

Fifth 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
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLEIN, Kevin E., Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
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, Hon.	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James, Hon.	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Morden-Winkler	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 23, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 38—The Builders' Liens Amendment Act
(Prompt Payment)**

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade, that Bill 38, The Builders' Liens Amendment Act (Prompt Payment), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Teitsma: This amendment to The Builders' Liens Act will bring—bring prompt payment requirements to Manitoba in a way that aligns us with neighbouring jurisdictions, boosts economic competitiveness and ensures that payments flow at the various stages of construction in a timely fashion.

The construction industry accounts for 8 per cent of Manitoba's employment, and while delayed payments are not unique to this industry, the construction sector is especially vulnerable to delayed payments. At each tier of the construction contract chain, contractors and subcontractors must finance their payrolls, materials and other expenses before they're paid, and delayed payments at multiple tiers can compound serious financial consequences for subcontractors.

So this legislation ensures that big-business owners, government departments and Crown corporations will be contractually obliged to make periodic payments to contractors and they, in turn, to subcontractors. This bill ensures that these employers will have the income they need to pay their bills and to pay their workers. That's especially important for small- and medium-sized construction companies.

This legislation has the unequivocal support of the entire construction industry, represented by many stakeholders with us here today. I look forward to its speedy passage.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen)—*[interjection]*

Oh—the honourable Minister of Finance.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table the 2021-22 FIPPA annual report for the Department of Finance.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank the honourable Minister of Finance for that.

Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mary Rebeck

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to honour Mary Rebeck, a long-time resident of Red River North for her outstanding contributions to the—her East St. Paul community for over 59 years where she has lived.

Mary moved to East St. Paul in 1964 and immediately became involved in her community centre; 59 years later, she is still volunteering in her community. She's helped develop and implement many programs over the years. One of her favourite programs was the figure skating club.

Some of the other causes she has volunteered for in helping were the Lions Club, the curling club, supporting children with congenital heart disease, the deaf-blind association, KidSport, two scholarships for students at River East Collegiate and many, many more, Madam Speaker. She recently volunteered with the local Scotties Tournament of Hearts that was held in East St. Paul.

For many years, Mary has sponsored children from Ukraine and other countries. But to Mary, it's not just about sending money abroad, but also communicating with these children and following up with them through their journey of life.

With the war in Ukraine, Mary felt strong—a strong need to help the refugees. She has helped families find housing, employment, household goods and food and provided rides, child care and translation services.

Mary is a very spiritual person and, through her faith, has become involved in many charitable organizations. Mary started a network of family and friends to collect needed items she helped with—to distribute to families right across the riding.

Mary says that she has no intention of slowing down and will continue to help her fellow men, women and children in any way that she can.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me today in welcoming Mary Rebeck and her husband Gary, who join us today in the gallery.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine)?

The honourable member for The Maples.

Manitoba Association of Filipino Teachers

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Madam Speaker, the Manitoba Association of Filipino Teachers Inc. celebrated their 45th anniversary recently, and it was amazing to see all of the hard work and contributions that MAFTI are offering to the community.

Just this month I was also able to attend MAFTI's path to teacher certification in Manitoba event. This event was held at the Maples Collegiate and focused on helping internationally trained educators and professionals attain the necessary certifications to becoming a teacher in Manitoba.

MAFTI has played a major role in preserving and promoting Filipino cultural heritage for the past 45 years, especially with the Filipino language preservation and revitalization. Originally founded in 1977, MAFTI is a volunteer association whose members include teachers, educational assistants, new immigrants, child-care workers and members from related professionals.

The organization has contributed so much to the—both the Filipino community and the—Winnipeg at large. The first public school Filipino-English bilingual program in Canada was introduced four years ago for early years students at the Arthur E. Wright school in the Seven Oaks School Division. Just a few months ago they also announced that, thanks to the MAFTI, the Winnipeg School Division will also be launching a Filipino bilingual program in September at the Meadows West School.

Please join me in thanking MAFTI for all their hard work in education and helping Filipino language and culture flourish.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Gary Kozussek

Mrs. Cathy Cox (Kildonan-River East): Madam Speaker, I am especially pleased to rise in the Chamber today to recognize a man who has often been called a miracle worker and someone who has saved tens of thousands of soles throughout the course of his career.

Now, I'm certain you're all expecting me to give a sermon related to a man of the cloth, but that's not the case, Madam Speaker. I am here to recognize the guy who has saved thousands upon thousands of shoe soles. I am talking about Gary Kozussek, better known as—across the province as the Shoe Guy.

Madam Speaker, at the age of 20, Gary responded to an ad looking for a shoe repair person. With no previous experience in the shoe repair business, Gary hesitantly set up shop in Sears Polo Park. Fast-forward 40 years, and the rest is history.

I'm proud to announce that on March 15th Gary celebrated his 40th anniversary as the infamous Shoe Guy. He's deservedly earned the reputation as the very best shoe guy, hands-down, from repairing broken zippers to adding new grippers, from replacing old soles to fixing those holes, from mending a purse or maybe your 'murse,' the Shoe Guy has done it all.

Madam Speaker, when I asked Gary to share his most memorable moment, he told me of the time he was asked to replace a 100-inch zipper for somebody who needed the replacement done now, because a client was waiting. Of course, Gary, who is known for his exemplary customer service, agreed. However, in the back of his mind, he was wondering who would require a garment with a 100-inch zipper.

Madam Speaker, he then explained with a smirk that the request came from a funeral home, and I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

Much of the Shoe Guy's success is thanks to his wife Tammy, who joined the team in 1990. Madam Speaker, I can tell you from my own personal experience that you'll never find two more hard-working, honest and genuine people as Tammy and Gary.

Gary's always quick to thank each member who walks through his door. It's only thanks to each client, says Gary, that the Shoe Guy has survived 40 years.

Unfortunately, Gary and Tammy are not able to join us today as Gary is battling mantle cell lymphoma. He just completed his final round of chemotherapy and will soon be undergoing a stem cell transplant.

* (13:40)

I know they're tuned in, though, Madam Speaker, so I ask all members of the Chamber to stand and give a wave to Gary and Tammy to thank them for their service.

Happy 40th anniversary, and God bless.

Universal Coverage for Birth Control

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The Manitoba NDP understand that sexual and reproductive health access includes access to abortion services, universal coverage of birth control, comprehensive sex education and affirming sexual and reproductive rights.

I was proud to stand with my NDP colleagues this past Sunday announcing that, should the NDP form government, we commit to universal coverage of birth control.

Accessing birth control is a human right and it must be made available to all Manitobans. Money should never be a barrier in ensuring that Manitobans have full control and agency over our bodies. Universal coverage of birth control will literally change lives, Madam Speaker.

Sexual and reproductive health care also includes timely and safe access to abortion services. Where one lives in Manitoba affects one's access to abortion services.

It is also alarming that we have a Health Minister that remains silent about the fact that abortion access is limited in Manitoba. Those who reside in north or rural Manitoba are extremely challenged when they need to access abortion. Often they are paying out of pocket to travel to larger urban centres such as Winnipeg or Brandon to access a surgical abortion in a timely manner. This is simply wrong, Madam Speaker.

There are more pregnancy crisis centres in Manitoba than there are actual centres offering abortions. Pregnancy crisis centres are not neutral or safe; they are known to offer misinformation about abortion and are anti-abortion. This is dangerous. It's also alarming to know that this PC government is happy to fund such agencies.

On this side of the House, we affirm sexual and reproductive rights of Manitoba and we look forward to offering these services to all Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Lyn and Lou Alarkon

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Today, I have the opportunity to share about two exceptionally strong women who dedicate so much to our community.

Ate Lyn and Ate Lou Alarkon, cousins who have joined us today, launched a creative management firm, Alark Co., in 2016, and through it they focus on uplifting and promoting local businesses and they organize creative events that I am sure some members of this House have attended throughout the province.

Allow for me to share a little bit about these initiatives that thousands of Manitobans have participated in, such as Coffee With X, GameFest Winnipeg, Pinta! Paint Series, Best Before Date and Bite Back Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker, even during the pandemic, Lyn and Lou utilized their digital skills in advertising and promotions and launched the Around the World in Winnipeg initiative to elevate local small businesses, all free of charge.

Now, I have a hard time keeping up with everything the two of these women are doing, but I do know they have hearts of gold as, on top of all these events to support local, they also help community organizations, including Canadian Cancer Society, Harvest Manitoba, End Homelessness and Main Street Project.

Now, it was through Tyndall Park community market that Lyn and Lou were first put on my radar, and I feel so lucky that so many of their incredible events take place in Tyndall Park, such as summer spark and Spark Your Future, a youth entrepreneurs forum made up of local youth vendors, non-profit organizations, exhibitors and food trucks.

Lyn and Lou's initiatives are designed to bring people together, promote local businesses and, most importantly, make an impact in our community.

Their consistent contribution to the greater good is inspiring, and that is why I'm hoping my colleagues will join me in thanking them for their efforts in helping local businesses and bringing our community together.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Southern Health Region Number of Nurses

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): The health-care crisis in our province is real, and each and every day we find more evidence of the cuts that this PC government has made to crucial health-care services across Manitoba.

We know that Brian Pallister fired nurses and eliminated their positions, and these things have only continued under this current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson).

I'll table FIPPA documents that prove just how bad it is in Steinbach and across other parts of the Southern Health region. You see, in 2016, there were 1,195 nurses, but today, there's only 1,147 nurses working in Southern Health. That means this government has cut the number of nurses in the south by 50.

Why did the Premier cut Southern Health nurses by 50 positions?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Deputy Premier): Let's take a trip down fact lane.

Clearly, we—making historic record investments in health care in this year's budget: a 9.2 per cent increase. That represents a \$668-million increase this year over last year in health care, Madam Speaker. Record investments: \$7.9 billion. That's pretty well \$2 billion more than the NDP ever put into health care.

We recognize the human resource challenges. We're also taking steps to address that.

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

Mr. Kinew: Here's a fact: there are fewer nurses working in the Southern Health region today than there were in 2016. I just tabled the proof for the Deputy Premier. It's a document created by his own government under the auspices of this Premier.

This government has cut health care in the Southern Health region over the past seven years. The health-care needs of people in Ste. Anne and Portage la Prairie and Morris have only increased, and yet they're paying more and getting less under these PCs; fewer health-care services available to the people across the Southern Health region.

Will the Premier tell the House why there are fewer nurses working in Southern Health today than there were in 2016?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, the reality is we're facing health human resource challenges not just in Manitoba but, quite frankly, all across our country. Every government recognizes that, and that's why governments are taking it upon themselves to make those changes.

Madam Speaker, we've committed \$200 million to attract 2,000 additional employees into the health-care field. This year's budget alone is committing \$123 million to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: —the human resource challenges that we face.

Would the NDP and the opposition members get out of the way, so we can pass this budget and make that \$123-million commitment to Manitobans?

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

Mr. Kinew: Fewer nurses working at the bedside; that's what the PCs have done on health care.

We know that the numbers are clear: Southern Health has lost nearly 50 nurses since 2016. That's a terrible record and it's because of the cuts of Brian Pallister that have continued on under the Stefanson government.

Every Manitoban knows that we need more nurses. Every Manitoban knows that this government has been making cuts to health care, and they don't like the direction our health-care system has been heading in. This is true in Carman, this is true in Lorette, it's true in Steinbach.

So will the Premier tell folks in these communities and across the Southern Health region why she's cut so many nursing jobs in their backyards?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, here's the reality: this budget is proposing a 9.2 per cent, \$668-million increase to health care.

And who voted against a 9.2 per cent? Members opposite, Madam Speaker. They want to talk about our Conservative government's record on health care: a 22 per cent increase from 2016 to today in health care.

* (13:50)

That is making investments on behalf of Manitobans. Let's just hope these—group in the opposition get out of the way so we can pass this budget and provide help to Manitobans.

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

Health Services in the Westman Region Health Centres—Closure Inquiry

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, you can see right through the talking points.

The Finance Minister doesn't believe in this budget, that's why he's quitting. He's not standing for re-election. We know why. People in his community,

and many others, are dealing with the impact of health-care cuts.

We've heard loud and clear people in Carberry are worried about their emergency department. They're standing up. They're asking for answers from this government. They want action to see health-care services remain in their community.

Emails from their local leadership, however, have been ignored by this government. That's wrong. Folks in Westman deserve to get answers about health care in their communities. We're committed to standing up for the people of Westman, even if the PCs won't.

The question that needs to get answered, though, is: Will Carberry's emergency department be open come September?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Deputy Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, this is a classic example of the human resource challenges that we're facing in Manitoba—in fact, that all jurisdictions across our country are facing. I've been in discussions with the local RHA. I've been in discussions with the Shared Health as well.

Certainly, I think every RHA is facing these challenges. We're trying to find constructive solutions for that. That's why this budget is investing \$123 million to redress some of the human resource challenges.

We recognize these challenges, but we're taking steps and we have a plan to resolve those challenges.

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

Mr. Kinew: Yes, we know. We know that other health regions are dealing with these challenges. We just proved in the first set of questions that they cut the number of nurses in Southern Health.

Now we're talking about Prairie Mountain Health. In fact, we're talking about Glenboro; we're talking about the Finance Minister's home community.

One of their doctors is departing at the end of the month. Their health centre is not even sure if they're going to stay open. It's also said that local leaders only heard about this issue second-hand.

That's why we need a clear commitment from this government, from this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), from the Health Minister to the people of Westman that the Glenboro Health Centre will stay open.

So what's the answer: Is it yes or is it no?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition would do well to remember their record when they were in power.

They permanently closed 16 rural emergency departments. The changes affected over 100 communities, Madam Speaker. I'll share these references in Southern Health: Emerson was closed, Pembina Manitou, MacGregor, St. Claude, Gladstone, Vita.

We are rolling back the damage and the failures of the NDP during their 17 dark days in power.

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

Mr. Kinew: They permanently closed the urgent care at Misericordia. They permanently closed the ER at Seven Oaks. They permanently closed the ER at Victoria. They permanently closed the ER at the Conc. [*phonetic*]. And that's only before you get to the Perimeter, Madam Speaker. No wonder folks in the Westman just don't believe this government when it comes to health care.

We're talking about communities like Glenboro and Carberry that are standing up and demanding answers. The mayor of Glenboro was very clear. He says, you close a hospital in a small town, you're going to lose the town. That's why it's important for the Premier and for this government to be straight up with the people of the Westman.

Will the Premier tell the people of Westman today if the health centres in Glenbury [*phonetic*] and Carberry are going to close this year, yes or no?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, our government has never permanently closed a rural emergency department, something that the Leader of the Opposition cannot stand in the Chamber and say the same.

Madam Speaker, I just want to share from question period—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —April 28, 2014, then-failed Health minister for the NDP, Erin Selby, said: In the Virden ER, there were two doctors that have left to go to another jurisdiction within Manitoba. It means we cannot keep that ER open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We just don't have the staff there right now to do it, Madam Speaker.

Again, we're rolling back the dark years—17 years of NDP failure.

Resignation of SANE Program Nurses Request to Address Staffing Issues

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, the nursing crisis continues under this minister's failed leadership.

After four resignations from SANE on Tuesday, another three nurses have since resigned in protest of the lack of support from this government. SANE nurses have told us that they resigned because they can no longer enable a system that doesn't support them or their patients.

That health system—the health system, rather, is the responsibility of the Health Minister.

Will this minister stand in her place today and apologize for making announcements and then failing to follow through on her own commitments?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Shared Health has now placed on their website an update on the sexual assault and intimate partner violence program, which I would like to table, Madam Speaker, because I will be referencing it in my answer.

They state in this update that the creation of a provincial program was prompted by the recognition of risks related to the SANE program's reliance on casual staff picking up shifts. Access to this type of care for residents outside of Winnipeg was also an issue. This is why six nurses were hired earlier this year for the new, permanent positions that didn't previously exist.

The hiring of this additional staff will bolster additional overall staffing for the services—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the SANE program was meant to support survivors of sexual assault and trauma.

The dedicated nurses on the front lines of that program had been raising their voices for months about how this government has been ignoring their needs. Instead of listening, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and this minister, just a couple of days ago, blamed others—will blame everybody else. Now, another three nurses have resigned.

Will this minister stop with the excuses, stop blaming other people and start fixing the problems at the SANE program?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, we are seeing again just how far the NDP and their caucus will go to cast fear, doubt and just to derail a project and the work of Shared Health and Health Sciences Centre.

Here is one example that they've also made available—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —that I'd like to table, where they saw media given a date and time of arrival for a patient, their sex and what time they were provided care. The purported age of the patient was subsequently tweeted by a politician—who happens to be the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine). These publicly aired details violate a patient's right to privacy and could serve to identify that individual to others who were in the hospital.

Shared Health is saying this is unacceptable, and—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Union Station—*[interjection]*

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, according to this Premier, apparently, no one—not even her Health Minister—is responsible for health care on that side of the House.

* (14:00)

Now, the minister can scoff at that criticism, but the facts are that she has ignored the pleas of the nurses at SANE, and that is the reason why seven SANE nurses have resigned.

Yesterday, she denigrated those very same nurses—front-line nurses—indicating that they were only casual, and hardly ever or never picked up shifts. Shame on that minister, Madam Speaker.

How can Manitobans expect health care in our province to improve when this minister shows such disrespect for our nurses? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Our government will always stand up for survivors of sexual violence. That is why we've invested in the SANE clinic, that is why we've made those positions permanent, that is why we've made other significant investments.

And I would like to update the House and say to the House that I think it's a positive first step that the Leader for—of the Official Opposition, his own defence counsel—the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv)—we think it's a very positive step that he updated his website over the last 24 hours to remove from his website this—the ad that he is now available for hire to be helping sexual violators, fighting to keep them out of jail.

We think that's a positive first step, that he's accepting that the role of a legislator should not be advertising in such a manner—good first step.

We're going to get the job done to ensure that all sexual assault survivors get the support—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Institutional Safety Officers Utilization of Service

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, PCs have broken yet another promise. In October of 2021, PC government enacted legislation to create institutional safety officers.

Institutional safety officers were touted as a way to increase safety and security at health-care facilities and post-secondary institutions. They were supposed to reduce police officers' workloads. Yet, we have a freedom of information document that I'd like to table that says, quote, currently, there are no institutional safety officers in Manitoba.

Can the minister explain why he's failed to establish even one institutional safety officer?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Institutional safety officers are available for those who choose to use them.

There are also community safety officers, whose powers are being expanded by legislation that is currently before the Legislature. It was asked for by the City of Winnipeg mayor, asked for by AMM, also asked for by First Nations communities.

I look forward to the member opposite, if he's actually concerned about these issues, to quickly passing that piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Why would anyone trust this government when they touted their institutional safety officer positions back in 2021 and they claimed that it would reduce demand on police resources, yet those positions

have never been filled? There are currently zero institutional safety officers in the entire province.

So that's a clear failure by this minister, and now he's asking us to once again trust him when it comes to public safety.

Can the minister tell us why he's broken yet another promise by failing to establish even a single institutional safety officer in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: There are community safety officers around the province, Madam Speaker. They're working today.

We've also brought forward legislation to expand their authority, as requested by the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and requested by Mayor Scott Gillingham, as requested by First Nations leadership around the province.

We're responding to their request to ensure the community safety officers have more authority. The only person who doesn't seem to be in support of that is the current Justice critic.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, the facts are that the PCs broke yet another promise.

In 2021, they claimed they were taking action to increase safety and security. They said, just trust us; we will make things safer at institutions by establishing the institutional safety officer program. Yet these FIPPA documents that the minister has in his hands clearly show there isn't a single institutional safety officer yet in the entire province.

So the question for the minister is: Why should anyone trust them when they're talking about public safety, and yet they failed to even fulfill their own promises from 2021?

Mr. Goertzen: There are community safety officers around the province, Madam Speaker. I think the question would be, why would anybody trust the only political entity in all of Canada that didn't want to see bail reform—[interjection]—the only political party from coast to coast that didn't want to see bail reform?

Well, and the member opposite says they've had a change of heart. I wonder if he's talked to the member for Fort Garry, who went onto Twitter and said that there didn't need to be bail reform, and I guess yesterday we found out why he holds that position.

**Brandon University
Funding in Budget 2023**

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, since day one, the PCs have attacked Manitoba's post-secondary institutions. They've cut funding, they've threatened performance-based formula—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Moses: —and they caused not one, but two, faculty strikes.

And now the attack continues at Brandon University, as they've received less funding than the other in—universities in this year's budget.

The funding fails to keep up with inflation, which means that Brandon University will be forced to make cuts.

Can the minister explain why she's left Brandon University behind?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I think that the member opposite is ill-informed, so I'm happy to put some facts on the record.

Our government, and certainly my department, has been working closely with post-secondary institutes to announce an historic, almost—well, 12 per cent increase in all post-secondary institute funding. And within that funding, we have been able to increase operating funds to address keeping the tuition fees low for students. In fact, we've lowered them year over year by a full 1 per cent.

So we are going to keep those tuition rates affordable for students, and we're happy to work with our post-secondary leadership, unlike members opposite who refused to meet with them.

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

Mr. Moses: The minister's just wrong, and Manitobans don't believe them.

Budgets are about priorities, and this year's budget makes it very clear that Brandon University is not a priority for this PC government. Funding for Brandon University this year is well below inflation. That means that they're going to be forced to make cuts.

The PC's government's choice to cut funding from BU will hurt Manitoba, it'll hurt Brandon, it'll hurt the entire Westman region.

Can the minister explain why her government is leaving Brandon and Brandon University behind?

Mrs. Guillemard: Our government actually brought in transparency and accountability into our post-secondary institutes. We were the first government to invite them to the Treasury Board to show some of their books so that they can be transparent to the public—which they are publicly funded. They were happy to do so and questioned why previous governments never asked to see the books.

Madam Speaker, we are changing and turning the page, so we are working well with our post-secondary. They're going to meet the market labour demands—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —and needs. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: I know that members opposite don't want to hear the facts and they're embarrassed about their record, as they should be.

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

Mr. Moses: After raising tuition, cutting funding and causing two strikes, Manitobans don't trust this government when it comes to post-secondary education.

Brandon University is an essential hub for Westman. It offers rural Manitobans the educational opportunities they might otherwise not have. And rather than recognize its importance and the important role it plays in rural Manitoba, the PCs are instead attacking Brandon University. These cuts mean that they will have to make very difficult decisions at Brandon University.

So will this minister do the right thing and commit to stop leaving Brandon University behind?

* (14:10)

Mrs. Guillemard: I think it's very rich coming from the member opposite, talking about criticism for this government, who has worked well with post-secondary institutions to have them well situated to provide a—*[interjection]* Again, the NDP don't want to hear the truth.

In fact, for years, Madam Speaker, they heard from industry and the nurses union that they were going to face a critical shortage of nurses. And how many seats did they increase for nurse training? Zero.

Our government has increased 400, and we will continue to support the sector and market needs, unlike anything the NDP would ever consider because they're all about the unions and not about students. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Drug Overdose Death Reporting Request to Release 2022 Data

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): After failing Manitobans with seven years of devastating cuts to our health and social safety net, this government is keeping overdose deaths in our province a secret to avoid the hard truth.

Instead of taking meaningful action to address the addictions crisis, they've introduced legislation to tie agencies like Sunshine House up in red tape, duplicating an application process that's already in place federally.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) do the right thing and tell her Mental Health Minister to release the overdose data for 2022? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. *[interjection]* Order.

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I'm very happy to stand here and thank all of our community support workers, nurses, resource, supply and all the individuals who are out in the field helping individuals with addictions and seeking supports for themselves, so that on their pursuit—in their pursuit of recovery, they're able to get the help that they need.

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

Mrs. Smith: The PCs have refused to release the numbers of overdose deaths in Manitoba in 2022. This—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith:—data is critically important.

In a FIPPA response, which I'll table, an advisory note provided to the minister says that they created a new data tracking system for overdose incidents which was, and I'll quote, expected to be launched to the public in fall 2022. End quote.

It's clear the PCs don't want to release the number of overdose deaths if they failed—as they failed to address the addictions crisis here in Manitoba.

Will the minister do the right thing and will she release those 2022 numbers today? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: As previously stated, preliminary numbers have been posted on our website. And if members opposite would like to go and take a look at the website, they could see the numbers that are there.

Also, the Chief Medical Examiner posts numbers on his website, so she has two options to go and seek them.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a final supplementary.

Mrs. Smith: I don't know why this minister continues to try to mislead Manitobans by saying those numbers are up to date; they are not. They're for—the end of November.

Manitobans know that, and they've been calling on this government, front-line workers have been calling on this government, RAAM clinic employees have been calling on this government, and now they're trying to put barriers in front of those folks that are actually doing the work to save lives in Manitoba.

So, will this government do the right thing and actually release those numbers for 2022 today and quit hiding behind them?

Madam Speaker: Order.

I have a caution on language that is being used in the House by a member saying, continuing trying to mislead, is actually over the line. It is almost saying, deliberately trying to mislead, and that is a—something I want to ask members to be very careful about using because that does cross the line into unparliamentary language.

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: Again, I want to extend my thank you to all the front-line workers working in the addiction service field.

We have offered supports, education. We have increased funding for mobile withdrawal spaces. We have increased funding for withdrawal management spaces, bed spaces. We put out an expression of interest for 1,000 treatment spaces.

So, we have supported, we have heard, and we are—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Morley-Lecomte:—answering what the individuals are asking for.

Thank you.

Funding for Manitoba Municipalities Rural Health and Policing Services

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We had the pleasure of meeting with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities this morning.

AMM's top issues are that provincial funding is not fair or predictable, investment in core infrastructure isn't there, the health-care system is broken and people don't feel safe under this government.

That's quite the indictment. In—since being elected, the PCs' budgeted increases in provincial transfers to municipalities—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —the last year was zero. The entire budgeted increase of 7 per cent to municipalities occurs this year, while the federal government transfers since 2016 are up by 103 per cent, or \$3.5 billion.

Given this federal windfall, why did this government spend seven years starving municipalities and denying them core infrastructure funding, including during the pandemic?

Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Municipal Relations): It's a great opportunity for me to put on the record the facts on what our government's doing for municipalities right across this great province.

Just last night, Madam Speaker, we had a chance in—meet with—at the association of Manitoba for municipalities. Myself and all my colleagues here, many of my colleagues on this side of the House, had a chance to meet with these folks, talk to them directly about the great things that our government is doing for the municipalities.

Just recently, we announced \$47 million in operating funds—that's unconditional operating funds, Madam Speaker, for Manituban *[phonetic]* municipalities. In addition, Budget '23 offers \$23.4 million in capital funding—unconditional capital funding—for municipalities. That does not even include the \$13 million that we've given to the City of Winnipeg for transit, Madam Speaker.

Our government is delivering for Manitobans. We are delivering—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Lamont: Municipalities were also concerned with our collapsing health-care system. We hear every

day about vacancies, resignations and, of course, closures. Now, we all know, as we hear it almost every day, the NDP closed 16 rural ERs, which the PCs then used to justify closing even more.

We now know reason for losses is that allied health workers, who run labs and work as paramedics rurally, haven't had a contract for five or six years. That's one of the reasons they're quitting.

Rural communities want reliable EMS and other health services close to home. Instead, this government closed 18 more EMS stations. As I tabled, that was an NDP plan from 2013.

If the PCs really disagreed with the NDP's rural health plans, why did they use them to justify closing rural EMS stations?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Appreciate the opportunity to speak about our government's commitments to health care, to rural health care.

* (14:20)

I know our Health Minister has mentioned exactly how many rural emergency rooms were closed under the NDP and how many rural emergency rooms were permanently closed under the PC government. Score for the NDP: 20 rural emergency rooms closed. Score for the PC company—PC government: zero, precisely zero closures to rural emergency rooms.

We prioritize care in rural communities. We take care of our health-care system as well, with unprecedented investments. That's the kind of government that we are.

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

Mr. Lamont: One of the biggest budget items facing most municipalities, of course, is the police budget. AMM is also asking for funding for alternative services for folks who are in crisis when it comes to mental health and addictions.

Now, the federal government is requiring new body cameras for police forces, an important step forward in ensuring transparency and safety in policing. Of course, this comes with extra costs, but given that federal funding this year to the Province is up by 16.8 per cent—or \$1 billion—we believe the Province should be stepping up and doing its job to fund municipal crime prevention.

If it's in the budget—as I'm sure I'll hear it will be—why is AMM asking for it?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I also had the great pleasure to meet with AMM officials yesterday. They were very excited about this government's legislation on community safety officers and applauded this government for that. They were also very complimentary of the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and others who are looking for bail reform, which was opposed by the NDP, Madam Speaker, but they were very happy that that seems to be moving forward.

Their greatest concern yesterday was that the federal Liberal government had foisted new costs on them by negotiating with the RCMP—new costs that weren't actually involving AMM, even though AMM is often the employer.

Those municipalities, they wanted me to express to the Liberal leader to get on board with this and to call Ottawa, get the failing Prime Minister to ensure that he actually confers with AMM before another contract negotiation with the RCMP.

Will he commit to doing that? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

New Film Studio in Niverville Development Announcement

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Last fall, our government was proud to announce direct flights between Winnipeg and Los Angeles, the home of Hollywood.

Today, the Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage and the Minister of Infrastructure just announced further development to support this growth.

Can the minister please enlighten the House on how our government's efforts are already paying huge dividends in the fastest growing community in Manitoba and, as Los Angeles refers it to, Niverville of the new—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler:—Niverville is the new Hollywood of the North.

Hon. Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I want to take this time to thank our Premier for her leadership on this, and my colleague, the member for Springfield-Ritchot, for his question and tireless efforts in Niverville *[phonetic]*.

Madam Speaker, did you know that Niverville is the fastest growing community in Manitoba and the

fifth in Canada? Manitoba is full of opportunity and talent. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: And now, with our industry-leading, tax-competitive credit and our new direct flight from Winnipeg to LA, we now have industry knocking on the door for a chance to work in Manitoba.

Today, we announced an infrastructure development that will further assist this and will directly assist a new film studio bring world-class technology here in Manitoba.

Under our government, the movie and film industry has tripled in revenue since 2016, and I am proud to stand on this side of the House.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired. *[interjection]* Order.

Right to Repair Legislation Request for Support for Bill 216 and 219

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): My question is for the Premier.

Our NDP right to repair bills, 216 and 219, would require all manufacturers of branded electronic products, such as Apple, Samsung and Sony, to provide accessible, affordable spare parts, manuals and repair services. If they choose not to provide the spare parts, manuals and repair services, consumers would be fully refunded by the manufacturer of the branded electronic product. This would support our small-business repair sector and ensure that they have access to parts and manuals to carry out repairs.

Will the Premier join Europe and the United States and support right to repair legislation today?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Deputy Premier): I'm happy to take a question on making repairs any time.

Madam Speaker, that's exactly what Budget 2023 does. It makes repairs to social services. It makes repairs to education. And it makes repairs to the health system.

Record investments, 22 per cent since our—in health care since our government came to office; 23 per cent in Education increase since our government came to office; 25 per cent increase to the budget in Families.

Madam Speaker, I hope members opposite have a great week, but when they come back, let's pass this budget so we can benefit each and every Manitoban.

Madam Speaker: Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Health-Care Coverage

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) Health care is a basic human right and a fundamental part of responsible public health. Many people in Manitoba are not covered by provincial health care: migrant workers with work permits of less than one year, international students and those undocumented residents who have lost their status for a variety of reasons.

(2) Private health insurance is not a substitute for public health insurance. Private insurance plans available to most migrant workers and international students are paid for by the worker or student. They do not provide coverage for all of the potential health needs covered by public health coverage. Individuals are required to pay up front for health expenses without a guarantee that they will be covered and wait weeks for reimbursement.

(3) Racialized people and communities are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, mainly due to the social and economic conditions which have left them vulnerable while performing essential work in a variety of industries in Manitoba.

(4) Without adequate health-care coverage, if they are ill, many of those without provincial health coverage will avoid seeking health care due to fear of being charged for the care, and some will fear possible detention and deportation if their immigration status is reported to the authorities.

(5) According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, denying essential health care to undocumented irregular migrants is a violation of their rights.

(6) Jurisdictions across Canada and the world have adopted access-without-fear policies to prevent sharing personal health information or immigration status with immigration authorities and to give uninsured residents the confidence to access health care.

(7) The pandemic has clearly identified the need for everyone in Manitoba to have access to public health care to protect the health and safety of all who live in the province.

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately provide comprehensive and free public health care to—coverage to all residents of Manitoba, regardless of immigration status, including refugee claimants, migrant workers, international students, dependant children of temporary residents and undocumented residents.

* (14:30)

(2) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to undertake a multilingual communication campaign to provide information on expanded coverage to all affected residents.

(3) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to inform all health-care institutions and providers of expanded coverage for those without public health insurance and the details on how necessary policy and protocol changes will be implemented; and

(4) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to create and enforce strict confidentiality policies and provide staff with training to protect the safety of residents with precarious immigration status and ensure they can access public health care without jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada.

This petition, Madam Speaker, 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.

Provincial Road 224

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding communities. The road is in need of substantial repairs.

(2) The road has been in poor condition for years and has numerous potholes, uneven driving surfaces and extremely narrow shoulders.

(3) Due to recent population growth in the area, there has been increased vehicle and pedestrian use of Provincial Road 224.

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to the many Manitobans who use it on a regular basis.

(5) Concerned Manitobans are requesting that Provincial Road 224 be assessed and repaired urgently to improve safety for its users.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to complete an assessment of Provincial Road 224 and implement the appropriate repairs using public funds as quickly as possible.

This petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi.

Louise Bridge

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown for the last 110 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as it has deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, City of Winnipeg has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed residents wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise Bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise Bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed.

(10) The City's expropriation process has begun. The \$6.35-million street upgrade of Nairn Avenue from Watt Street to the 110-year-old bridge is complete.

(11) The Premier has a duty to direct the provincial government to provide financial assistance to the City so it can complete this long overdue vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building this three-lane bridge in either direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction; and

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping the old Louise Bridge open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition's signed by many, many Manitobans.

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

Background to this petition is as follows:

(1) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin

contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

(3) In coming to Manitoba, Punjabi newcomers make sacrifices, including distance from their cultural roots and language. Many Punjabi parents and families want their children to retain their language and keep a continued cultural appreciation.

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens are—as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

(5) Punjabi bilingual instruction will help cross-curricular friendships, relationships and marriages and prepare young people to be multilingual professionals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programs and take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

And this has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Lead in Soils

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) In December of 2019, the provincial government's commissioned report on lead concentrations in soil in Winnipeg was completed.

(2) The report found that 10 neighbourhoods had concerning levels of lead concentration in their soil, including Centennial, Daniel McIntyre, Glenelg-Chalmers, north Point Douglas, River Osborne, Sargent Park, St. Boniface, the West End, Weston and Wolseley-Minto.

(3) In particular, the predicted blood lead levels for children in north Point Douglas, Weston and Daniel McIntyre were above the level of concern.

(4) The Weston Elementary School field has been forced to close down many times because of concerns of lead in soil and the provincial government's inaction to improve the situation.

(5) Lead exposure especially affects children aged seven years and under, as their nervous system is still developing.

(6) The effects of lead exposure are irreversible and include impacts on learning, behaviour and intelligence.

(7) For adults, long-term lead exposure can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney problems and reproductive effects.

(8) The provincial government currently has no comprehensive plan in place to deal with lead in soil, nor is there a broad advertising campaign educating residents on how they can reduce their risks of lead exposure.

(9) Instead, people in these areas continue to garden and work in the soil and children continue to play in the dirt, often without any knowledge of the associated risks.

* (14:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take action to reduce people's lead-exposure to lead in Winnipeg, and to implement the recommendations proposed by the provincial government's independent review, including the creation of an action plan for the Weston neighbourhood, developing a lead awareness communications and outreach program, requisitioning a more in-depth study and creating a tracking program for those tested for blood lead levels so that medical professionals can follow up with them.

This has been signed by Maria Celeste Calpatura, Catalina Zabaliero, Reynard Marzan and many other Manitobans.

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

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) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

(3) In coming to Manitoba, Punjabi newcomers make sacrifices, including distance from their cultural roots and language. Many Punjabi parents and families want their children to retain their language and keep a continued cultural appreciation.

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

(5) Punjabi bilingual instruction will help cross-cultural friendships, relationships and marriages and prepare young people to be multilingual professionals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programs and take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

This has been signed by Surnjit [*phonetic*] Singh Mangat, Gurpreet Kaur Mand, Amardeep Singh Mangat and many more.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) The population of those 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of those people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program—excuse me—after the last two nurses filling those positions retired. Excuse me, Madam Speaker. [*interjection*] Yes. The—sorry.

The number of those seniors—the number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and the surrounding areas. [*interjection*] Thank you. Sorry about that.

(6) There is no adequate medical foot care available in the city and the region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need of foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson, effective April 1st, 2022.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

(3) In coming to Manitoba, Punjabi newcomers make sacrifices, including distance from their cultural roots and language. Many Punjabi parents and families

want their children to retain their language and keep a continued cultural appreciation.

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

(5) Punjabi bilingual instruction will help cross-cultural friendships, relationships and marriages and prepare young people to be multilingual professionals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programs and take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Further petitions?

Community Living disABILITY Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Currently, adults with specific or non-specific disabilities, or a combination of disabilities, such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory or language processing disorders and/or non-verbal learning disabilities, will be denied access to services under the Province of Manitoba's community living and disability services, CLDS, if their IQ is above 80.

People with these or other borderline cognitive functioning issues also have extremely low adaptive skills and are not able to live independently without supports.

Recently, it has become widely recognized that access to CLDS should not be based solely on IQ, which is only a measure of a person's ability to answer questions verbally or in writing in relation to mathematics, science or material which is read.

Very often, persons with specific or non-specific disabilities or a combination of those disabilities have specific needs related to their executive function for support when they are adults or are transitioning to

adulthood, which are not necessarily connected to their IQ.

Executive function is the learned ability to do the normal activities of life, including being organized, being able to plan and to carry out plans and adapt to changing conditions.

Those who have major defects in executive function have a learning disability requiring assistance under CLDS to be able to make a contribution to society and be self-sustaining.

Provision of CLDS services to individuals with specific or non-specific disabilities or a combination of those disabilities or executive function disability, would free them from being dependent on Employment and Income Assistance and have the potential to make an important change in the person's life.

Newfoundland and Labrador have now recognized that access to services should be based on the nature of the disability and the person's needs, rather than on IQ.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to change the requirements for accessing community living and disability services so that these requirements are based on the needs of individuals with specific or non-specific disabilities, including executive function or a combination of disabilities, rather than solely on the basis of their IQ.

* (14:50)

Signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I have a leave request for the House, prior to calling orders of the day.

Could you please canvass the House for leave to change the sponsor for the PMR previously announced for debate next Tuesday morning, the title of which is, Commending the Provincial Government for Investing in Diabetic Supports, from the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Smook) to the member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Cox).

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to change the sponsor for the private member's resolution previously announced for debate next Tuesday morning, Commending the Provincial Government for Investing in Diabetic Supports, from the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Smook) to the member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Cox)?

Is there leave? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, Madam Speaker, I thank the House for that.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please call for second reading this afternoon bills 35, 28, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 11, 34, 2, 8, 10, 13, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 36.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of the following bills this afternoon: 35, 28, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 11, 34, 2, 8, 10, 13, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 36.

And prior to calling on the first bill, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

House Business

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: On House business.

MLA Fontaine: Pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Redhead). The title of the resolution is Calling on the Provincial Government to Restore Thompson's Foot Care Clinic.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 34(8), the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Thompson. The title of the resolution is Calling on the Provincial Government to Restore Thompson's Foot Care Clinic.

* * *

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Just for clarity, Madam Speaker, on the leave request that was granted by the House, I may have sent some panic into the House, we might be here next Tuesday morning.

For clarity, the resolution will be on the next Tuesday of private members' business—the next sitting Tuesday of private members' business.

Madam Speaker: And the member has just indicated some clarification to his earlier comments, so we accept that.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 35—The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct)

Madam Speaker: So, I will now call second reading of Bill 35, The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct).

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I've got some preliminary stuff first, but we'll get there.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 35, The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct); Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire (brevets d'enseignement et conduite professionnelle), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that Bill 35, The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Madam Speaker, the Manitoba government takes the safety of youths very seriously. Bill 35, The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct), is a historic step toward improving safety for Manitoba students.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Given recent examples of misconduct involving students, some of who have been charged with a series of offenses against students, urgent action is necessary. In response to these concerns, and in discussion with education partners, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning is enhancing the legislative

framework to better protect Manitoba students by preventing and addressing teacher misconduct.

This bill was developed through extensive consultation with the partners, including two rounds of engagements between November 2022 and March 2023, such as trustees, school administrators, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, Indigenous partners, post-secondary institutions, students, parents, child advocacy groups and survivors of sexual misconduct.

Reflecting what we learned during these consultations, this bill proposes new structures and processes to improve accountability and transparency regarding the regulation of teachers and better align Manitoban's—Manitoba's legislation with other Canadian jurisdictions. Specifically, as a result of Bill 35, an independent commissioner will be established to respond, investigate and adjudicate matters of teacher misconduct.

One of the most important considerations we heard from stakeholders is that there needed to be a clear avenue for anyone to report misconduct. It is important that such reports can be easily made after the first offense in order to ensure that it can be addressed before other students can be harmed. This will also give the commissioner the ability to identify concerning patterns of behaviour and potentially stop them before they escalate.

In order to balance the need to have an open, compliant process with the rights of teachers to not be subject to malicious or false complaints, the commissioner will have the authority to dismiss a complaint if it is frivolous or out of scope of their jurisdiction. Further, in order to ensure that legitimate complaints can be dealt with in an expedient manner, the commissioner can enter in a consent resolution agreement with the investigated teacher to resolve the matter or refer matters to be adjudicated by a hearing panel.

As an important improvement to our current adjudication committee, hearing panels will now have members of the public that are not teachers, ensuring that their voice and perspective can be considered given the high level of responsibility entrusted in teachers.

To increase transparency and accountability, concern—consent resolution agreements entered by the commissioner and decisions from hearing panels will be made public. An exception is allowed in cases that would cause significant harm to the victims. In such cases, a summary of the agreement or decision may be made public.

In addition to addressing matters of misconduct, the commissioner will also have the authority to take action against a teacher's certificate to address matters of confidence. This will ensure a single-door approach with consistent processes for addressing all professional matters.

The department is committed to consulting broadly with stakeholders, including the Manitoba Teachers' Society, on development and implementation of the professional standards.

Other key components of the framework include an expanded definition of professional misconduct and broader reporting obligations for employers of teachers.

Proposed amendments also establish a registry of certified teachers that will be publicly accessible and will provide information on the status of a teacher's certificate and a record of actions taken against a teacher's certificate. A public registry will increase transparency for employers and parents, providing them the necessary information to make informed decisions. Experts in the area of child protection such as the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, have recently highlighted the need for such registries in their report, *Child Sexual Abuse and Victimization by K-12 School Personnel in Canada*.

* (15:00)

Teacher registries are common across Canada, including in all western provinces and Ontario. Government is committed to—our government is committed to respecting the privacy of teachers while also facilitating easier access to this important information.

The proposed legislation also provides future avenues to address mandatory training, a certification renewal process that can include obligatory background checks and other requirements to be satisfied at the time of renewal.

The department will continue to engage with employers, teachers, students, other education partners and, of course, the general public to clearly communicate and implement these changes.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): 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. Nello Altomare (Transcona): With such an important bill being brought forward today, one that deals with teacher registry, I would like to—the minister—I know he did touch upon it upon his—on his opening remarks about the consultation process, but I'd like him to talk a little bit more about what that looked like.

Did they come to the Legislature? Did the department go out and seek consultation? Were they, you know, done in a fashion that certainly had teacher voice included?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Absolutely, and I'd like to thank the MLA for Transcona for his respectful question.

Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, the consultation process, as I said in my opening remarks, took place from November of 2022 to March of 2023, and those consultations had two rounds, and they varied in different venues or media type of consultations. And that ranged from in-person meetings, Zoom meetings, and any other type of—pieces of documentation that needed to be shared with those—

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

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, if I could just ask the minister—I had a question because I know that the bill—well, I'll ask two questions.

One, if I may, one relates to the fact, of course, it makes sense as we're talking about the safety of students, I was just wondering, there—whether there had been any consideration about the fact that sometimes there can be challenges for teachers if it's another teacher or if it's somebody else—if it's not just mistreatment of a student but a mistreatment of somebody else in the workplace; if that was something that was ever considered.

And the other was just a concern around the—asking about the regulations, the idea that a whole bunch of stuff will be determined in regulation in the future—

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

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to thank the member from St. Boniface for the questions. So, I'll try to unpack his couple questions in a short amount of time here.

But what does the new bill do? The proposed bill is going to strengthen the regulatory framework for teachers through amendments to the Education Administration Act.

Specifically, the bill will provide the legislative framework to establish the independent commissioner to investigate, adjudicate, and otherwise respond to matters of teacher misconduct and competency, including having the ability to enter into a consent resolution agreement and refer matters to a hearing panel for adjudication.

Hearings that will be open to the public and hearing panels that have equal representation—

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

Mr. Altomare: We know that we already have many disciplinary processes outlined in current collective agreements. I'm wondering is—how will the regulatory regime of Bill 35 coexist with the existing disciplinary processes that are part of many—or, of all collective agreements that are in place here in Manitoba?

Mr. Ewasko: So, I'd like to thank the member again for that question.

So, as he knows—and we've had a chance to do a bill briefing, Mr. Acting Deputy Minister—as Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning does not have the authority to regulate non-teaching staff, this is something where we're going to be having a commissioner, which is going to be selected by the minister. Somebody based on qualifications in adjudicating matters of professional misconduct, and the draft legislation does not contemplate specific criteria.

In other jurisdictions, such as British Columbia and Alberta, similar roles are occupied by individuals with backgrounds in the legal system.

Mr. Lamont: This question for the minister—sorry—it relates to the, sort of, the IT—the open-ended part of the bill, which I think it might be too open-ended. This is obviously a bill that could have a huge impact on the lives of anybody who comes before—who is facing such a jurisdiction.

So, had there—what sort of—is there any anticipated idea of what the regulations actually will be? Is—why are we deciding to make all these regulations, rather than making the decisions right in

the legislation where it's accessible to the legislators as part of the debate?

Mr. Ewasko: So, of course, once—thanks, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

So, once the—once Bill 35 passes, we will be working on various misconduct or competency standards as well. And so, the bill provides the commissioner powers to address the competency issues in accordance with professional standards. And the department is also committed to consulting broadly with all our education partners here in Manitoba, which, of course, includes the Manitoba Teachers' Society, on the development and implementation of these professional standards.

The department's also heard from stakeholders that it's very important to have that single door for students and parents to raise any concerns they have with a teacher, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Altomare: As you know, local school divisions have a tremendous amount of responsibility. They hire professional staff to do the important work that they do in their schools.

Am I to assume correctly that Bill 35 will parallel some of the processes that are already in place with regards to how school divisions discipline teachers that—found to be in misconduct?

Mr. Ewasko: The bill—to the member—the bill establishes a fair and transparent process, which includes the reporting, investigation and decision-making processes, which will be complemented by public reporting.

The bill also gives investigated teachers the options of appealing a decision to the Court of King's Bench, which—if they consider a decision to be unfair.

As with the current process, teachers may continue to be represented by legal counsel, and the department will work with the commissioner to ensure that the rules of practice and procedures adhere to all expectations of the procedural fairness and due process.

Mr. Lamont: My question here for the minister is—it actually relates to nondisclosure agreements, because we had—we brought forward a bill to reform NDAs, and we actually had people who were teachers who were talking about some of the issues they've been required to sign NDAs.

Would—and you may not be able to answer this. Would this—would, if somebody has signed an NDA, would they be able to break it as part of this—if they were testifying or if they were being a witness in front of this jurisdiction?

Mr. Ewasko: I thank the member for St. Boniface for that question. That specific question, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I will endeavour to get the member from St. Boniface the exact answer to his question.

* (15:10)

Mr. Altomare: We know, as I mentioned earlier, this is a very consequential piece of legislation and will amend many of the current practices that are already in place when it comes to professional conduct, professional standards, et cetera.

Has the department thought about an awareness program—essentially, professional development for teachers once Bill 35 receives royal assent?

Mr. Ewasko: To answer the member's question, part of the consultation process that we've done with many education partners throughout the province—also, I'd like to remind the member that we've also—did a ministerial mandate to all school divisions for school staff to be trained and to have taken the Respect in Schools or the Commit to Kids program. So a lot of that is encompassed into those two programs.

And, by the end of February 2023, those school staff are supposed to be trained in those two programs.

Mr. Altomare: I don't know if that answered the question. This is specific to Bill 35 and the really consequential changes that are being proposed by Bill 35.

What I asked about is the really important professional development that will have to take place. This is more than just doing a Respect in School or respect in sport requirement. This is to do with how a teacher does their job and how they're going to be, for lack of a better term, monitored.

So I'm hoping for some professional—

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

Mr. Ewasko: To the member from Transcona, I went with a bit of a different answer to his original question, and thank you for clarifying your question.

Absolutely, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, there's going to be some professional development around Bill 35. And keep in mind that the majority, quite a large percentage, of teachers are going about their everyday, teaching our youth in this great province of ours. They're trusted, absolutely. And this bill will help keep those students safe. That it's such a small percentage.

But very important to make sure that there's an avenue not only for the students' safety, and for parents and guardians, but to make sure that also the teachers—

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

Mr. Altomare: I do appreciate the professional development piece that will be offered. I'm glad that's on the record because it's really important, Acting Deputy Speaker, that that be in place. This is new in Manitoba, and teachers will require—it's going to be a steep learning curve that's going to be experienced by many educators here in Manitoba.

I just want to move on to the criteria for selection of the commissioner. What does the minister and his department envision as being some of the qualifications, criteria that they're going to require of this commissioner?

Mr. Ewasko: I would like to answer the member's question, but I would like to put a bit of a clarification on his perceived steep learning curve, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

So, this bill is brought forward to make sure that our students are kept safe. The professional misconduct that we are talking about, that the commissioner will be looking at, is any act concerning a pupil or other child under the teacher's care or supervision that involves sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct concerning a pupil or child, physical harm to a pupil or child, significant emotional harm to a pupil or child.

Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I take exception to the fact that most—that the member is saying that teachers are going to have a steep learning curve; don't do these things.

Mr. Altomare: Yes, I don't even know where to go with that, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. We're having a respectful dialogue here and this is where we go with a very consequential bill that impacts teachers and schools as well as kids.

My question was specific to the criteria that is going to be used to select the commissioner. People deserve to know that, as do kids. They need to feel that this is going to be a process that's going to be well undertaken.

So, I'll ask again: What are the criteria—are going to be used to select the commissioner?

Mr. Ewasko: I did not mean, in my previous answer, to upset the member from Transcona. The fact of the

bill, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, is that—is the fact that we take the safety of youth very seriously. And I just wanted to clarify for the member what was involved in the bill. And I know he's had a bill briefing.

But in regards to the commissioner, the commissioner will be selected by the minister based on qualifications in adjudicating matters of professional misconduct. The draft legislation does not contemplate specific criteria.

In British Columbia and Alberta, similar roles are occupied by individuals with backgrounds in the legal system, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. So hopefully that clarifies and answers the member from Transcona's question.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Time for questions has expired.

Debate

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

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): It's always an honour to get up in this House to debate bills; bills consequential, like Bill 35, that's being brought forward and I look forward to the debate this afternoon.

This is something that we're learning about. As you could see through the question and answer period, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, it's important to get these items on the record so that everyone in the province knows what Bill 35 contains and what it entails. It amends The Education Administration Act that exists right now.

To teach in a public school or a funded independent school, a teacher here in Manitoba must have a Manitoba teaching certificate. I still have my first teaching certificate, actually, Deputy—Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. I keep it in my wallet. It's because—something that I'm very proud of and something that, you know, they can never take away from you unless, of course, you know, misconduct occurs.

The 'folloring' are some of the key changes that are made in relation to this certification process, and this is to do with the registry of teachers. An online registry will be established to allow the public to obtain information about a teacher's teaching certificate, including the date it was issued, its class and its current status. The registry will also include a record of any disciplinary action taken against the teacher.

The director of certification will be appointed to oversee this process for teachers and for the registry. The government is given the authority to make competent standards that teachers must meet to be issued and to maintain the teaching certificate.

There, of course, will be a disciplinary process where a commissioner is appointed to oversee this new process and—the commissioner will have a lot of awesome responsibility, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, especially when it comes to the—well, of course, the reviewing of complaints from the public and reports from school boards and other employers about teacher misconduct and incompetence.

The commissioner can decide what action is appropriate to address a complaint or report and can: investigate; close the matter by not taking further action; postpone taking action if the teacher's employer or a criminal proceeding is addressing the same concern; enter into a consent resolution agreement, in which the commissioner and the teacher agree on appropriate consequences that address the concern without a hearing; and order a hearing and appoint a hearing panel.

* (15:20)

If the hearing panel, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, finds a teacher guilty of professional misconduct or incompetence, or that a teacher lacks capacity to carry out professional responsibilities, the panel may suspend or cancel the teacher's certificate, place limitations or conditions on it or reprimand the teacher. An appeal from the hearing panel's decision may be made to the Court of King's Bench. And these are consequential amendments that are made to The Public Schools Act and The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act.

Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I am on the record, my party is on the record, as saying that the safety of kids is our No. 1 priority; it absolutely is. I can say that when I stand up in caucus, I certainly have the support of my caucus members, and they were in full agreement that the safety of kids is our No. 1 priority.

I will say that, with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the very first point in the professional code of conduct is to do with the safety of children. So, as professional educators, we have that as our No. 1 priority. And, as been mentioned, this bill is not intended for the very vast majority that do understand that point.

We do need something in place that ensures that our kids are not preyed upon in school. There's a piece here that remains really important, and that's the professional conduct piece. And is my hope that that is

kept, you know, in mind when we move forward with the implementation of this bill.

It's important that every kid feels safe in school, absolutely. The most trusted people in the public school system are teachers. And teachers take that very seriously. It's quite a responsibility to be responsible for young people in your classroom. One that comes with a—certainly, a high level of reward, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker; high level of reward because you get to work with young people and help them on their path to develop themselves into very capable human beings—ones that will contribute to their communities.

That's why having a mechanism and structure in place to ensure children are protected in schools is important, and that there is accountability, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, for people that harm and hurt children. As I said earlier, we will support this bill on the principle of accountability that it reflects.

Teachers and educators certainly will have a voice on this disciplinary process, as it's designed. The representatives of—teachers and educators need to have to ensure that their voice is heard—there are already some mechanisms in place, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that I hope will also be considered once amendments to this bill come forward. There is a professional growth process that many teachers are a part of every year; it's an important piece of their professional practice. I know it's something that, certainly, many of my former colleagues in the school division that I worked in took very seriously and looked forward to the process every year.

As a bit of a review for that, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, and how it relates to Bill 35, is that the professional growth process really allowed the school administrator to get to know the teacher, to know what their priorities are and were, and to establish processes so that they could also improve their professional practice.

That PG—that professional growth plan process is one that is taken very seriously by teachers and school administrators, and, you know, it's a process that I hope is reflected in some of the phases of this bill.

That's why teachers need to be at the table throughout, and I did hear the minister say that they were consulted. I hope that consultation process continues because, as you know, with the introduction of any new bill, once it's rolling and once it's in force and in action, there is going to be things that are going to come up that are going to require some tweaks and some changes. And from what I heard from the question and

answer period, I heard that the minister and the department are open to that, so that it does ensure what it's intended to do.

Because, as I said earlier, and the minister has said this, too, the vast majority of teachers are committed to helping and protecting kids, and we understand that. Manitobans also understand that. They see that every day in the great work that teachers and school administrators do. I know that this bill also impacts those that have a teaching certificate that aren't just teachers, right. I mean, there's the—of course the clinical staff that are also part of this, and that's important, too.

I would like to see some of the pieces, and expanded a little bit more, in a sense of encompassing all of the people that work within the educational system, and not just teachers or what are termed as professional staff. I know that the minister knows this.

And I know that this is likely going to come up at committee stage, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that we look at expanding the scope of this bill to include everybody that is exposed to children in the school, not just in the school, but also outside of the school, wherever children are in place and under the supervision of the school at that time. Because sometimes it's also outside of hours, different locations, et cetera, like on the bus, things of that nature.

The piece that's interesting, too, is the bill would allow parents and students in Manitoba to be able to check on a teacher's disciplinary history—very important. That already exists in a couple of provinces here, and I do think it's time here in Manitoba that we have something like that here. Teachers rightfully consider themselves as professionals and as this has evolved you'll see that professional—people that are considered professional, like doctors, also have this in place where you can check on their qualifications. And so that's a piece that will be important.

The independent commissioner role is going to be vitally important, as well, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. I did ask for some clarity during the question and answer period, and I know the bill is new and the process is going to be new. Just for myself, and I'm sure the minister may feel the same way about this, it'll be very important for the commissioner to have some experiences within the public school or independent school system, or have a deep understanding of how the system works. That will provide, I believe, a lot of credibility for the commissioner to do their work. It'll inspire confidence in families, in communities, and also in teachers and professional staff.

That commissioner role will be very important—only—not just because of the job they're going to do, but also, too, there's going to be something there that comes with it, and that's an awesome responsibility to make sure that the bill is administered the way it's intended to be administered. I would hope, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that that commissioner role will grow in its scope and responsibility and will provide the necessary guidance for the next steps whenever next steps need to be taken in the disciplinary process.

The bill is important. I did mention, that there—there mane—be some need for amendment. When we get to the committee stage for this bill, I am quite confident that there will be a number of presenters, both in person and virtually. The really unique thing about Manitoba, and I know you know this, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, is that committee stage and the role the public plays at the committee stage. It's unique in Canada. We saw it—we see it on a regular basis. I was checking the committee website, and I've noticed that a number of Manitobans have already signed up for the committee stage. And I look forward to being at committee—and I'm sure the minister does, too—supporting the presenters when they arrive.

And also, though, too, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, is hearing what they're bringing to the table to make the bill even better. Right? Because that's going to be, really, the piece that's going to define this is the committee stage because we're going to need to hear from what people are saying about it because it is also part of that consultation piece that we often talk about as legislators here in the House, one that can't be diminished.

And I really—I look forward to that. I'm sure there'll be many organizations that will also be part of that committee process. An organization such as Stop Educator-Child Exploitation, that has said and—is on the record as saying that this registry is a positive step, and I'm sure they'll be there to make a presentation.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection has also said that this bill is a positive step that will bring Manitoba more in line with other provinces and will, I think, position Manitoba well in—within the country. It's nice every once in a while to have Manitoba seen as a lead in something; that's an important piece. And I know a number of these organizations have already said that.

We also know that there are exceedingly few teachers that engage in this—these heinous acts, and this is what the bill is intended for. That part is—goes without saying.

But, you know, we did earlier, Mr. Deputy—Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, bring forward a private member's bill, bill 224, that talked about protecting youth in sports. We know that schools provide a lot of opportunity for sport and for extracurricular activities. We also know that some of the coaches—some of the people that undertake leadership in that area are not professional staff and are not covered under this bill.

Bill 224 would've looked after that, could've worked in tandem with this, would've ensured that schools and sports organizations, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, would have been covered by many of the same provisions that are in this bill; would've been a really good first step. I think it would—it's shown some magnanimity on the government benches to accept some of what we were bringing to the table at the time.

I think—I think; I know it was a missed opportunity, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Because there were certain provisions in bill 224 that I think are really important and would've had as expectations, such as: would've prohibited young athletes from being in coaches' or principals' homes without parental permission—would've put it right there, it's just not going to happen without express permission.

Supporting the bill would've prevented harm against young people and created a model of responsible coaching behaviour. And, again, another opportunity to show some leadership, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, so that everyone—parents, kids, coaches—could feel comfortable, feel confident in the people that will be working with their kids.

One of the really important pieces as you're growing up is acquiring your voice, your own ability to advocate for yourself. What teachers do is they certainly teach kids how to develop that voice because it's difficult. It's difficult to develop and it requires a lot of work, a lot of role modelling and a lot of important reflection and dialogue with kids as it's being developed. It's kind of like raising your own children, right? How do we develop their voice?

Bill 224 would've done that, would've helped that. And prior to introducing bill 224 we also introduced a private member's resolution to address the same issue, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Unfortunately, the government benches decided not to support that PMR. Again, an opportunity that was missed, you know, and I remain somewhat disappointed by that.

We are talking about child protection and child safety here. As legislators, we bring forward important pieces of legislation, either through a private

member's bill or a private member's resolution, so that we can debate these important topics right here on the floor of the Manitoba Legislature.

And that was an opportunity for this government to show how serious it was. It was a missed opportunity. The need for measures like this to protect children are—unfortunately, they're sadly documented. And even brings me a little bit of pain to even repeat some of these, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Because, of course, it impacts our young people.

I'm—you know, was sad to read that in April of 2022 a Winnipeg high school football coach was charged with multiple alleged sexual assaults. As I said earlier, these are acts that are just so unacceptable that it just—it leaves you more than disappointed. It leaves you a little bit angry—

An Honourable Member: Disillusioned.

Mr. Altomare: —disillusioned, thank you.

An Honourable Member: Disappointed.

Mr. Altomare: And disappointed.

But here's the piece. We had bill 224, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that would've addressed this, that we brought it at the time. And when given the opportunity—

An Honourable Member: Relevance?

Mr. Altomare: —of course, it didn't happen. Relevance? You're darn right it's relevant. We're talking about the safety of our kids, and somebody on the other side, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, is shouting relevance? Are you kidding me? Come on.

* (15:40)

We're on the floor of the Manitoba Legislature here, debating really consequential legislation, and this is what we get from the government benches. You know, I remain disappointed and disillusioned. Preventing sexual abuse, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, is something that is really important, and we know that.

We have received a number of suggestions from community members to better protect youth, and we're hoping that some of these measures eventually, through the committee stage or through other amendments, are certainly considered to make this bill even better.

These rules will just not only apply to professional staff, as I said earlier, Deputy—Acting Deputy Speaker, but also to everybody that's exposed to children in school and outside of school. Really important pieces.

I do also want to say that there are other prevention strategies, and that we ensure that we put them in place so that we don't get to a point where we have legislation that doesn't have enough oomph to ensure that we have the protection of our youth in our schools.

I will say this, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that we will work closely with other legislators in this House to ensure that Bill 35 does what it's intended to do. We will work with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, Manitoba School Boards Association, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents and other important organizations to ensure that the bill is designed to do what it's supposed to do.

Because, like I said earlier, when given the opportunity to support some of our private members' pieces, we didn't get that from government benches, and that was disappointing.

So, I'm looking forward to the committee process. I'm looking forward to the ability to bring forward amendments to make this bill even better, stronger and protective of kids.

And with those few comments, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I would like to wrap up my debate.

Thank you.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Whoops, I just dropped my notes. I apologize.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. I really am grateful for the opportunity to put a few words on the record in regards to this bill.

Bill 35 is an important piece of legislation, and I do think that it's important that this bill comes forward now, and I recognize that there are some concerns that people have in regards to this bill. I've heard some of those concerns from some educators.

But I do think that everybody is really on the same page, that everyone that I talk to and that I know certainly wants to make sure that kids are safe and that students are being educated in ways that prioritize their well-being and protect them from people who may be putting their health at risk—and that's their physical, emotional and their mental health at risk—folks who may harm students.

And, unfortunately, you know, we do live in a time in society where we still do see incidents—tragic incidents of people in positions of power and authority, educators, hurting students. And it's devastating every single time we hear one of those stories.

And I think that every time we do hear one of those tragic stories, it reminds all of us to reflect on what it is that we can do in our capacity to make schools safer for students, more equitable for students so that they can have, you know, as pleasant an experience as possible and then move on from, you know, their K-to-12 education and pursue whatever their interests and their dreams are.

So, I'd like to take this moment to highlight a couple of incredible educators that I had in my life growing up as examples of why it's so important that we create positive spaces and strong K-to-12 institutions for folks to be learning.

You know, I grew up just south of the city, and there were a couple of people throughout my childhood and my teen years who had a tremendous impact on my life. And there's one person in particular—there's several, actually, but one in particular—named Denis Marinelli, who was an educator at St. Norbert Collegiate for many decades, and he retired a few years ago—we remain friends to this day—who made a big impact.

And one of the most important lessons I learned from Mr. Marinelli was that what we should expect from our educators is an approach to teaching that really puts the needs of students first.

And, you know, I'll share one story really quickly, because it's one that I'll carry with me the rest of my life and I've carried with me to this point in my life. So, when I was very young—I was in about the ninth–10th grade, going into the 10th grade. I was a pretty good basketball player by that point, and I'd been playing on the varsity basketball team for Mr. Marinelli. And other students and other adults in my life—other teachers, other educators from other schools—were encouraging me to go to another school, a bigger school, maybe a fancier school. And they were telling me that if I went to a bigger school, I'd have more opportunity to get a scholarship.

And I—you know, I was in a situation where paying for post-secondary wasn't going to be a thing my family could do; I was going to have to earn a scholarship or work jobs or what have you to make it happen. And so, it was a big deal for me to hear from other teachers and other adults that I could get a scholarship or have a better chance at that if I went to a bigger school where I might get more attention.

And so, you know, Denis Marinelli and other teachers at St. Norbert Collegiate were people that I really trusted. They were teachers who made me feel safe.

I was a kid who was bullied for many years in grade school quite badly, and so being in an environment where I felt safe and I knew that the teachers had my back was a big deal.

And so, I brought this information to Denis Marinelli—Mr. Marinelli—one day. And I said, you know what, I really appreciate everything you've been doing for me as a young basketball player, but everyone is telling me I should go to a bigger, better school.

And, you know, the interesting thing was Mr. Marinelli did not do anything to try to convince me to stay at St. Norbert Collegiate. He listened to me, and he said to me that what he wanted for me was to have the best possible future I could have and to be happy—to be a happy kid, and that whatever I chose to do, he would support me. And if I chose to stay at that school and play for his team, he would be in the gym with me before the day started, as he already had been many days of the week, rebounding for me, making sure I could get in there and practise—put in extra practise. And he'd make sure the gym was for me—was there for me after school, and he'd make sure I had access to camps if I wanted to go, if I stayed.

And then he said, but if you choose to go to another school, a bigger school where people are telling you to go—if your family makes that choice, I want you to know that I'm still going to open the gym for you early in the morning and I'm still going to rebound for you. And I'm still going to make sure that you have the support you need and the coaching you need after hours so that you can be the best student athlete you can be, because I want you to succeed.

That was a lesson for me that—it taught me about the kinds of people, the kinds of teachers you should really have in your life. And every single student deserves to have a Mr. Marinelli in their life.

And, you know, it is so important that we do what we can as legislators to ensure that students not only have people around them who have their best interests at heart and impart on kids, you know, those kinds of moments that help inform the way that they navigate the rest of the world, but that we also protect kids from folks who maybe don't have their best interests at heart.

And, you know, this bill certainly provides an opportunity for parents, for communities to get a sense of who it is that's educating their children, to know transparently if there's any concerns they should be aware of. And it talks about putting in some measures to investigate and, you know, look at situations where,

maybe, unfortunately, kids have been at risk or harmed.

And so, I really think it's important to talk about some of the details, because the details really do matter. So, specifically—and I know that my colleague, the MLA for Transcona, has already asked about the commissioner appointment role, but I think that that's an important point to talk about.

* (15:50)

And I say that because, you know, I was pretty lucky in certain ways growing up—and I don't want to say, you know—maybe lucky is not the best word because, you know, all kids should have really great educators around them. But I was pretty fortunate to have some wonderful adults in my life, wonderful teachers in my life, who recognized that not only was I a kid going to their school who lived in the community but they also recognized that I was a first-generation kid. I was a Nigerian kid.

I was a kid who was raised in a pretty traditional, pretty strict, I-wasn't-partying-on-the-weekends kind of household, I-had-to-get-certain-grades-if-I-wanted-to-play-sports kind of household. You know, if there was an issue with the school, Mama Doris-was-at-the-school-the-next-day kind of household. And, you know, they really saw me as a whole person, a really dynamic kid.

And I think it's so important that, when we look at who is going to be appointed to oversee a disciplinary process for teachers, that that person does come with the understanding of what intersectionality means and how it functions in schools. It's really, really important that whoever that person is not only has an understanding of school systems and all of the dynamics that seem really obvious, but I think it's crucial that, to really maximize the value of that role, you know, it be somebody who has an understanding of the different identities and experiences and complexities that students have in order to make sure that any concerns that are brought forward are given their due diligence from a perspective of somebody who can appreciate the diversity that exists in Manitoba schools.

And so, I do think that it's really important that the minister have clarity on that. I don't think that we really got any clarity whatsoever from the minister when my colleague, the MLA for Transcona, asked specifically about, you know, who that person could be and what the expectations are and what they bring to the table.

I think those are very valid questions. And if we want to ensure that, you know, all issues are taken seriously and that all experiences are seen for the diverse sort of experiences and issues they may be, that the person who's in that role be someone who has an expertise that incorporates intersectionality. It's not just a buzzword; it means something very concrete and real and applicable everywhere, but certainly, here in Manitoba.

So, you know, when we talk about safety in schools, it is—it's also important for us to talk about what has also already been brought up in this House and to talk about the fact that school and school access and the relationships that happen, you know, in those places isn't just a, you know, 8:30 to 4:30 or 8:00 to 4:00, the hours of the schools now—it isn't just within that period of time, Monday to Friday, when kids are in the building, right.

We're talking about interactions and relationships that take place in sports, extracurricular activities, you know, intramural activities, student government opportunities. You know, there's all kinds of times, places and spaces where it's really important that we ensure kids are safe and that educators have a full understanding of the impact they have on students well beyond the classroom and well beyond their respective buildings—school buildings.

And so, you know, that's, you know—the other part that I think is really important in terms of when we're talking about accountability for teachers and protecting kids, we need to talk about the ways in which we are ensuring that teachers are educated, ensuring that they are informed in terms of what is appropriate and not appropriate, in terms of, you know, how power dynamics manifest in academic spaces.

And there was a bill brought forward by our colleagues on this side of the House, bill 224, that was a really good opportunity for the government, the PCs, to acknowledge that kids do not—the need to protect kids doesn't just stop during school hours; that teachers often wear very many hats, especially, you know, dealing with a government that's been underfunding and cutting school budgets for, you know, several years now. We see teachers taking on many more responsibilities. Coaching is just one example of many.

And my colleagues brought forward a bill that would have put in better provisions to protect youth in sport. To me, that's kind of a common-sense bill. It's really a common sense approach to better protecting kids. So I do think it's concerning that the PCs have

failed previously to take a step that would further protect children in sports.

And, you know, there are, unfortunately, many cases in the last handful of years alone where we've seen students be harmed, sexually abused, physically abused, emotionally and mentally abused by coaches, and, in some case, those coaches have also been their teacher. So, you can imagine the incredibly difficult dynamic for a student who may be suffering abuse at the hands of a coach. And then the same student goes to school—maybe they're competing on the weekend in a tournament. The same student returns to school, and Monday morning they're sitting in a classroom with the same person, that coach, who maybe also happens to be a teacher.

And, you know, bill 244 was an opportunity for this government to take an additional step to protect those very kids, and it is disappointing that they chose not to do so.

But, you know, on the topic of what is needed to protect kids beyond this bill—because this bill, you know, is doing something important. I do think that there's ways this bill could be strengthened, and it's really important, because we are all on the same page. We all want to do our part to make sure kids are as safe as possible in the schools, right, and to hold teachers accountable if they're abusing and misusing the trust of students and families. I also think that there's much more that can and should be done.

And, you know, there are many ways in which we can educate folks. There's a lot of training that we can provide folks that currently is not happening. I'll share with you that myself and my colleague, the MLA for St. Vital, as well as my colleague, the MLA for St. Johns, we've met with different students over the past few years who have, unfortunately, had negative experiences in their schools.

And I'll give a couple of examples, because they're specific to anti-Black racism. And these are young, Black students who should be focusing on, you know, their studies, getting the grades they want to get, participating in extra-curricular activities. School dances are still a thing, I know. I mean, TikTok.

You know, these are students who should be focusing on, you know, all the fun and important things of high school. But we were meeting with those students because they were experiencing some pretty harmful things in the hallways of their schools and they didn't feel as though they had the support—the

adequate support—of their educators, the administration of their schools.

And, you know, I think a part of the reason why there was a lack of adequate support is because there is a lack of understanding on the part of some of those educators about what anti-Black racism is and how it functions and how it hurts people, how it manifests. How do we address it meaningfully and immediately?

And so, those students came to us, because they wanted to be heard; they needed to be heard, because they had great ideas about how this can be addressed in their schools and because they understand that legislators have a responsibility to take action when those kinds of issues are brought forward.

And so, you know, something that I think this government has failed to do is look at the ways in which educators are informed—again, I'm going to use that word again—from an intersectional perspective. What does it mean when young, Black students—young, Black women, come forward and say that something that is being shown in the classroom, something that's been said in the classroom, something they've heard in the hallway, is harmful and specifically hurts them as young, Black female students?

If we are not providing the resources and the opportunities for educators to be adequately informed and equipped with the tools so that they can respond appropriately, that hurts students. And what we're talking about today is a step that's being taken to protect students. And when we talk about that, we have to be honest about how it is we're going to ensure that all students are protected. And so that's why I'm raising that, because I've met with students in Winnipeg. I've heard from students beyond Winnipeg.

* (16:00)

In fact, I visited with a young student and his family two summers ago. This kid was experiencing some pretty brutal incidents of racism in his community. And so I drove out there with the MLA for St. Johns—they'd reached out to both of us—and we met with the family. And one of the things that was abundantly clear was that there was just a deep lack of understanding of what this family had been going through. And, you know, there was a lack of clarity for administrators as to how to properly respond.

And so, again—and I can't impress this enough, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker—when we talk about Bill 35, we're talking about the importance of protecting kids, we have to make sure that we're taking

steps beyond this bill to protect all kids and to understand the experience of all children getting educated in Manitoba. It's 2023; there are many ways that we can do that, and it's really important that we do.

So I think that when a lot of people—and I raise that again because I think when a lot of people think about protecting kids from abuse and, you know, making it transparent which teachers are violating the trust of students and families and harming them, we need to recognize that harm, mistreatment, abuse happens in a myriad of ways. And the more that we talk about the ways in which it happens and create a greater understanding, the more we can effectively put policies in place that better support families and students and communities, quite frankly.

And, you know, Manitoba, like the rest of the country, is competing for international talent. There's an increase in immigration to Manitoba that we are going to see, hopefully. I know we're losing a lot of talent from Manitoba, unfortunately, under this government, but we're all hopeful that we can see an increase in international talent coming to Manitoba. And we need to make sure that we've got policies in place that recognize the unique needs of these communities and these families that are coming here.

And so, when we move forward, you know, with this bill—and I know, like I said in my beginning—my earlier remarks today, that there are some folks who have some concerns about what this means in some ways for teachers. You know, I think that it is important that we involve teachers in the conversation. They should be at the heart—along with students and families—of, you know, this legislation, in making sure that everybody, as much as possible, is on the same page about why this is important, but also recognizing that, you know, that overwhelmingly—overwhelmingly—we have such incredible teachers in Manitoba.

We have such incredible educators throughout the system working in so many different ways, wearing so many different hats. And we value that. You know, their expertise is really invaluable to our communities. And what we want to make sure is that folks who maybe have nefarious intentions or have, you know, not lived up to the standards of these incredible teachers, that families know who they are and understand the full breadth of the impacts of what their behaviours might've been.

Now, I know I talked a little bit about what it is I think can be done to strengthen a bill like this and policies that we bring forward. And, you know, I do

think it's important for us to recognize that, unfortunately, you know, here in Manitoba, there are folks who go without the same level of access to particular resources, and I'm speaking specifically now about those students who live in rural and northern communities.

You know, when we talk about protecting students, we have to recognize—and I think we do recognize—that there's a very real impact on students who are victims to mistreatment at the hands of educators. And, you know, right now, if you're a student who doesn't live in Winnipeg—if you're a family who lives, you know, in a rural or northern community—it's harder for those folks to get access to the supports that they might need in order to heal from these experiences.

You know, if you need access to a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a registered psychiatric nurse, a counsellor, a therapist, if you need access to services of various kinds in order to support you and your family after navigating maybe a harmful incident, there's barriers that exist, real barriers that exist disproportionately for folks living in rural and northern communities.

And, again, I have to say it, because it is so important, that if you are somebody who is part of a targeted or marginalized community and you have very specific needs in terms of what those services should look like to meet your needs, the barriers are even greater for those folks.

And so, when we bring a piece of legislation like this forward and we're acknowledging that we have to take steps to create safer environments for students and hold educators more accountable, right, we also need to recognize that we need to ensure that the resources and services that are meant to be there to support these kids and their families should something, you know, unfortunate or tragic take place, are there. And right now, across Manitoba, we know that isn't the case.

We know that, unfortunately, due to underfunding by this government, cuts to mental health services by this government and a failure to adequately support the areas of mental health care and well-being, that students who, again, have maybe been—unfortunately had a negative experience, a harmful experience, with an educator, would need to access or might benefit from accessing, those services are super limited now.

And, you know, I think that one step that could've been taken was instead of giving, you know \$4.5-million contract to a private company, Morneau Shepell, during the pandemic, that money could've been invested in schools, to the services and resources that would've ensured now—you know, after being a couple years removed from that money being spent—could've ensured that kids have access to more counsellors in their schools, that kids have greater access to psychologists in their schools and that families who are dealing with maybe even the news of—you know, now there's going to be some reporting and access to the information regarding misconduct; you know, it would be very jarring, I would imagine, for any family to see that, you know, perhaps their student, their child, was in a situation or in an environment with somebody who had been causing harm, and may want to access support to process that, right?

And so we need to make sure that those supports are there for them when they need it, and right now that's not the case. And we need to work, you know, extra hard to make sure that folks living in rural and northern communities, and that families who are navigating, you know, maybe more complex experiences, complex challenges, have those services even more readily available to them.

And, you know, I think, lastly—lastly—what I'd like to talk about in regards to this bill is that it is so important that, you know, government work alongside educators, work alongside administrators and work alongside families in order to bring forward policies that are as comprehensive and as forward-thinking as possible. I do think that that is a shortcoming of this government; they have a hard time working with other people and have really earned the lack of trust that Manitobans have for them, unfortunately.

And, you know, with a bill like this, being able to effectively roll this out, being able to create an environment where people have full confidence that a commissioner is going to appropriately and adequately and consistently investigate issues that are brought forward, you know, people really have to trust the government's ability to handle those decisions and make those appointments.

And, right now, in Manitoba, Manitobans don't trust this government, which is why we're here asking really important questions, so that we can go back, you know, on our side of the House, and sit down with Manitobans and provide them the answers to their very important questions and to let them know that, you know, should government change this year, or at

some point, that an NDP team, an NDP government, would work collaboratively with students and their families, with teachers and administrators to ensure that a role like the commissioner, who would be investigating as per this bill, is, you know, fulfilled by somebody who, again, has a comprehensive understanding and appreciation for the incredible diversity of our student population here in Manitoba, and somebody who, you know, really understands the value in taking an intersectional approach to their role.

And so, you know, while we're on this side of the House, we'll continue to amplify the voices of Manitobans and we'll continue to advocate for improvements to legislation that, although we may support it, we recognize improvements can be made. And that's not a bad thing, right? It's a good thing. It's a good thing that we can have that conversation in debate and hopefully bring things forward that strengthen legislation that is meant to protect vulnerable populations.

* (16:10)

And, you know, we'll continue to meet with and listen to and act on the expertise and the experience of our valued front-line educators, again, of which—we have an abundance of incredible educators in Manitoba. You know, I shared my own personal experience with just one. There are many, many, many more of them—thousands across our province. And the hope is that we can ensure that there's even more wonderful educators in our classrooms, teaching kids, supporting families and working alongside government in partnership to make our schools better, safer, healthier places for students to learn, for families to feel connected to their communities and, quite frankly, to strengthen our province.

You know, students are leaders right now, but they're certainly the leaders of tomorrow. And making sure they're protected and that they're well throughout their journey is part of how we make sure that they're well and protected as they move forward to strengthen our province as a whole.

So, thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on the record today.

Thanks.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): It's a pleasure to put some words on the record about this bill.

It serious—it had—does have some very serious flaws. I will say that, in terms of regulation, one of the things that all judicial processes, including this one,

must have—they have to have complete integrity and due process to protect everybody involved. You want to make sure that, when it comes to justice, that the person who's been hurt is protected, that they're able to come forward and speak safely, that they're not re-victimized by the process that is set out. But you also want to ensure that you have balance and evidence and that the due process of somebody facing charges under a bill like this have to be respected.

And so, one of the concerns here for us is that there's a fairly broad area where it says that—a whole series of questions about what will work or what constitutes an offence will be regulated instead of legislated. That is to say, if the Cabinet wants to do an order-in-council and declare—either add or remove these elements.

That's one of the concerns. That it sort of—it makes it too—in a sense, too broad and too flexible. We don't know what exactly would constitute an offence. We don't know what could be a problem.

And it's also just as easy—if—you might have something that's legitimate in there that's an offence or a problem that needs to be dealt with, that could be removed through regulation, as well. When, really, to us, that's one of the things that's missing, that this needs to have a legislative framework that it's—so it's very clear, because it—having it, you know, a fill-in-the-blank-later bill when it comes to regulation, really creates a lot of uncertainty for a bill that requires certainty.

The other is that—we also—the other consideration about it is, while we all agree that the protection of children needs to be paramount, one of our—one of the things we've talked about is the fact that it's—the mistreatment even of other—of teachers can actually come from within the workplace.

And so, I don't know—I know that there were some members who had the opportunity to attend the committee on Legislative Affairs, November 2nd. We brought forward a bill to reform NDAs, and there were five hours of very popular—sorry, very powerful testimony. I know not everyone has five hours to watch it on YouTube, but it is very powerful testimony of how people have been affected by nondisclosure agreements. And it was only because people were able to stand up and speak for the first time—they were not—because they had parliamentary privilege at committee, essentially, the NDAs did not apply.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And if it weren't for the fact that those people were able to speak, I don't think it would have been possible for any of us, as MLAs, to really understand what people who've been required to sign NDAs have gone through. It's—they're—often have PTSD. What they've gone through is traumatic, and they've been silenced. They're not able to talk about it. And so, if it weren't for the fact that people were able to speak up, and—I know that—I don't think people at the committee would've been as convinced.

I was bowled over, really, and I know that a lot of the other members of the committee were influenced by this very powerful testimony, and one of them was within the education system.

So I just want to talk a little about that, that there was a teacher who came forward who'd had some issues. She expressed concerns for her health and safety because she had very severe allergies at work, right? And she'd never had issues; she'd worked in other schools for years before, and all of a sudden started at a new school and expressed concerns for her health and safety because she can actually have a fatal response if she's not being—if people are being careless.

She said she asked if students could eat in one of the other—in—if students could eat in another room that was empty at lunchtime; her request was denied. And though she recognized that in a—no workplace can guarantee that there is no chance whatsoever of an allergen or a risk, she ended up being taken away in an ambulance in anaphylactic shock because of her exposure in the workplace. The administration charged her for a sick day for this incident. And that was just the beginning of those instances of an administration—essentially, the principal was not willing to accommodate the fact that she had allergies and it put her life at risk. She ended up being taken away in an ambulance, which, in itself, was traumatic.

She submitted a note confirming that her reaction was caused by coming into contact in the classroom, requested that the room not be used as a lunch room, but the administration again denied the request, saying they were not going to take any orders from the doctor; the doctor was not their boss. And this is, again, this is a case where somebody's health and even their life was at risk. This was somebody who could've died from exposure to these allergens.

Their first medical plan by the doctor was rejected, and finally, they did reach out to the Manitoba Teachers' Society, who were helpful. They spoke to a union rep, who assured them it was just a simple medical accommodation, that this thing should've

been taken care of. The union rep coached them on what to say in the letter to the principal that was respectful. But the principal responded; they said they were furious at running to the union, you know, and this is an individual who said they had the right to seek advice from MTS and should not have to fear retribution from the principal for doing so. And the challenge there is that—and this is what we saw over and over again with the testimony at the NDA committee—is that sometimes there is no place to report, and when there is a place to report, it isn't always satisfactory.

The—in the end, she—the challenge here is that there's an essential conflict; there's a conflict because of the fact that both the worker—the teacher, in this case—and the principal are defended by the same union. So it's difficult for the union itself to be able to resolve this because their responsibility is to both individuals. So how do you square that circle? And she said—she testified that teachers and principals are in the same union. While trying to settle the matter, she was forced to drop a complaint and end the human rights grievance by accepting a small settlement. And in exchange for which she had to sign an NDA to ensure that she never exposed the principal or the division and never talked about it. So she had to drop her claims, drop her reporting where she could actually get some compensation for the suffering that she'd experienced.

And, you know, here again, when it comes to NDAs—this is part of the reason I asked the minister, because I hope that this—if this bill were to pass, if this board is created, this certification board or this examination board is created, that it needs to be able to hear from people and people need to be able to speak the truth and not be silenced by NDAs, if that's the case. And she said she ended up with PTSD. The individual ended up with PTSD, and the person who gave them that PTSD through mistreatment at work is still working. They were forced to sign an NDA under duress and had no independent counsel to protect their rights.

And she said being silenced by the NDA and not being able to share what the experience was like being trapped in a bottle without air.

And this is one of the issues that is so important because there is actually an enormous amount of workplace violence and workplace harassment that is not—that is difficult to report.

And, actually, the Canadian Labour Congress put out a report called respect at work. And it was very important. It had—it was a survey of workers all across the country, with very significant findings. And, again,

these are—I believe these are things that every member should read, if they have an opportunity, to read the testimony of the committee of NDAs. It's incredibly important.

* (16:20)

But also this report by the Canadian Labour Congress about the difficulties that people face at work because it's really, really shocking. It actually shows—it talked to and surveyed workers in the private sector, as well as the union—as well as unionized workers. Unionized workers tend to have slightly better protections than the private sector, but the levels of—the number of individuals who were experiencing bad behaviour at work, it wasn't just a few bad apples. It was people—we're talking about people—50 per cent of the—50 per cent of more—or more of workers were sometimes facing—were facing serious abuse. We're talking about sexual harassment, sexual assault, violence and assaults at work.

It's truly—it's a very, very important document. It's unfortunate—hasn't had the kind of attention it had, but education is one of those sectors. They said survey respondents indicated that third parties and co-workers are the most common perpetrators of harassment and violence—28 and 25 per cent, respectively—and the findings reflect the sectors most commonly represented by survey respondents: health care, social assistance, education and public administration. They involve both working with the public and have a significant proportion of women workers.

But one of the challenges was reporting. And this is one of the things that I hope that—this is actually one of the reasons why there is some reason of the necessity of this bill. It said there continued to be major barriers for reporting, and survey respondents were more likely to report experiences of harassment and violence than experiences of sexual harassment and violence. But, unfortunately, for survey respondents who did report experiences of harassment and violence, or sexual harassment and violence—and this is truly tragic—the majority believed that reporting made no difference or made the situation worse.

And I'll just say that again: The majority of people in the survey believed that reporting injuries to them made no difference or made the situation worse. For those who experienced sexual harassment and violence and made reports, less than one in four believed that by reporting to a supervisor or manager, reporting to their union or filing a formal complaint or grievance, their situation was made better. Many believed it made it worse.

And so that is something we should all be considering with a bill like this, is that this is an unacceptable way for people to be treated. Is it—especially if people are going to be reporting, they have to be assured that they're going to be protected, that they are going to be safe. That they're going to be able to—and that they won't be punished, which unfortunately is the result.

Again, so it says, of significance, the number of survey respondents who believed that reporting their experiences of sexual harassment and violence would not make a difference was 38 per cent; or that reporting would result in negative consequences, was 36 per cent.

That's the vast majority. It's two thirds of people. The findings are supported by research on workplace sexual harassment and violence, which has demonstrated that most women do not report their experiences for a variety of reasons, including fear of retaliation—including job loss, potential disbelief and/or lack of information about resources.

And when they talk about the places that are affected, one in two—50 per cent—were physically intimidated, and almost one in six—which is 16 per cent—were physically assaulted, resulting in serious injury. One in six. These are really extraordinary numbers.

And this is why it's so important to be able to have bills that don't just cover students, that actually are able to deal with these complaints in a way that's fair and equitable, and not limit these—not limit bills simply to, you know, the—it needs—the—we need to not just be protecting students—we need to protect students, we need to protect children—but we also need to be making sure that the people who are working in schools are protected as well, because that hasn't happened to an adequate degree.

And it is a very serious challenge in this province—I've worked with a number of survivors of violence and sexual assault, and it is extremely difficult to report. It is extremely difficult for people to get the justice they hope for. There is barrier after barrier after barrier, in part because it seems that the systems are set up to defend the system and not to actually get justice or fairness for people who are being mistreated.

And so, I mean, the other thing about this is that it is very narrow in—it's also a bill that is very narrow in scope. I did say—see somebody point out that we don't have this level of oversight and complaint for other professions in the province, the police being one. You know, is that—I will have to point out that, you know, in the last 20 or 30 years, I don't know—or

I'm not sure that I know of any cases where there are—where teachers have been putting people's lives at risk. And, clearly, the—teaching is very different than policing, but with policing, the police actually have—or, are granted the right to use violence and deadly force, and we have looser regulations over them than we do over teachers.

So, part of this is that it's, I would say, a bit selective. We do need this—we do need bills and this kind of regulation, but there's a real lack of capacity, because the requirements for reporting too often are not independent—is that people can't go to courts. They're expected to go to somebody else first, even if—take the example of whistle-blower laws—that you're expected to reach out to your immediate supervisor; well, what if your immediate supervisor is the problem?

And, unfortunately, this is the same case, I will say, in environments where—let's say, a unionized environment. The expectation, right—and there's lots of justification for this—that if you're a worker and you've got a conflict with somebody, the assumption is that it's going to be with your employer, that it's going to be your employer who's been mistreating you. And, again, there's plenty of evidence for that. There's plenty of justification for that. That's why labour movements exist. That's why unions exist; to protect people. The challenge is sometimes when there's—it's within a group, and you're having the challenge of being able to deal with these things. You're able to have independent—an 'independent' place to go, so it isn't people marking their own homework, so to speak.

So, this is—as a bill, it's—it is—we see it as being deeply flawed. I think that the critical element, just to go over again, is that it's too loose in terms of its definition of what could be a problem.

To have a situation where you've got regulation, which is—which can be made up after the fact, can be deleted after the fact, rather than legislation where we know ahead of time this is going to be—if this legislation comes to be, it will be a powerful piece of legislation that'll make the difference between whether somebody gets to keep their job or not. It'll make a difference between whether they're—you know, could be publicly shamed or not. It could result in ruining their careers and derailing their life, right?

That's—those are the consequences, sometimes, for people who are going to be—and you want to make sure that that never happens—that you never have a situation where somebody is wrongfully convicted. That they are smeared or that something happens to them and they're—that they're found guilty just on the

basis of an accusation and not on the basis of evidence. So you have to have an incredibly robust framework for that, to make sure that that's happening.

And that, again, is why I think why this needs to be—those rules need to be legislated. It's very important for that to be something that is debated out in the open, that's voted on out in the open by members of the Legislature, and not simply decided behind closed doors and sort of decided by fiat, by a government—by whatever government of the day it is, because you could be adding those regulations or taking them away.

The other is that it needs to be broader in the sense that we need to have—and again, this is partly about protection—again, protection of teachers. But recognizing that it's about—not just about protecting children, but about protecting the entire environment. That the work—if you have a workplace—it's often said of health care that the condition of work is the condition of care—the conditions of work are the conditions of care. And if you don't have good conditions at work, you have bad conditions of care.

And we're seeing that right now: places like Grace and other—elsewhere, where, due to staffing shortages, people are burned out, people are losing—or, struggling to keep their compassion. These are real challenges that happen. But the same is also true of education. That you want to have a positive—you want to have a positive environment, and you need to deal with people who are either completely—their behaviour is inappropriate or their—the use of authority is inappropriate as well.

* (16:30)

And so, part of that is guaranteeing that everybody—everybody—in Manitoba has access to be able to say—to be able to report, to be able to report without fear. And on the issue of silencing people with NDAs, especially, this is—the degree of trauma that people can go through at work, the people—the way people can be traumatized by be mistreated at work, being gaslit at work, losing their pension, losing their job.

The one—I, again, I urge everyone to read the Hansard from that committee because you really see the depth—and it is all workplace; it is all—almost all workplace injuries that are happening. There were a couple of family situations, but it happened in every workplace. It happened in private workplaces and it happened in public workplaces. It happened in education, health care—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order, please.

I'm going to ask the member to pull back his comments to this specific bill. While I appreciate his concern around NDAs, I think he's sort of gone a little bit far in talking about that. I need him to specifically talk about this registry of teachers and what this bill itself is about.

Mr. Lamont: I'll just add, the reason for this is simply that we want to make sure that, if we're going to have a functioning registry, that people are able to speak up and then not—they're not silenced. Because right now, it is extremely common to use—again, I'm sorry to use—to bring up NDAs, but within the context of the teachers' registry, that it's extremely—it's very important that, if the process is going to be fair, if the registry is going to work, that the organization, that the institution, has access to all the relevant information and that nothing can be held back.

Which is why I asked that question of the minister earlier about whether people would be able to—if it is an effective quasi-judicial institution, if it actually functions as any form of court, then that should—then we should have total freedom of access to those—to that information to ensure that the people in charge are actually able to make the very best decisions.

So, again, this is a bill that—it is flawed. We do need to have—we do—to make—need to make sure that the processes are good. And there are two—again, there are two big holes in this bill so far, which, I mean, they could be remedied through amendments. One is to ensure that the conditions and everything else is set out in legislation, the other is to actually expand it to be able to protect teachers and to expect—to protect people more broadly in the workplace and not simply to focus on the safety of children because, ultimately, the—this—the safety of people who work in education is just as important.

So, with that, I will finish up.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I'm very happy to stand today to have the opportunity to speak about Bill 35, The Education Administration Amendment Act.

This bill amends The Education Administration Act. To teach in a public school or funded independent school, a teacher must have a Manitoba teaching certificate and the following are the key changes that are being made in relation to these certificates: that there's an online registry of teachers established to allow the public to obtain information about a teacher's teaching certificate, including the date it was issued, its class and its current status; the registry also includes a

record of any disciplinary action against a teacher; a director of certification is appointed to oversee the certification process for teachers and the registry; the government is given authority to make competent standards that teachers must meet to be issued and maintain a teaching certificate; and a commissioner is to be appointed to oversee a new discipline process for teachers.

The commissioner review complaints from the public and reports from school boards and other employers about teacher misconduct and incompetence. The commissioner can decide what action is appropriate to address a complaint or report and can: investigate; close the matter by not taking further action, postpone taking action if the teacher's employer or a criminal proceeding is addressing the same concern; enter into a consent resolution agreement in which the commissioner and the teacher agree on appropriate consequences that address the concern without a hearing; and order a hearing and appoint a hearing panel.

If a hearing panel finds a teacher guilty of professional misconduct or incompetence, or that a teacher lacks capacity to carry out professional responsibilities, the panel may suspend or cancel the teacher's certificate, place limitations or conditions on it or reprimand the teacher. An appeal from the hearing panel's decision may be made to the Court of King's Bench, and consequential amendments are made to The Public Schools Act and The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act.

So, Madam Speaker, clearly—and I think this message has come across loud and clear from my colleagues today—that safety of children is our No. 1 priority. You know, I'm a mom. I—prior to being an MLA, I was a counsellor. I worked with kids for almost three decades. I started my career working with children who were sexually exploited. My first seven years as a counsellor, I worked in a rehabilitation residential program for sexually exploited children. And—you know, I was pretty young, I was only in my 20s when I started that work—and it really set the stage for the rest of my life, for what I'm doing today in many ways.

So there's no question where I stand on this issue of safety for children. Every child should feel safe in school and should be able to attend school.

I want to say that teachers in general—the vast majority—I'd be willing to say, probably, 99.5 per cent of teachers in the world are in it for the right reasons. We know that teachers have an incredible power to change and influence the lives of children.

And most of the time, they influence their lives for the better. But sometimes, they influence their lives in irreversible and terrible ways. We heard a wonderful story—testimony from the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) about the influence of a very, very powerful teacher and coach in their lives.

You know, I had some pretty wonderful teachers along the way, too. I also had—I have teachers in my family. I have an insanely large family because of all kinds of blending along the way but I have—I was trying to count it up—I believe three brothers, three sisters-in-law, an uncle and two aunts and someone I kind of consider a sister in our blended family that are all teachers. Some of them are retired now, some of them are currently teachers today. And so, education is a really big part of any family conversation that I'm in. I know and respect these family members and their skills and ability and how they change the lives of students.

And I have a number of friends that are educators. I had the opportunity—when I worked at Women's Health Clinic for a number of years, I trained volunteers to deliver workshops in classrooms on body image and self-esteem. Some of that was to offset some of the negative influences out there in the culture, like, the—you know, the sexualization of girls that happens in the general, everyday life of the world. Through that program, a number of the volunteers in my program—actually, they were in school to become teachers and they went on to become educators. So, this is a very big part of my life and I have enormous respect for all of these educators.

But I also know—something I know very deeply in my bones is that when someone wants—when someone is a pedophile, when their sexual proclivity is towards children or youth, when that is what they want access to, they are very smart, Madam Speaker, and they will find their victims.

And that is why pedophiles go into teaching. Pedophiles go into child-care work. Pedophiles go into medical professions. Pedophiles generally don't go into jobs where they have no access to children, unless they have had therapy and rehabilitation and are actively working at not offending, right? But there is a reason that this happens.

* (16:40)

And people are often so surprised it was that person they really trusted, they thought was so great, who was so generous or went out of their way or did those extra things. And it's really hard for children to

kind of see their way, you know, to understand, especially because pedophiles will also go out of their way to target the most vulnerable. They're way more likely to go after a child whose parents don't seem to be around as much. They're way more likely to go after a child who perhaps doesn't know the rules or the laws, or is very, very lonely, or appears to not have a good support system, friends.

So none of this happens by accident. And, again, I'm going to say it again on the record, most teachers are incredibly generous people whose whole goal in life is to just teach children and make the world better for children. But, sadly, we will find pedophiles in the teaching profession, because it's—it positions them perfectly to meet their victims. It's never an accident.

And so we do, in fact, need to have things in place to protect children. Every child should feel safe in school and should be safe to attend school. We need mechanisms and structures in place to ensure that children are protected in our schools and ensure there's accountability for people that hurt children.

We do support this bill and the principle of accountability that it reflects. But we also believe that teachers and educators do need to have a voice about any kind of disciplinary processes that affect them, how those processes will be designed, and it's really important that the representatives of teachers and educators need to have their voice heard in this process. They need to be at the table to ensure that voice is heard and the rights of all educators are respected.

We're committed to listening to the concerns of their representatives, and we are also very interested in bringing forward amendments that might improve this bill. Again, the vast majority of teachers are committed to helping and protecting kids, and Manitobans see that every day in the great work that teachers, education assistants and other educators do in the classroom with tens of thousands of students. But we must have accountability for those who break the rules.

This bill would allow parents and students in Manitoba to be able to check on a teacher's disciplinary history and have a new way to bring forward misconduct complaints. It would also create an independent commissioner who would oversee that process. And, as I said, we're listening to the concerns of teachers and educators, who deserve to have a voice in the disciplinary processes they're subject to. And this bill just may need to have some amendments to ensure that it is, first and foremost, protecting children.

We have heard that feedback from child protection groups, that while this bill is very important, it isn't perfect. The organization Stop Educator Child Exploitation has said that the registry is a positive first step. And the Canadian Centre for Child Protection has also said the bill is a positive step, which will bring Manitoba more in line with other provinces on this issue, including British Columbia and Ontario.

I want to say a little bit more about the impact of sexual abuse, about what happens to children who have been sexually exploited in the education system by a teacher, by a coach, by any adult they come in contact with who has power—so much power that they carry in their lives. So I'm just going to give a little bit of—more background on that.

We know that victims of any kind of sexual assault and sexual exploitation, you know, there—I think I'll just tell a little bit of a personal story. My grade 6 teacher—I'm tempted to put his name on the record, but I'm—won't—he had a habit of walking into the girls' change room, supposedly to tell us to hurry up and get ready and get out to the soccer field. He also had a habit of staring at the breasts of the girls in his grade 6 class. And he frequently made inappropriate comments. This was 1977; none of us had any idea what to do about that. *[interjection]* I'm fine. Sorry. I'm going to say, fortunately for me, I have no idea if his behaviour ever went further than that, but I often wonder about my quietest classmates; wonder if they were harmed by this man.

And I'm giving that example because, to my knowledge, he didn't sexually assault anyone, right. But he said things and he did things and he created a space where it was dangerous to be a girl. And those kinds of behaviours have an impact—a significant impact.

So, victims of sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment—and I'm just going to say, sexual danger zones in schools. You know, being around perpetrators of that kind of behaviour affects people—girls, boys, non-binary, trans, all genders. They're affected emotionally, physically, psychologically and socially.

There are a number of other effects that this kind of sexual violation has on youth. They—my clients that I worked with for decades engaged in self-harm. They were more at risk for, you know, sexual—maybe sexual behaviours ahead of their age, sexually transmitted infections. They struggled with substance abuse to cope with their trauma. They often experience disassociation, which is a pretty healthy defence mechanism for the

brain to help you cope with trauma. Some experienced panic attacks, and I worked for years with people with eating disorders.

And, you know, with eating disorders, about 70 per cent of those who experience eating disorders have had some kind of trauma in their life and often, but not always, that's been a sexual trauma.

It affects survivors in so many ways, including perceptions of their body and feelings of control. We know that youth can sometimes become pregnant following sexual assault. Some struggle with sleep disorders, including falling or staying asleep, sleeping at unusual times of the day or for longer or shorter than usual. And being sexually exploited puts youth at increased risks of experiencing depression or suicidal thoughts.

Being sexually assaulted, especially by a person that a young person trusts, can often cause that person to struggle to develop relationships or trust others again. And, you know, when I think about some of those trusting relationships, like in the world of texting, oh, my goodness. Like, I'm sure many of us are happy we did not have to navigate our adolescence through, you know, cellphones and texting and social media. But the kind of immediate access that an adult who wants to exploit a child has through those mechanisms is terrifying.

You know, we're hearing that there's significant numbers of—an increase in numbers of teachers who have been accused of things over the last couple years. That, maybe, is tied to the pandemic. And I'm not letting them off the hook for whatever happened for them during the pandemic, but I think about what was happening for those youth, that—some of them just desperate for connection, and how that could've put them at risk.

We know that many victims experience emotions such as anger, fear, frustration, confusion, guilt, shame and grief. Victims may be angry with the offender, with service providers, with family members, with friends, the justice system and often—in fact, almost always—with themselves.

Oftentimes, victims are confused or unsure of what actually happened, and this is particularly true if the victim is young and is assaulted by a person they trust. And, sadly, some victims, as we know, are, you know—they go on to—you know, they're suicidal, they're self-harming, they may experience a lifetime of PTSD or flashbacks.

We know—the research shows that the shock from victimization and trauma touch not only the victim, but family members, next of kin, neighbours and acquaintances, and these effects can endure for a lifetime.

* (16:50)

I do want to say, you know, if—sometimes people do turn in—tune in and watch our debate—so, I think as we're, you know, winding down the day, I want to make some comments for anybody who is paying attention to this.

We know that if you've been a survivor that you may have faced stigma in coming forward. You may have been blamed for being a victim. We know that, you know, that you may not have been notified of supports available to you in the case of sexual assault. But it's important that you know that victims of crime, including sexual assault, have the right to access services provided by Manitoba Justice Victim Services and that there are workers throughout the province.

If there's any youth watching this, if any classes decided to tune in and look at the debate on this bill, I want to remind you this bill doesn't need to pass for you to get help, that it's very important that you speak to an adult that you truly trust who hasn't harmed you in any way, and to talk about what's happened to you, whether it's something that happened to you in the community by a family member, a friend or happened to you in the schools.

Anyone who has been a victim of sexual assault is not to blame and is worthy and deserving of support and care.

Further to this bill, I do want to say that we have received some suggestions from concerned family members. Some of these came in in relation to bill 224, the bill that the members on the other side of the House did not support and pass, which was to protect youth in sports for some of the same issues. And I hope that—I hope they've had a change of heart around that.

But some of the suggestions that have come in from family members that started when we initially brought that bill forward were, you know, that these rules have to apply across the board, and the adults who have responsibility for children and have access to children need to follow the same rules and understand what is and isn't okay and be held accountable—be held accountable when they harm.

There were suggestions that teachers shouldn't be allowed to have players or students at their house. And, you know, I do know there's good teachers that have, you know, hosted students in their house—in their home with no harm.

I also know that the grade 6 teacher I mentioned, you know, he hosted an annual, kind of, barbecue for his students in the backyard of his home. He—it was a, like, we were out, it was a very rural community. It was a short walk to his property from the school, and it was an annual event.

And, you know, to this day, I think about that. I think about that barbecue at his house and I think nothing happened that I know of, but I don't know that and I don't know if that was the beginning of making sure that somebody who maybe lived closer to him, like, understood where he lived. I've no idea what that was about.

I remember not wanting to go. I remember thinking he was, like, disgusting, and we were kind of afraid of him, but—those of us that did talk about it—but we also kind of had to because he was our teacher and that's what he told us we were going to do on one of the last days of school in June, and I know it was an annual event.

So it's really worth looking at the suggestion about, you know, is it ever appropriate and in what circumstances would it be appropriate or safe for teachers to host students in their home.

Another suggestion that came in from community members was about if a teacher has their own child in the school where they teach. You know, the principal or club supervisor should be informed so they can waive the policy about having classmates in their house.

At the start of each school year, during the first assembly, all students and staff should be informed that students aren't allowed to be at teachers' houses and that there's a tip line to report concerns. And parents should also be informed about this.

Schools should try to host a survivor of abuse who's willing to come and speak at a high school. Hopefully, during a student's four years in high school, they would hear a victim's story at least once.

And again, these are suggestions that came forward from community members. Obviously, professional educators and professionals in preventing sexual abuse should be involved in helping develop some of these things.

There's other prevention strategies that can be put in place, as well. You know, schools and clubs could be implementing policies that—and education that just helps children and teenagers recognize signs of abuse, signs of grooming and learn how to react in these situations.

Some of the messages—and any of us that have parented, I hope, are very familiar with these messages that children need to hear over and over again: that their bodies are theirs, that, you know, if they have ever given someone permission to touch their body or they have, you know, played or touched, whether it's just hugging or tickling, in any way, first of all, that's their choice. If they don't want to be tickled or they don't want to be hugged, they shouldn't have to be, in any context. That helps kids learn that they have autonomy over their bodies. But if they've given permission for those activities, it doesn't obligate them to ever participate in that another time.

We need to teach kids to trust their instincts, and we need to teach them that it's actually never, ever okay for an adult to be interested in them sexually and to make any kind of sexual behaviour or remarks towards them. And another part of that education—you know, one of the struggles, often, for kids is that alcohol and drugs may help them—or may cloud their own sense of boundaries and their own sense of judgment or autonomy, but also to be very cautious if adults are ever offering them drugs or alcohol and wondering about what their motive would be for that kind of behaviour.

So, Madam Speaker, I know that there are, you know, numerous other parts of this conversation that need to happen, and I trust that, you know, I trust that eventually, when this gets to the committee stage, that we're also going to hear from a lot of community members who have something to say about this issue.

It's—these are changes that can't be made lightly, but also are incredibly important. They need to be done right. They need to be done in consultation with teachers. They need to be done in consultation with the groups that promote the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. And they need to be done right; they need to be done right the first time so that we can have a real impact on the youth in this province.

So, Madam Speaker, I am going to—I know my colleague wants to put a few words on the record, so I'm going to sit down now. Thank you for your time. I appreciated getting to speak on this very important issue.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to share a few words on Bill 35, The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct).

When I first—seen the legislation brought forward, one of the things—and I shouldn't say one of the things—many of the things that I first thought about is professional conduct.

And for myself and my community and my—largely, my constituency, there is still a significant impact of the residential school system, the day schools. And the conduct that was brought upon students there was not given a second thought. It was not disclosed. Students that attended those schools were not believed, and they were told they were making up stories and that didn't happen. And they had absolutely devastating impacts and intergenerationally impacted families for generations, and we're going to see that for generations to come.

So, Madam Speaker—and, in some cases, it was traumatic. Some cases, those students never came home. They never saw their families again. They were—and I'm going to say—they were killed in those institutions and killed in those schools.

So when we talk about safety and professional conduct in school, that is something that hits very close to home for a lot of Indigenous people and 'iligenous' communities and Indigenous students here in Manitoba. I could—and I'm not going to sit here or stand here and talk about their stories, because that is their stories and their lived experiences to tell.

But I will share something that my dad, when he attended a day school, was kind of subject to. In our—

Madam Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 28 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Monday, April 3rd, at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 23, 2023

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