginal like that. But that \$30 is more important to this government than 19 teachers to teach for students.

And, of course, this government has borrowed money left and right. They have, what, a \$2-billion deficit, the highest ever in Manitoba history, and they're not spending it; they're hoarding it. And they are coming back for more, which they have no intention of spending, and they're going to hoard it.

* (16:30)

All the time in Manitobans' history, where we are in desperate need—we have so many problems, so many vulnerable citizens that are crying out for government help, and this government just says, no, that we're sitting this pandemic out; sorry, we're sitting this recession out.

And this is a government that is more interested in standing in front of new schools in 2023 before the election—I guess we heard it, in West St. Paul and in Waverley. I guess those are two of the ridings they're very concerned about.

And they want to cut ribbons, and they want to cut ribbons at that time for a one-day press hit, and they are choosing to do that than to actually address the real needs of Manitoba families and students. And this is disappointing, to say the least.

This minister knows better. This government knows better. This is about values. This is about choices, and we certainly have a clear sense of where they're coming from.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

If not, is the House ready for the—oh, sorry.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record today. I want to thank my colleague, the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), for his very important words and for asking really important questions of this government and the minister around this issue.

And, you know, Madam Speaker, I have to say I am always so thoroughly impressed by my colleagues on this side of the House, by the members of our caucus, as to how seriously they take their jobs and how well they research the portfolios they're responsible for. It's always just outstanding to see our critics, like my colleague, the member for Fort Garry, speak to these issues with such expertise and understanding, and also through the lens of compassion and empathy and a progressive lens in terms of what's going to benefit Manitobans and really looking at the long-term impacts—not just the short term, but the long-term impacts on all Manitobans. And I just wanted to make sure that I made a note of that on the record.

Now, Madam Speaker, I think it's really important for us, when we're looking at this bill, to be able to reflect on the government's decision-making to date in terms of spending during this pandemic.

And it's important because the government has failed in so many ways, and so for us to be able to reflect and put these words on the record and ask tough questions is a part of, hopefully, this government doing some listening; hopefully, this government taking into consideration the information that we share, so that, moving forward, they make better decisions, they make decisions that support all Manitobans, that they stop leaving Manitobans behind from many communities.

You know, a good example, Madam Speaker, would be that this week we finally saw data released—race-based desegregated data that's been collected during this pandemic.

And it's important for us to be able to look at this data that's been collected, look at the communities—of which we know Black, Indigenous and communities of colour are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. It's important for us to be able to understand how dollars that are going to be spent and further invested in health care and navigating this pandemic and education, how are those dollars going to positively impact the communities that we now know have been most negatively, detrimentally impacted by COVID-19 during this pandemic.

Those are totally valid questions. Those are important questions, Madam Speaker, to be asked and answered with transparency, with clarity from this government in order to reassure Manitobans that those folks who we know are being so impacted can trust that this government is going to put their interests in mind as we move forward, that they can trust that this government is, in fact, learning and has learned from their own mistakes during this pandemic.

So, Madam Speaker, you know, when I think about in my own role as critic for Health, the state of our health-care system leading into this pandemic, I have to reflect on the concrete data, the numbers that we knew of in our health-care system leading into this pandemic.

So I look at numbers like the fact that the difficulties that may have been mitigated, had the government invested adequately, before the pandemic, surrounding staffing in our hospitals is a good example.

We've seen the burden, the impact of COVID-19 on our hospitals; we've seen the impact on, whether it's surgeries—elective surgeries having to be cancelled, folks being directed to other health-care centres, folks delaying accessing health care, and then ending up sicker and sicker in presentation at our hospitals, and just generally folks with COVID-19 being in hospital beds, further burden on the health-care system and how that impacts our front-line workers.

So, Madam Speaker, when I think about the state of the health-care system before the pandemic and the realities of this government's failure to spend appropriately, adequately during the pandemic—and responsibly during the pandemic, I look at numbers like the fact that critical care at Grace Hospital before the pandemic had a vacancy rate for nurses of 26 per cent.

I look at numbers like critical care at Health Sciences Centre: had a vacancy rate for nurses of 31 per cent. Emergency care at St. Boniface Hospital had a vacancy rate for nurses of 28 per cent. These are all vacancy rates that we talked about in this House, in committee, in question period many times before this pandemic ever reached Manitoba. These are all vacancy rates that were not addressed by this government.

In fact, Madam Speaker, leading into this pandemic, I think it's fair to say that this government unfortunately did further harm to the relationships with our front-line workers, to the point where they had very little trust—quite frankly—that the government would protect them once this pandemic reached Manitoba.

And unfortunately, I have to say those concerns from those front-line workers were validated once this pandemic reached our province.

It is incomprehensible to me that our front-line workers—who have been working, under this government, exorbitant amounts of mandated overtime hours, see their families less and less, had their jobs cut from underneath them and forced to work at other hospitals that were nowhere near where their kids went to school, where they'd bought their homes and situated their lives—went into a pandemic without the adequate protection that they deserve and that they were assured by this government they would receive.

This government—we all stood up, sat down, participated in this Chamber to make sure that this government had access to the dollars that they needed in order to make sure our front-line workers were protected, and Madam Speaker, they failed.

I'm going to give a couple of really concrete examples. I don't even think I'm going to get into how nonsensical it was that the government spent \$425,000 on a ready set go—sorry, Madam Speaker—a Ready. Safe. Grow. HR campaign while giving our front-line workers expired PPE that put them at greater risk while providing care to Manitobans during the greatest health crisis of our lifetime.

I won't get into where that \$425,000 or some portion of it could have been better spent and allocated, but what I will talk about is the millions of dollars, Madam Speaker—millions of dollars—that the government ordered in PPE: \$13 million worth of N95 masks for health-care workers that failed to fit requirements—\$13 million spent on PPE N95s that didn't even meet requirements.

And that Minnesota company sued the Province of Manitoba for an additional \$6 million, claiming the total for the deal was \$19 million worth of masks, of masks that failed to even fit the adequate requirements, which is just totally unacceptable. That's a substantial amount of money.

I don't know about you, Madam Speaker; I have never seen \$1 million, never mind \$13 million and toss on six that they were actually were supposed to still pay us. That's a lot of money that could have been spent certainly much more responsibly.

I think it's also really important for us to reflect upon the fact that even when health-care workers were finally able to use their best expertise and decide—our front-line workers in hospital—how they can use N95s, that came after a significant amount of back and forth and, quite frankly, tensions between front-line workers and the government in order for workers to be able to use their best judgment and expertise in deciding when they can don that PPE.

So it is shocking to me that after that back and forth, after workers raised their voices, made their needs heard, demanded that right, that instead of them being able to put on that PPE, keep themselves safe, the government said: You know what, we're gonna—we're not only gonna—we're gonna send you the wrong PPE, we're gonna put you at greater risk, you're gonna think you're safe and you're gonna go to work and put yourselves at risk because we're failing to protect you.

And the government spent millions of dollars failing to protect front-line workers and that's shameful, Madam Speaker.

* (16:40)

I don't want to take up too too much time on this, but I just feel it's critically important for us, like I said, to be honest about the fact that there is a lack of trust for this government to do the right thing with these dollars, allocate them responsibly, adequately, appropriately and with the folks in mind who need the most protection here in our province.

And so, hopefully, the government doesn't just see this as, as they keep saying, ideological. Hopefully they just see what it is, Madam Speaker, and us amplifying the concerns of every day Manitobans who want to be safe and get through this pandemic collectively with the supports that they deserve.

And I hope the government can see that, reflect on the information that we're sharing and providing on behalf of Manitobans, and do the right thing and

responsibly—this time around—put those dollars to good use on behalf of every single Manitoban in this province.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to debate the bill?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) that Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021, be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

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

The House will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider and report on Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021 for concurrence and third reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the chair.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill 69—The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of the Whole please come to order.

We will now consider Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement? No?

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

We shall proceed with the consideration of the bill clause by clause. The title and the enacting clause are postponed until all other clauses have been considered.

Clauses 1 and 2—pass; clauses 3 and 4—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

That concludes the business before the committee.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021, and reports to—the same without amendments.

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

Motion agreed to.

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 69—The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Johnson) that Bill 69, The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021, recorded—reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and now be read for a third time and passed.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: We will now proceed to royal assent.

ROYAL ASSENT

Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms (Mr. Ray Gislason): Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

Her Honour Janice C. Filmon, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Manitoba, having entered the House and being seated on the throne, Madam Speaker addressed Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor in the following words:

Madam Speaker: Your Honour:

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba asks Your Honour to accept the following bill:

Clerk Assistant (Ms. Monique Grenier):

Bill 69—The Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2020-2021; Loi portant affectation supplémentaire de crédits pour l'exercice 2020-2021.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): In Her Majesty's name, the Lieutenant Governor thanks the Legislative Assembly and assents to this bill.

Her Honour was then pleased to retire.

* * *

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Can you canvass the House and—I suppose, virtually, to see if it's the will of members to call it 5 p.m.?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to call it 5 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

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

And just a reminder to everybody, we are going to have our historic pandemic photo tomorrow, and it will include everybody virtually.

And we're working very hard to ensure those virtual pictures will be very good as well so we will have a historic picture of this time.

We ask everybody to be prepared for 9:30. That photo will be taken at 9:30.

We ask everybody to start logging on—that are virtual—by 9 o'clock so that we can ensure that there is the connection made.

So we want to have this photo done within a short period of time starting at 9:30, so that we are then ready for the 10 o'clock sitting. Thank you.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

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