

First Session – Forty-Third 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-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 7, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 8—The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): I move, seconded by the minister of—by the First Minister, that Bill 8, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Fontaine: Bill 8, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, will protect access to abortion services and ensure the safety and security of all Manitobans who access or provide abortion services through the creation of buffer zones around clinics and facilities providing those services and the homes of service providers.

With Bill 8, Manitoba joins BC, Newfoundland, Labrador, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia who already have said legislation.

Abortion is health care. It's a human right. Bill 8 affirms these facts. And while some citizens may not agree with abortion, don't have one. And if folks feel the need to protest against these human rights, they're welcome to do it here at the Manitoba Legislature.

I'm happy to present Bill 8 for consideration, and I look forward to it passing unanimously.

Miigwech.

The Speaker: Any further bills? The honourable minister—sorry about that.

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

Bill 9—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Simard), that Bill 9, The Employment Standards

Code Amendment Act; Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

The Speaker: And just as a reminder to all ministers, the first speech on the introduction should be around 30 seconds.

MLA Marcelino: Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

The purpose of this bill is to extend long-term leave for serious injury or illness from 17 to 27 weeks, to align with the federal employment insurance sickness period. This will ensure that all Manitoban workers are able to access enough unpaid protected leave from their jobs to receive the full extended EI benefits.

Extending Manitoba's protective leave to 27 weeks supports workers who are in the difficult circumstance of having to temporarily leave their job due to serious illness or injury, and this will also ensure that Manitoban workers have the time and flexibility that they need to recover and return to work.

This will be beneficial for those with serious illnesses, such as cancer, to focus on their treatment and recovery while being able to collect federal EI benefits, if they qualify, for the entire available period.

I'm pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The honourable Minister of post-secondary education—Advanced Education and Training, sorry.

Bill 10—The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt), that Bill 10, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act, now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Cable: Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 10. This bill will amend The Advanced

Education Administration Act, will allow government to oversee the implementation of sexual violence policies in post-secondaries.

So this will address and prevent sexual violence because that's a priority for our government, and will ensure staff, students and faculty in our post-secondary institutions are both—are safe both in and off-campus activities.

We know that most of our institutions are responsive and responsible partners that share the same values and priorities of our government. But in the event that an institution fails to uphold or take appropriate action, we will now have the ability to act. We want to strengthen compliance and ensure that institutions respond in a timely way and to properly support the safety of students on our campus communities.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The honourable Minister of Justice, and just a reminder again, 30 seconds.

Bill 11—The Statutes and Regulations Amendment and Interpretation Amendment Act

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 11, The Statutes and Regulations Amendment and Interpretation Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm pleased to introduce The Statutes and Regulations Amendment and Interpretation Amendment Act. This bill will provide the tools needed to update language to achieve gender neutrality in Manitoba statutes and regulations, to efficiently make minor amendments and corrections to regulations and to allow for changes to be made to coming-into-force proclamation before an act's commencement date, if required. It will help ensure that our legislation is more representative of all Manitobans.

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

No further introduction of bills? Committee reports? Seeing none, tabling of reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to table the first inaugural annual

report on nutrition programs for the '22-23 school year that are provided by the K-to-12 public schools right here in Manitoba. This report stems from the passage in the previous session of bill 222, and I'm thrilled to share it today as the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: I would advise that the 90 minutes' timeline has been met, so the honourable Minister of Families.

International Women's Day

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): As Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, I am honoured to celebrate International Women's Day, which takes place tomorrow, March 8th, 2024.

International Women's Day is a global movement recognizing and holding up women and girls across the globe. This is my absolute favourite day of the year. It's a day where we lift up each other, where we can celebrate our achievements and where we find empowerment and liberation in one another as women and girls.

* (13:40)

Yet, on this International Women's Day, we are witnessing devastating levels of global unrest, political instability and armed conflict not seen in a generation. From the Congo, Haiti, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza and more, women and children are bearing the brunt of these conflicts.

Today I joined the chorus of international voices calling out the sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in Gaza and women and girls in Israel. The latest United Nations' report found reasonable grounds that acts of sexual violence took place on October 7. And right now, thousands of women and girls have been killed, maimed, displaced and are starving in Gaza.

Patriarchy, misogyny and toxic masculinity has no place in our future. It's a system designed to uphold the power and privilege of men at the expense of women, girls and marginalized genders.

Patriarchy dictates who we should be, how we should behave, how we should speak, what we can wear and what we can do with our bodies, spaces where we can safely be in and what we should aspire to achieve—more often, cis heterosexual marriage and babies.

In the struggle against patriarchy, I put my full faith in the undeniable and sheer will, spirit and soul of women and girls and the incredible courage and determination of rebuilding families, communities and nations.

And so on this International Women's Day, let me say this to women and girls everywhere: Live your best life. Take full advantage of every opportunity available to you. Live up to the potential your ancestors gave you. Take risks. Take up space. Take up all the space. Wear those amazing earrings. Speak your truth loudly.

Be bold. Let them speak behind your back at how unmanageable and loud you are. Never shrink yourself to make men comfortable. Unapologetically and courageously smash patriarchy every single day, not only on International Women's Day.

And know this to be true: Women and girls are the holders of solutions, and we will be the ones to heal this world.

Happy International Women's Day.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I am honoured, excited and proud to stand here in the House today to recognize the importance of International Women's Day being celebrated across the world tomorrow.

Throughout my life and career, I have been blessed to know and be inspired by so many women that show us what it means to be strong, determined and unapologetically woman.

Immediately, I think of my mom who raised me to stand up for what is right and has been such a supportive and encouraging force in my life. And of course, I think of my daughter, with her 5-year-old can-do and determined attitude, gives me not only inspiration every day, but excitement for what the future can hold for her and our next generation of female leaders.

Every day, in every way, there is more work to be done to improve opportunity for women. But today is a chance for us all to thank and recognize those who have broken down so many barriers and glass ceilings to get us to where we are today.

I want to thank all the women who have run for elected office, in council chambers, the Legislature, Parliament and the Senate.

I want to thank the women who have broken down so many traditional barriers in the areas of STEM, manufacturing, trades, finance, business and

agriculture. Throughout my career in these fields, I have first-hand witnessed the willpower of so many women boldly using their voice and their expertise.

But, we also need to continue to voice our concerns for those women whose voices have been shut down, intimidated or simply targeted and torn down simply for their gender. Sadly, this continues to happen today.

As important it is to recognize the many efforts that have been done to get us where we are today, accelerating progress, the theme for this year, also means acknowledging that we still have a long way to go in the pursuit of gender equality.

We on this side of the House understand when women benefit, society benefits. This is why our PC government took action, Honourable Speaker, and made significant steps to reduce barriers and combat inequality in Manitoba. This includes, but is not limited to, removing requirements for victims of intimate partner violence to prove that they are in an intimate relationship with someone who is abusing them through The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act; and partnering with the federal government to invest \$22.3 million toward the implementation of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

There is still much more work to do. Sadly, across our province and across our world, we are constantly reminded of this, hearing repeated cases of gender-based violence, sexism, discrimination, lack of access to necessary resources and pay equity. We have also seen harassment and abuse take on new forms through the digital age. These past few years have had a disproportionate impact on women, including an increase in domestic violence and sexual assaults, job insecurity and challenges with work-life balance for mothers, daughters, sisters and caregivers.

We can be the change that we wish to see. With a collective effort, we can make life safer and more prosperous for our mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, partners and friends. Honourable Speaker, this is a call to action.

As I look across this Chamber, I am inspired to see so many women who have made strides towards gender equality. So today, and every day, let's celebrate women. Let us raise awareness against the bias that still exists today. This is what International Women's Day is all about.

So, in closing, together let's lift up women and celebrate their hard-won achievements and continue

paving the way for a future generation of female leaders.

Thank you.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

The Speaker: Does the member have leave? *[Agreed]*

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, tomorrow, March 8th, is International Women's Day, and it serves as a reminder that gender equality is one of the most effective ways to build a healthier, more prosperous and more inclusive world. This year's theme is Invest in women: Accelerate progress. And to do this, we need to recognize women in all fields.

Throughout history women have trailblazed against all odds. We can go back to 1645, where Jeanne Mance founded Canada's first hospital. In 1867 Dr. Emily Stowe became the first Canadian women physician to practise in Canada, and in 1992 Dr. Roberta Bondar became the first Canadian astronaut woman sent up in space

And, Honourable Speaker, I always like to bring it back to the House. Here in these Chambers, we are so lucky to have our colleague from The Pas-Kameesak who, in 2015, was the first Indigenous woman ever elected into the Manitoba Legislature. We also have our colleague from Tuxedo, who was the first female premier ever elected here in Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, we have a lot to celebrate. Just earlier this week I met with two wonderful women from the Islamic Circle of North America, who have a chapter here in Manitoba. The organization dedicates themselves to helping others, be it by spending time with seniors, donating books, food and clothing drives, participating in celebrations and more, and also taking the time to both teach and learn about others.

And this Saturday I'm attending an event being put on by the Asian Women of Winnipeg, who use their signature event to showcase the accomplishments of women and acknowledge their hard work and the barriers women had to overcome in order to be successful. I hope to see all of my colleagues there.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before we move on to member statements, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce.

Seated in the public gallery from St. John's High School we have 15 grade 12 students under the direction of Tala Gammon, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for St. Johns, the honourable Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine).

Welcome.

* (13:50)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Maryna Olieshko and Neonila Palii

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): Today, I want to recognize the resilience of women across the world. I invited two inspiring women from my constituency of Kildonan-River East, a mother and daughter who join us today in the gallery.

Maryna and Nila moved to my constituency from Ukraine within the last couple of years. These incredible women were forced to flee their home, leaving behind their loved ones, particularly Maryna's husband, the father of her two young boys.

It's beautiful when multiple generations of strong women come together to care for their families, their community and each other. Their connection reflects a common intergenerational story among women: mothers, daughters, grandmothers, all working together to raise villages, build community and make impactful change in our world.

For many newcomer women who are forced to uproot their lives, every day is a challenge. This includes navigating child care, employment and finding resources for their new settlement.

This mother and daughter have supported each other throughout this difficult transition. On top of all of this, they choose to still connect in the community by meeting new people at church and at the thrift store where they work together.

I want to acknowledge Maryna and Nila today for their bravery, resilience and strength. Our communities thrive when we encourage and celebrate women's leadership and determination.

Please join me in thanking these brave women for their contributions to our community.

Thank you.

Marine Museum of Manitoba

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Today, I arise to bring recognition to the Marine Museum of Manitoba

and to the exceptional general manager that has continued to bring forward the vision and dedication in giving its customers a truly unique experience.

The Marine Museum of Manitoba is a true historical gem located only 39 kilometres from the steps of this Legislative Building, located in Selkirk, Manitoba. The museum provides its patrons with a wealth of nautical history of the ships and vessels that navigated the waters of the Red River and Lake Winnipeg. The museum provides a hands-on experience, giving you the opportunity to step back in time as you board, explore and learn the history of the S.S. Kenora, the C.G.S. Bradbury and many more ships.

Honourable Speaker, the Marine Museum of Manitoba will celebrate its 50th year this summer. Fifty years of preserving and showcasing the history of these ships and their importance to the communities they served requires a special staff to make that happen.

'Tonay'—today I would like to acknowledge and commend the general manager, Shaylene Nordal, for her dedication, vision, unbridled passion and hard work preserving history for all future generations to enjoy. This summer, Shaylene will celebrate 30 years of continued dedication and perseverance at the Marine Museum of Manitoba. Shaylene's three decades leaves a legacy for all visitors to enjoy today, tomorrow and in another 30 years.

It's with great respect for Shaylene and her service, I ask everyone here to join me in acknowledging the contributions of one of our unsung heroes of Manitoba history.

Women in Small Business

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): Honourable Speaker, today I rise to honour women who are leaders in Manitoba's small-business sector. Some of those women are joining us in the gallery today, and they have been influential entrepreneurs in our province's economy.

Small businesses are the heart and soul of our economy and our neighbourhoods. Women in business continue to face discrimination and minimized opportunities. Often, women are overlooked, underappreciated, undervalued and underestimated in our ability to be leaders in our communities.

There are close to 4,000 women-owned businesses in Manitoba. An incredible number, and yet they only make up 12 per cent—12 per cent—of all businesses in Manitoba. We must encourage and uplift

women in order for there to be equal representation in our business sector.

I would argue that Manitoba would not be the thriving place it is without the female leaders who either began their own businesses or were strong, fierce advocates for other women in business.

I want to ask the small-business leaders I invited here today to please stand. These women are involved in every part of the business sector, including retail, aesthetics, marketing, artisan goods and more. Please join me in commending their creativity, passion, determination.

They have shown young women and girls across Manitoba that barriers can be overcome, that women can accomplish whatever they put their minds to and that discrimination will never win. Once again, we're grateful for your dedication to our province. I provided a list of names—a list of my guests' names to be added to Hansard.

Thank you for everything you do.

Michelle Cameron, Cassandra Carreiro, Preslie Cross, Kate Fenske, Kathy Hunter, Harmanpreet Kaur, Danielle Mondor, Gabrielle Zoppa

Heavenly Care Care-Home

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Honourable Speaker, it was my pleasure to visit the Heavenly Care care-home facility in Neuenberg, just before its opening in January.

The nine-bed care home is located on the farm in the village of Neuenberg where the late George Dyck was born in 1935, and where he passed away a few years ago. It was George's wish that the iconic house barn be turned into a care-home facility that would benefit others, and in January, that wish became a reality.

Heavenly Care provides certified health-care staff on a 24-7 basis, an on-site chef, recreational programming and much more. The potential for expansion is also there, with the opportunity to build another structure to house many more residents at the property.

George's nephew Gerald Papp, who still operates the farm, and his family have poured their time and resources into the project, and locals are thrilled with the prospect of being able to stop by and visit with residents, as well as to be able to work at the facility.

I want to recognize Celma Pinto, who is the CEO of Heavenly Care, and Arveen Aulakh, who is the

operations manager, as well their staff, for their hard work and determination to see the project through, and for their care of the residents.

This effort is typical of the irrepressible can-do spirit of the people of southern Manitoba, and on behalf of the community, I again thank all those who worked so hard to make this vision a reality.

Thank you.

Recognizing Women Political Leaders

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Tomorrow is International Women's Day. And to honour this day, I want to thank the trailblazers who've paved the way for women in this space.

I recognize the late Rebecca Catherine Barrett, better known as Becky to all who know—knew and loved her. She was a passionate community leader who dedicated her life to social justice and labour advocacy as a political organizer, MLA and minister in Manitoba.

I recognize Nancy Allan, who served 16 years as the NDP MLA for St. Vital. Elected in '99, the former minister of Labour and Education made significant contributions to anti-bullying and inclusion legislation with the groundbreaking Public Schools Amendment Act. She deeply understood the importance of protecting students and investing in our young people's futures.

Flor Marcelino was the first visible minority woman to be elected to the Legislature and appointed to Cabinet. She broke the ceiling for future women of colour, including the incredible MLA for Notre Dame.

Erin Selby, my predecessor as the previous MLA for Southdale and minister of Advanced Education and Literacy; Erna Braun, a fierce voice in the community whose support allowed me to be sitting as a proud member of this NDP government.

Diane McGifford, the first-ever provincial minister of Advanced Education; Education minister Maureen Hemphill, who fought against blatant misogyny by being exceedingly capable; Muriel Smith, the first woman in Canada to serve as deputy premier; my colleague, the member for The Pas, who was the first First Nations woman to be elected to the Legislature; Theresa Oswald, the first female minister of Health and a precedent setter for ministers' maternity leave; Myrna Phillips, pardon me, a strong gender equity advocate and Speaker of the House. These are just a few of the women who have forged the path for us.

* (14:00)

I thank all women, past and present, who made it possible for us to occupy our rightful space in this Legislature. I look forward to doing the same for our next generation of strong NDP women.

I would like to add all of these names to Hansard.

Thank you.

Nancy Allan, Rebecca Catherine Barrett, Erna Braun, Maureen Hemphill, Flor Marcelino, Diane McGifford, Theresa Oswald, Myrna Phillips, Erin Selby, Muriel Smith

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before we move on to oral questions, I would like to formally introduce some guests who are joining us here in the House.

In the gallery, Erin Selby, former member for Southdale; in the loge to my right, Nancy Allan, former MLA for St. Vital; Myrna Phillips, former MLA for Wolseley; Muriel Smith, former MLA for Osborne; Erna Braun, former MLA for Rossmere; and Flor Marcelino, former MLA for Logan.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you all to this Chamber.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bail Reform Government Intention

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): I, too, would like congratulate and thank all the strong women, not only that are in this Chamber, but that have affected all of our lives. And happy International Women's Day tomorrow to absolutely everyone, not only tomorrow but each and every day.

Honourable Speaker, the NDP Premier has ripped off talking points from former British prime ministers that he's going to come down on crime and its causes.

Six months ago, as the NDP leader, the Premier gave a speech about crime, justice and reconciliation. He made a few promises, including one about bail reform—which he's already broken. He also said, and I quote, Indigenous people come up in our conversations about crime in this province.

Now, despite the office that he holds now, he's forgetting to include them in that conversation. AMC Grand Chief Merrick said this week, the Premier's failure to engage First Nations on his bail reform—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I'll take the opportunity a day early to wish everyone a wonderful International Women's Day. It's a wonderful opportunity to be in the presence of greatness. The former Speaker, former deputy premier, former leader of our party, former MLAs and ministers who are here, people who've led the political movement without elected office.

I'd extend the same wishes across the partisan aisle to our colleague from Tuxedo as the first woman chosen to serve as premier; and of course to the youngest woman MLA ever elected, which I believe was the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) but is now the member for Radisson (MLA Dela Cruz).

And so, to everyone who serves in these hallowed halls and is advancing the cause of gender equity by being strong women leaders, we say, thank you, and thank you for your service, to be specific.

And just to be clear, I will answer the leader's question in the follow-up sequence.

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

Mr. Ewasko: I will get to those questions right away. So, I'm hoping that the Premier has called up the Grand Chief Merrick and apologized for his missteps.

But it was reported in the Winnipeg Free Press that the Premier was defensive yesterday. Today, he's defensive again—well, not quite yet, but he will be—about his failed bill—bail reform announcement, and he's repeating a pattern of this when he faces questions of accountability by pointing fingers at others.

I get while he—while—why he's being defensive. He's made—he's way over-promised. He's way under-delivering. And he's under-delivering in many areas, but especially in public safety. There are real victims, real impacts of crime that the Premier cannot run away from.

When will the Premier deliver a real bail reform plan or policy, Mr. Deputy—or, Mr. Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Kinew: The work to implement bail reform at the provincial level has already begun, under the leadership of our Attorney General. We announced some of these plans recently, but of course that work began immediately after the election.

Along the way, of course, we did consult with Indigenous stakeholders, but we look forward to furthering those discussions with the Assembly of

Manitoba Chiefs and with other leaders across the province.

I want to point out one thing, though. The guidance that we've provided to prosecutors, the clarity, the support that we're offering to them is something that never happened under the Progressive Conservatives. During their time in office, they were completely silent on the issue.

And while they wanted to point fingers at the federal government, we decided Manitobans would prefer a different approach, one where the government shows leadership and does things right away under the areas of our jurisdiction.

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

Mr. Ewasko: And, I guess, with no phone calls, no conversations, no emails and no plan.

Honourable Speaker, the Premier just recently sent a memo to Crown attorneys that they haven't seemed to see—or, received. His failed bail reform announcement landed with a thud, and critics, including AMC Grand Chief Cathy Merrick and former senator and judge Murray Sinclair, have concluded the NDP approach is both backwards and not effective.

Manitoba is unfortunately grappling with a tragedy committed by a violent offender who was out on bail. I would like to offer my condolences to the family, friends and communities affected by this horrific crime.

And can the Premier explain why fentanyl dealers and violent offenders are still being released on bail, and can he answer whether the individual who is in jail for this tragedy that I already mentioned will be released on bail?

Mr. Kinew: As elected officials, we have a number of responsibilities. Some of these are legal responsibilities, which mean that, when it comes to the administration of justice, there needs to be a stark division between what we do at the political level and what occurs within the judicial system. Our government will always respect that division of authority.

But I want to say that there's also a responsibility for us as political leaders to carry ourselves in a way with great reverence for those who are the victims of crimes. I make that comment in respect to the specific instance that I know our colleague from Morden-Winkler has been active on, and, truly, this showing of compassion necessary to respond to the community knows no partisan bounds.

But I do feel compelled to call out the fact that, while they invoke the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Progressive Conservatives do not have the ability to sit down at the table with that organization because of their shameful conduct in the 2023 general election. Apologize.

The Speaker: Order, please. The Premier's time has expired.

Bail Reform Government Intention

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, last fall the Premier promised that he would, and I quote, direct the Ministry of Justice to implement stronger conditions on bail within the first 100 days in office.

He was elected 156 days ago, and we're no closer to being safe in our—safer in our communities. He wrote cheques with his mouth that his government cannot cash. Perhaps his bail platform should be stamped account closed.

Will this Premier rise today and admit that he promised more than he can deliver?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Again, we have a comprehensive approach when it comes to justice in Manitoba. We're tough on crime. We're tough on the causes of crime.

* (14:10)

On the justice side, of course, we've brought in measures to support Crown attorneys, to support law enforcement and perhaps most of all, to support you, the people of Manitoba, to feel safer in your communities.

At the same time, we're investing in education, a universal meal program, so that kids have a positive path to success in the future instead of being induced down some negative trajectory. So I simply explained to the member opposite that the difference between our administration and the former one is, they put out the press releases first and never followed up with work. We do the work first, put out the press releases later.

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

Mr. Balcaen: Honourable Speaker, I've sat with families of victims that have been in the courtroom as they saw offenders released, only to walk amongst them again. And in far too many cases, I've seen the

same individuals brought back before a justice while out on bail.

This Premier thinks that he can solve the problem by instructing Crown prosecutors to oppose bail. This is a problem with our Criminal Code and not judgment of our dedicated legal officials.

Bail monitoring is important, but this Premier must do more to ensure Manitobans are protected from repeat violent offenders.

He's 56 days late on his promise, so I'll ask again: When can Manitobans expect—

The Speaker: Order, please. The member's time is expired.

Mr. Kinew: Just to provide greater clarity for the member, I want to remind him that this work began on day one. We come out with the press release once the policy is implemented, once the funding has been approved, once that—all the processes have been put in place.

Of course that's a sharp contrast with the Progressive Conservatives, who didn't even budget for any of the promises they made in the lead-up to the last general election, but I believe that we know that the issue of public safety is one of those sacred trusts that we need to treat with great reverence.

That's why I was proud to stand with the Attorney General, as well as representatives from the union that represents RCMP officers across the country. We're starting the work, we're not done the work, but it is very encouraging to hear the National Police Federation say that under this Attorney General, our province is a leader nationally.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon West, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Balcaen: Honourable Speaker, I have a deep and resounding respect for the dedicated public servants who take on the thankless role of Crown attorneys and Crown prosecutors. To hear this Premier insinuate that Crown prosecutors could try harder to oppose bail for violent offenders is using Crowns as pawns.

His plan has been called no big revelation of—or no big reinvention of the wheel by lawyers, and law professors said it could backfire. I guess the only defence lawyer in favour of this plan is the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv).

With this—will this Premier admit that his measures do not match his promise to Manitobans, and will he

let us know when actual, stronger conditions on bail are coming?

Mr. Kinew: This work has already begun. Our Attorney General hit the ground running. We know that the National Police Federation stood with us when we shared the details of the work that we've already been undertaking, and they encouraged other provinces to follow Manitoba's lead.

Now, of course, it's far too early for us to say that, you know, the mission has been accomplished, but rather, it's reassuring to hear that some of our partners in law enforcement are saying that we're on the right path.

At the same time we know that we need to address the root causes of crime, and so we're calling a public safety summit, where the voices of community and law enforcement and so many of the stakeholders and rights holders will be able to engage with a substantive questions and details about how do we make Manitoba communities safer.

We're making the economy more affordable, we're making the health-care system meet your needs as patients and we're making the streets safer, because we're working for you.

MACY Five Year Review Expert Participation in Subcommittee

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): On Monday I had the opportunity to introduce a motion at committee to give greater scrutiny to the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth legislation. I called for the formation of a non-partisan subcommittee that would include independent experts around the table. The minister herself admitted that she was not an expert on child welfare, yet she blocked experts from having a real voice around the table.

Can the minister tell the House why she would want to limit the contribution of subject matter experts in this important review process?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): We sat in standing committee on Monday in respect of the MACY five-year review, and I was asked at length for about an hour and 15 minutes, give or take, questions in respect of the motion that the member brought forward.

And let me be clear. It's important to understand that the standing committee infrastructure that we have here in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly is very unique across the country in the sense that experts, citizens, families, voters have the opportunity to come

and present at standing committees. We're not limiting in any capacity any experts to come forward.

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

The honourable member for Midland, on a supplementary question.

Children in CFS Care Call for Debate in Legislature

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Yesterday my colleague from Tyndall Park brought forward a MUPI on a very critical issue in our province. The Advocate for Children and Youth agreed there should be a debate. The Liberals and the PCs agreed that there should be a debate. But the minister was too busy to have this discussion.

Will she rise today and apologize to the foster parents for being too busy to have this discussion?

The Speaker: The honourable First Minister—sorry, the honourable Minister of Families.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Miigwech to the member for that question.

Let me just say first and foremost that as minister responsible we value the sacred work that foster parents do in behalf—on behalf of children in care, taking children into their homes and taking care of them. We value that. That's sacred work. Just earlier this year I had the opportunity to meet with the Manitoba Foster Parents Association, and I heard their concerns in my office, as I've spoken with many foster parents.

And is the system perfect right now? Absolutely not. And that's why I'm busy working to make that system work for children in care and for all Manitoba children.

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

Death of Child in CFS Care Call for Inquiry

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): In the past few weeks, seven children have tragically died in care. This includes a child in my own constituency in Carman. A child called CFS to beg for help, but no one answered the phone. This kind of tragedy cannot happen ever again in Manitoba.

For years the minister had advocated that more needs to be done for children in care. There's no more time to wait. The minister and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) need to act now before we lose another young person.

We demand that this minister immediately call an inquiry into this tragedy.

Will the minister stand up here today and commit to that?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I appreciate the concern and the passion that the member is bringing forward to this Chamber.

I think that all of us are devastated in respect of the news that's been happening in the last several weeks. Every child that dies is an extension of ourselves and our response as Manitobans and the type of province that we want to have. And one of the first things that I did as minister responsible is ordered a section 4 review of all contact in respect of CFS.

We are working hard every single day. Our whole team in Families is working hard every single day to prioritize the protection of children, all children. And as our government has said repeatedly, we want to make sure that more children reach their 18th birthday.

Miigwech.

Ten Ten Sinclair Housing–Health–Care Aide Strike Quality of Care Concerns for Residents

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Over 100 residents at Ten Ten Sinclair facilities are in limbo now that the health-care aides that help them are on strike.

* (14:20)

A resident from one of the facilities wrote to me yesterday expressing her serious concerns regarding the care that residents like herself will receive during the strike.

While she was told that workers would come to help her yesterday morning, no one came. Call after call to various layers of authority to see if she would be receiving help, with no response at all.

These tenants rely on the services of the care workers in this home. Many are unable to get dressed, shower or feed themselves without this help.

What is the minister doing to immediately ensure that these residents receive the care they need and deserve?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I thank the member opposite for that very important question.

I have been in regular contact with the WRHA in regards to this situation. Our top priority as a government and certainly, I believe, the top priority of those

across the health-care system, is to ensure that the residents at Ten Ten Sinclair continue to receive the care that they depend on, and we are ensuring that there are mechanisms in place.

I had a meeting just earlier today, Honourable Speaker, with the WRHA. They've taken steps to ensure that residents are receiving quality care.

If the member opposite has a specific concern about a resident, as I've always stated, bring that directly to me; I will immediately address it. We all want the same things, for residents to be safe and receive the care that they depend on.

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

Mrs. Cook: Well, while I appreciate the response from the minister, this morning we checked in with the resident and up until 10:30 a.m. this morning, she'd heard nothing.

No one showed up to help her to get out of bed. She was left lying there, uncertain of whether she'd be getting any help at all today.

Later, she reached out to tell us that help had arrived, but she'd been told that two staff would be available for the facility, where normally there are 10.

Does the minister consider two staff where there are normally 10, to be adequate care for some of the most vulnerable people in our society?

MLA Asagwara: To answer the member opposite's question directly, no, I do not think that that's adequate care.

That is an incredibly concerning piece of information to hear on the House floor. I would have loved to have gotten that information before being in the Chamber so that I could have addressed it immediately.

This is a situation I take very seriously. The care and safety and dignity of these residents are my top priority. It is the priority of our government to make sure they receive the care that they depend on.

This is something I will look into immediately, and will ensure that the adequate staffing resources are put in place. Again, if anyone has a concern, you can reach out directly to my office. If you go through your MLA, they should let me know immediately.

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

Mrs. Cook: I think that the minister knows by this point in our relationship that I'm not one to politicize these issues.

The minister has this correspondence; their office received it yesterday afternoon. It is unacceptable for residents to be forced to worry about whether they can get up and use the bathroom today.

It is unacceptable for these residents to be sitting in inhumane conditions without reassurance that workers will show up to help them when they need it the most.

Will the minister assure the residents of Ten Ten Sinclair facilities that there will be no further interruptions to the vital health-care services that they rely on?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, the top priority for our government in the dispute between Ten Ten Sinclair and the union is to ensure that residents at all six sites are receiving the care that they depend on.

If there are concerns that that is not happening, as minister responsible I will take steps to make sure it's addressed immediately.

I have been in contact with the WRHA consistently on this matter. They have taken steps to bring in staff across all sites and have a plan in place until Tuesday of next week.

Now, I look forward to working with the member opposite moving forward when these issues arise, but again, our top priority is these residents being safe, having the care they depend on and having dignity in their homes.

Our government will take this from the Chamber and action it right away.

Building Sustainable Communities Program Inquiry into Application Delays

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Honourable Speaker, municipalities like Brandon, Thompson and Dauphin are making their plans for summer construction and maintenance projects.

The Building Sustainable Communities program provided 432 unique projects with over \$25 million in funding during the '23-24 program, and I have the spreadsheets for tabling.

This minister seems to be sitting on his hands and taking his time in getting the BSC application portal open for business and money in the hands of Manitobans.

What are we to expect from this delay? Is the BSC program on the chopping block?

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): Honourable Speaker, \$1.6 billion. That's what this government left, and that's the legacy of what this government is bringing to the table.

Now, for some reason, the member opposite wants to be able to listen to the municipalities when under seven years not once did they listen. And I assure the members that we're having those conversations each and every day. We had those conversations in opposition; we have them in government, and we continue to have them to see how we can grow municipalities across all of Manitoba.

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

Mr. King: Honourable Speaker, normally by this time of year the intake period for the BSC program has already occurred and applications are being vetted. Organizations like APTN located in Union Station, Harvest Manitoba in Notre Dame and 430 others benefitted from the BSC program in '23-24 alone.

To date not a single group has had the opportunity to apply, yet alone be approved for the BSC funding. Municipalities and community groups are waiting nervously for the NDP to hatch their plan.

When can we tell our constituents that they will be able to apply for the BSC program?

Mr. Bushie: The member opposite uses the word normally, and normally over seven years municipalities would have been able to concentrate and continue to depend on reliable, predictable funding. And they did not get that, not one year, under this Progressive Conservative government.

Now the member opposite wants to talk about various aspects of what to be able to—\$1.6 billion that they budgeted for, that they accumulated, that they did not know how they were going to spend. \$1.6 billion, Honourable Speaker. They did not know how to manage money.

We will—we take a responsible approach and we'll talk to municipalities each and every day.

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

Mr. King: Honourable Speaker, the NDP are developing a bad reputation for pausing and cutting programs. Groups are concerned that the BSC program is part of this trend. Despite this government saying otherwise, there is a real and tangible fear amongst existing recipients that they will not receive their allocated grants.

Will the minister commit today that all awarded grants, funds which were allocated through the Treasury Board, will be received? Manitobans want to know.

Mr. Bushie: I guess the problem there, Mr. Honourable Speaker, is they ignored Treasury Board. They went straight off the side of their desks and said, here you go, here you go, here you go.

Honourable Speaker, \$1.6 billion—how do you accumulate \$1.6 billion in deficit when you do not invest in municipalities? \$1.6-billion deficit with no investment in health care, no investment in education, no investment in municipalities.

Shame on that government. Shame on that former government for being able to stand here and say where's the money for municipalities when they ignored them each and every day for seven years straight.

Community Safety Status of Rebate Program

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): The Premier (Mr. Kinew) is quick to pat himself on the back on community safety, but folks on the ground disagree with his assessment. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business was quick to point out this announcement about community safety completely ignored his promise in supports for security, rebates and on Manitoba families and businesses.

Has the Premier reneged on this commitment?

* (14:30)

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I wanted to begin by thanking members of the Winnipeg Police Service, who successfully executed very complex warrants and made significant arrests yesterday as part of an ongoing organized crime investigation across several jurisdictions.

It's important work, and it's work that we want to continue to partner with them on going forward, because it's important to support our law enforcement across the province.

With regards to supporting communities, the member knows that we're going to be calling together folks in a public safety summit to talk about ways that we can work together, and we're excited—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

The honourable member for Red River North, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wharton: No one who followed the career of the Premier is surprised to see him walking back on these

public safety commitments and half-baked excuses for policies. That is what he does. Says what you want, you—what you think you want to hear, and then while no one's actually paying attention, he just doesn't do it.

Will the Premier commit today to following through on his commitment to make small businesses in Manitoba and Manitoba families safer today?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the member opposite should know that we got to work on day one at helping make our province a safer place. We started by making the commitment and working with municipalities to fund law enforcement all across this province, something that the member opposite never did.

In fact, seven years of cuts have left our municipalities feeling like they're on the outside when it comes to enhancing and supporting citizens within their communities. We're going to get to work supporting community; we're going to get to work hiring mental-health workers to support our law enforcement. And we're going to partner with law enforcement to ensure that we can make our communities safer each and every day.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Red River North, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Wharton: The Canadian Federation of Independent Business are looking out for their members, and has called on the Premier to keep his word. They are trying to keep their employees and their businesses safe.

Can the Premier please recognize how important this issue is to many, many Manitobans, and answer the question: When will he provide the security rebates that he promised them?

Mr. Wiebe: Members opposite will know that we just recently enacted legislation that will support community safety officers and First Nations safety officers throughout this province. They are eager to work with law enforcement to ensure that our communities stay safe. And they are eager to work with us and community to make sure that we enable neighbourhoods and communities to work towards public safety.

I know the minister—the member opposite has been very eager to read the mandate letter that's been issued to me. We're hard at work. I think he's going to see some exciting news coming forward. I ask him to simply stay tuned.

Auditor General Report on Foster Homes Implementation of Recommendations

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The Auditor General report on foster home management, which was produced nearly five years ago, made a number of recommendations to improve the safety and security of children. Its follow-up report showed that none of the recommendations made to the Department of Families had been implemented.

Amidst the crisis in CFS, can the minister tell the House how many of the AG's recommendations on foster homes have been implemented to date?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Miigwech to the member opposite for the question on foster-care rates. I think it's important to, again, let me just situate our government's position on—in respect of the sacredness that—on the role that foster parents have in dealing with child care here in Manitoba.

I think it's really important that, you know, our government is focused on providing the best homes for children and youth that come in the care of a CFS agency. And we are working with everyone to get this right: Indigenous leaders, community members, members from other parties as well.

And we owe it to the next generation of Manitobans to work together in respect of this.

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

MLA Lamoureux: In the Auditor General report, it was found that dozens of children are living in foster-care homes with adults that don't have their criminal record or child abuse checks. In 45 files, well over half did not have the background checks that should be required.

The minister had the opportunity to talk about this yesterday but chose not to, because she was—and she said—she was too busy to do her job.

So, Honourable Speaker, maybe now is she too busy to do her job? Will she share with the House whether this government will work to implement this recommendation ensuring more safety for children in care?

MLA Fontaine: Again, once again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

The member will know that in the last seven and a half years under the previous PC government there was little action or concern in respect of child welfare in its totality. And, certainly, there was little concern

or action in respect of ensuring the safety of foster homes or group homes, and hence why we have the recommendations that came out.

We are actively engaged in fixing the mess that the previous government left in respect of child welfare, including the former government, in respect of legislating away the—

The Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

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

Children in CFS Emergency Care Qualifications of Staff

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, this government needs to start taking some responsibility because they are the ones in government right now.

In a recent media report, the Manitoba advocate for youth said that the emergency shelter staff are often hired with minimal qualifications—who aren't always trained to deal with complex concerns like mental health, addictions and trauma.

Since all the emergency shelters are licensed by the Province, can the minister explain why emergency shelter staff don't even have minimal required qualifications to deal with our most vulnerable youth?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Miigwech to the member opposite for her questions in respect of EPRs.

Let me just say this, as the minister responsible, coming into this role for the last four-plus months, it is absolutely shocking to see the state that the former government left child welfare.

And, again, I want to take an opportunity to just lift up the staff that we have in the Department of Families that, despite the lack of concern or dedication or commitment to fixing child welfare, opposite—members opposite made it only worse—despite that, our staff have been working very, very hard to ensure the safety of Manitoba children that are currently in care. And we will continue to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Health-Care Facilities—Staff and Patient Safety Placement of Institutional Safety Officers

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): The Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care has made it clear that safety in our health institutions is a top priority. They have been meeting with front-line workers,

administrators and labour leaders to discuss concerns around the safety of health-care staff and patients—concerns that went ignored by the previous government.

Can the minister update the House on the progress being made to address this very important issue?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, I have been meeting with front-line workers, touring emergency departments, talking with union reps, and many folks are expressing similar concerns on this very important issue.

Many people have pointed out how 'disapornid'—disappointed they were in the previous government's inability to deliver on their own promise to institute institutional safety officers in our emergency rooms—another broken PC promise.

So, I am happy to stand here today as part of a new government that listens to front-line health-care workers and works with them to say that we are moving forward on plans to increase safety for patients and staff.

On March 18, ISOs will begin their two-week training, after which they will immediately be brought on site at the ED at HSC. Emergency departments, we know, are places where some folks go at our most vulnerable times—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MPI Special Risk Extension Policies Inquiry into Insurance Delays for Trucking Industry

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): My question is for the Minister responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance.

* (14:40)

With 95 per cent of goods moved within Manitoba depending on truck transport, and Manitoba's for-hire trucking carriers directly and indirectly contribute to more than \$2 billion of Manitoba's GDP, can the minister please answer why there has been a more than three-month freeze on new special risk extension policies, which has been financially devastating to many trucking companies and owner operators by grounding them along with their high-priced equipment.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation): Well, the member seems upset that it's taking us longer to clean up the mess that the previous government left us than he'd like.

But there's a lot of work to do, and if he had spent some time at committee with us the other day, he would have heard that directly from officials at MPI. They identified that the mismanagement at MPI that the former CEO, that the board that the former government put in place, hand-picked board that they put in place, created a mess at MPI.

We're committed to cleaning it up, and we're going to get the work done.

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

Mr. Narth: After speaking with a number of MPI brokers, it is clear that they have all been given the same lack of direction around the hold on new SRE policies.

So my question for the minister again is: What is he doing to ensure truckers and the trucking industry have access to insurance products they need right here in Manitoba through our provincial Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation?

Mr. Wiebe: One of the first actions that this government took was put in place a new board at MPI and end the strike—the 10-week, politically motivated strike—brought by the members opposite.

There's no question that the strike had an impact on the service delivery at MPI. That's not my words; that's the words of the member at committee just the other day, who admitted that this has had a serious impact on MPI and the delivery.

We have identified the problems. We have put in a new board, a new CEO. It's a new day at MPI. We're going to clean up the former government's mess.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions? [*interjection*] Order.

Petitions? No petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(*Continued*)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, can you please call for second reading of Bill 7, followed by second reading of Bill 6.

The Speaker: It has been announced by the Government House Leader that we'll call for second reading of Bill 7, followed by second reading of Bill 6.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 7—The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act

The Speaker: So, calling for second reading of Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act.

The—sorry.

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I move, seconded by the Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Simard), that Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act; Loi abrogeant la Loi sur les projets de construction dans le secteur public, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Marcelino: Honourable Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and speak about the repeal of The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Act. The repeal of the act will no longer ban project labour agreements in Manitoba.

In 2021, against the wishes of the business and labour communities, the previous government enacted The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Act, banning the use of project labour agreements, or PLAs, in the public sector.

Project labour agreements are agreements between the contractor of a specific construction project and the unions that perform the construction work. These agreements govern all working conditions such as wages, benefits and working hours for a specific duration of a construction project.

Project labour agreements are seen globally as useful in reducing risks of disruptions on critical infrastructure projects. Agreements cover wages, ensure safe, high-quality construction and prevent work stoppages, thereby providing a level of cost certainty to a project while in progress.

These agreements serve as valuable workforce development tools in an era of labour shortages across the sector.

PLAs often include provisions for local community employment, workforce diversity and apprenticeship spots to train future generations in the skilled trades.

Repealing the act would allow the public sector employers to tender or enter into PLAs that require

labour agreements as a condition if they want to, but does not mandate tenders or project labour agreements to include unionization as a requirement.

Our government made a commitment to Manitobans to grow the economy with good jobs, and PLAs do just that by protecting workers' rights and prioritizing high-quality construction while fostering local employment and training opportunities that contribute to a skilled local workforce.

The legacy of the previous government's backward approach to labour relations has Manitoba as the only Canadian jurisdiction to have legislation that prohibits project labour agreements.

Our government's introduction of this bill repealing the ban would provide a means for achieving workforce diversity, local hiring, skill development and workplace safety and health.

Contractors will also benefit as project labour agreements establish the framework for efficient completion of a project, ensuring that the project is completed on budget and on time.

Repealing the act would advance our government's commitments to protect workers' jobs and to always back the rights of working people.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any opposition or independent 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. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Yes, can the minister please tell us who they consulted with outside of their union friends?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

We did consult with the Manitoba Building Trades Institute, and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) actually consulted with Bram Strain, Ash Modha and Michael Pyle.

* (14:50)

Consultations are actually ongoing. Just today, I spoke to the CEO, Chris Lorenc of the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, and more consultations are occurring.

However, at the same time, this is a repeal of a ban—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): COR safety certification is a standard used in the construction industry. It has job hazard analysis, tool box talks, making sure employees are safe.

What will this bill do that is not already there for the safety of people?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you to the member opposite for that question.

This bill is a repeal of the ban, so it's basically just taking out a ban. Going forward, government, public sector entities such as Crown corporations, will be able to assess a project and determine whether or not they want to go the route of a PLA or go through a different route, as they've been doing for the last seven or eight years.

The choice is going to be theirs. You know, presumably for major critical infrastructure projects, especially up North, the PLA would be a great way to go. For other types of projects, given the responsibility of what the departments are going to be determining—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired. *[interjection]* Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Building on the minister's last comment and the release yesterday, the member mentions that the public sector entitles the option to require contractors building on infrastructure projects to employ a unionized force.

Will there be, in regulation, something that will allow outside private sector to be involved in all projects in Manitoba?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, member opposite, for your question.

You know, during the legislation, back in 2017, and it got passed in 2021, you know, members opposite kept talking about forced unionization. And this was totally proven to—and it was totally proven and it was debunked, all the way up to—even to the Supreme

Court of Canada—that these PLAs were forcing people to unionize.

That was not happening. In fact, even in the last time that the PLAs were used for Keeyask and for the Red River Floodway, 77 per cent of those contractors that were employed in building these major critical infrastructure projects were not unionized.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, the member—the minister said that she consulted with different organizations. Did she consult with Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba? They represent 6,000 contractors in Manitoba.

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, member opposite, for that question.

No, I did not consult with Merit Contractors but, like I said, consultations and relationship building is still ongoing. I do have another conversation scheduled for—I think sometime this weekend or tomorrow—with folks from the Manitoba Employers Council.

Conversations are ongoing. Relationships are—continue to be built. We need to have strong relationships as a government with both the workers and the labour groups as well as with the business community in order for us to forward the goals of prosperity across all Manitoba, okay.

So these relationships are going to continue to be fostered, and I'm open to any and all conversations with other people, unlike—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Can the minister give an estimate of the impact to costs that this will have on government tendered projects? With less eligible bidders there'll be less competitiveness and higher prices for Manitobans.

MLA Marcelino: Thank you to the member for Brandon West for your question. You know, this is a very important question.

You know, our taxpayers demand, and rightfully so, that as a government, we're responsible for the funds that are entrusted to us. Okay? So, before we go into any types of contracts with folks, we have to make sure that what they're offering, that they're going to be able to do this on time and on budget.

There is no proof out there that shows that PLAs will cost more down the road. We've taken a look at the evidence, and a lot of it actually, unfortunately, doesn't—

The Speaker: The minister's time is expired.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, the minister has clearly explained that she's bringing this bill forward before consulting entirely with the workforce.

So can the minister explain why they are letting their ideology guide their legislative agenda and not the principles of open and fair tendering, choice and competition?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, member opposite, for your question.

Ideology. If I was going to be ideological, then I would be mirroring what the ban was, okay? And the mirror image of that would be to mandate PLAs for every single public sector project, and that is not what we're doing. We are not banning it, like what you did, and we're not mandating it, like what would be an ideological response.

Instead, we are lifting this ban so that there is choice that the government can make.

And again, every single jurisdiction in Canada has this choice except us.

So that is where the ideology was: with the previous government, by putting an unnecessary and foolish ban. That's where it was.

Mr. Wharton: How does Bill 7 increase equity in tendering contract bids for Manitobans, and how does it protect Manitoba taxpayers?

MLA Marcelino: Oh, sorry, I didn't hear it—hear the question.

Mr. Wharton: How does Bill 7 increase equity in tendering contract bids for Manitobans?

MLA Marcelino: What I heard was how does it impact tendering.

Again, this is just a repeal on the ban. So, going forward, for example, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and consumer government services will be able to take a look at the projects and then decide which route that they're going to go, if they're going to go with the PLA route or if they're going to go with the open tendering bids. So it's not going to be specifically telling them which way to go. This is just a process activity.

I'd like to, you know, calm any waters that might be rifled right now, because this is still just making us in line with other—

The Speaker: Minister's time is expired.

Mr. Balcaen: We heard earlier about the 6,000 contractors in Manitoba that maybe should be consulted with, but based on the immediate backlash from industry groups, will the minister repeal her bill?

* (15:00)

MLA Marcelino: Thank you for the question.

No, we will not be taking back this bill. This is a very, very important bill. This is going to allow the government to make the choice, especially for major, critical infrastructure projects, like up North.

I was just talking to Chris Lorenc this afternoon, and he told me that it makes sense for governments to engage in PLAs, especially if it's in those types of projects. So, again, we need to have that flexibility to be able to make the proper choice for the proper project.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Perchotte: Can the minister explain why non-unionized workers should have to pay union dues?

MLA Marcelino: That does happen when there are PLAs engaged. It doesn't—and the reason why, if a worker wants to participate in a PLA-type of project, they are going to be benefitting from that agreement that was negotiated by that union. The wages are pre-determined. Their working hours are pre-determined. Any kinds of health and safety requirements are going to be pre-determined.

And a lot of work was put into making sure that the agreement was going to be able to satisfy the needs of that project. These are multi-year projects; these are major projects, and we want to make sure that there is high-quality work going into it. We don't want to pay a lot less now, and then later on we have to make up for all the mistakes that were made before.

We want to make sure, that especially on these very, very important critical infrastructure projects, that there is high-quality work.

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Johnson: It's a long-standing tradition in this building that critics get a bill briefing prior to the bill coming on the floor here. That might answer a lot of questions, help the critic understand the bill.

Can the minister please, please explain to Manitobans and the critic and the people on this side of the House why she is bringing forward a bill without a bill briefing, as the long-standing tradition has been?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, member opposite.

I think that's an oversight on my part that I would take responsibility for. I did speak to my critic this afternoon, and I informed her that as for her, as well as for the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux), I was 'hopening' to be able to meet with them on Monday morning to be able to talk about this bill, as well as the employment standards amendment act that I put forward today.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Turtle Mountain): Honourable Speaker, I just want to know if the minister has actually contacted, say, the private sector when it comes to employment services companies, like Pinnacle, or companies that would—do supply a lot of staff to, let's say, heavy construction industry, to contractors who are going to be doing a lot of the work here, because there's a shortage of employment out there, and the thing is it's important that everybody's on board here when it comes to a bill like this.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, member opposite, for your question. I want to emphasize that this is a repeal of the ban. It is not mandating the government to now go on into every single government service project now to have, you know, to enter into a PLA. This is just removing that very unnecessary ban in the first place.

Going forward it'll be business as usual, as it is in every other jurisdiction in Canada when governments are going and taking a look at what type of process that they want to do for the project—for that particular project. We're just putting us in line with the rest of Canada and removing that unnecessary and foolish ideological ban that was placed—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

The honourable minister for Interlake-Gimli.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Yes, thank you, Honourable—minister? Oh, okay, member?

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, it's a—how soon we forget, but yet we don't, right?

So, this legislation was originally brought in back in the day to have a responsibility for the tax dollars for Manitobans.

I think we can all agree—and I know contractors, when they're bringing a tender forward and they have to pay union dues, they just increase the percentage of their bid. They add that in, and that costs Manitobans money. That's our taxpayers' dollars that the NDP doesn't appear to care about.

Also, there's a lot that just don't participate. They're worried that they participate in these projects and they will be unionized in a matter of a week or so of being on the job.

Now, the members opposite are not only—it's not just them suggesting that unionized workers are more competent to perform the work in Manitoba. I feel we have a lot non-unionized contractors that are every bit as competent as unionized contractors.

There is—Merit alone has 6,000. They represent 6,000 different contractors in Manitoba, and they were not even consulted; they were not on the call list of this minister because they are—they represent non-unionized workers. And maybe they were intentionally left out; I don't know; that's for the minister to answer. We could've asked those questions if we're in the bill briefing, but that did not happen either.

It seems like the ideology is being put in front of everything else here in Manitoba. It is not equal opportunity for different organizations to bid on projects. Now, we've seen this multiple times here, in not just the press, but the NDP, their get-togethers, and the unions are the NDP; that is the words right out of the union leader's mouth.

So, this bill is nothing about anything else but ideology to line the pockets of all of the unions. And that money is coming from the taxpayers because the bills are being—the bills that are submitted by the contractors are being increased to cover those additional costs. Those costs don't come right out of their pocket; the workers get paid more money, and then those union dues, that kickback, goes directly back to members opposite's buddies.

So, we know the NDP, they work strictly with the unions. Public sector entities themselves should be prohibited from paying fees to a union in respect of construction work being awarded to a non-union company.

I think if we look back across history, take the diversion around Winnipeg, the floodway, there is

evidence of how much that increased the bids. And I know contractors that worked on there. I know employees that worked on there, and they were furious about having to pay union dues. They would've rather given the union dues to a charity than to the unions.

It was not fair to them to have that forced upon them. It was not a choice.

So, again, we've heard over and over again that unions are the NDP, and that's why this ideology is being brought forward.

Now, the minister spoke of speaking with Chris Lorenc this morning, who represents Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, and that consultation was short and almost non-existent, and I think they'd be surprised to find out that most of the members of Manitoba Heavy Construction Association do not support this ideology.

Now, Merit Contractors of Manitoba have clearly come out in the media and said that this is a ludicrous way to move forward; that's not a quote, otherwise I'd table it. But that was the gist of their media, was something that the NDP are just pushing upon the contractors.

* (15:10)

So, if you don't want to pay union dues, you don't get a job from the Province of Manitoba. If you're willing to pay union dues then we'll give you the job, and as I said, that kickback goes all the way back to the unions.

Now, back in 2018 when we introduced this bill, there was actually some work done behind it. It wasn't ideology. There was a market research survey conducted by NRG Research Group, asked—and they asked Manitobans if they believed that it was fair to force workers to join a union that they don't want to belong to. And 74 per cent said that it was unfair. Unfair to force people to pay union dues to a union that they don't want to belong to, but they're still forced to pay the dues.

Now, the survey also found that 58 per cent of the respondents agreed that forcing members of a non-union company to join a specific union and pay union dues trampled on their constitutional rights to choose which people or organizations that they associate with.

So what that is, is you don't have a choice of what union that your money is going to. Maybe you would rather go to the nursing union than you would the Operating Engineers, for example. You don't have a choice.

Where—maybe you want to submit your dues to Merit rather than the Teamsters union.

So, and I know there's people in this Chamber that have belonged to a lot of unions over the time. Honourable Speaker, I can't even count the amount of unions that I've belonged to. I've worked around the world in different mines, as far away as Indonesia, and as a contractor I went to different mines, and I was personally forced to pay union dues in a province—to a union in a province that I didn't even reside in. I didn't feel it was fair.

Now, over and above that, there were also—this is back to the survey that was conducted, so it wasn't just, like I said, ideology—they were also asked if they believed it was unfair that Manitobans are denied work on big government construction projects because they refused to pay union dues. And 64 per cent of the respondents answered, it is unfair.

In other words, if a company refuses to pay those union dues, they will not be awarded that work. That's not fair for companies that are not unionized.

So also they were asked if they believed if it was fair for Manitoba workers to be forced to pay union dues to other unions other than the ones they—that they already belong to. So even if a member already belongs to a union, for example a Teamsters union, and they may be forced to pay to Operating Engineers; 84 per cent of the respondents said that this was unfair.

I think the ideology that the government benches are bringing forward is not fair to Manitobans or to the taxpayers of Manitobans. This will drive up the price of contracts in Manitoba.

So Merit Contractors association president, Yvette Milner, was quoted in the Free Press on March 6, shortly after the minister introduced this legislation. This is a quote now: "This is a step backwards, quite frankly. The repeal of this bill will have a negative impact on all of our members on a go-forward basis."

So obviously the minister has not consulted with them. That was quite evident in the questioning, and they represent 170 different companies with 6,000 different workers, right here in the province of Manitoba. And the act that the NDP is repealing represents choice. They are taking choice away from Manitobans. It represents competition. When there's competition in tenders, you have reduced costs. You—competition, they sharpen their pencils a little bit more to try and get the work, but when you get rid of competition it drives up the price of the projects in Manitoba.

And, does the NDP government care? No. That's coming out of taxpayers' pockets.

Now, it's very important to promote open and fair tendering. I think if we look around basically the majority of the world, there's open and fair tendering. People cost everything in; they figure what they can do it for; they try and be more efficient than their competitors, and then those savings are turned over to the taxpayers.

In this case, the projects will see an unfair escalation in prices, and that's unfair to the taxpayers in Manitoba.

Now I know the NDP doesn't believe in getting value for money, but it is important. Like, they are now the stewards of the public dollar, and they need to understand the common sense idea that when the number of bidders for a contract is increased, it decreases the price; you have more competition. The likelihood of saving taxpayers' dollars goes up dramatically the more people you can engage in the bidding process. So, the value for money increases.

So, they are now going to limit who can bid on these specific tenders and give them out to their friends and give a kickback to their union friends here in Manitoba. Because, as we heard, and we've seen it over and over again at different conferences, the NDP is the union; the unions are the NDP. This is nothing but a kickback to their union friends.

Now again I would ask that the minister would consider repealing this legislation that she's put forward, or that they have put forward, and do a fulsome consultation. There's still time to repeal this bill and actually do some consultations. It was very clear, as I said earlier in question period, that the member has not consulted with everybody that should be consulted with, with this legislation.

Again, just Merit alone is 170 different companies and they employ about 6,000 workers. Their voice—all of them; voters, taxpayers here in the province of Manitoba—their voice has not been heard by this minister.

Now, the choice: the choice that somebody can decide to do, whether they want to pay union dues or not, the company should be able to choose if they want to be unionized and if they're organized fairly—and so be it if the workers come forward and organize the company; that's the choice of the workers—but they should not be forced to go through this.

And, again, competition: the competition is so important with the taxpayers' dollars. You know, we've balanced the budget twice, as the PC government. Last time was—the first time was a \$35-million surplus; this last time was over a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar surplus. *[interjection]* Yes, that's worthy of applause, thank you.

Now, I want to thank all the members that did all the hard work, that sat on Treasury Board over that period of time to do the hard work, to get that budget balanced. It was very important for Manitobans.

And I know we had a worldwide pandemic that had all governments back into the red again, but it's so important to be competitive with the taxpayers' dollars and have the work in a competitive fashion so you're not artificially increasing the prices and promote that open and fair tendering.

* (15:20)

So, it's not fair that this is only going to be—the work is only going to be open to unionized workers and that money only goes to the unions.

Maybe there's other organizations—there's employees that get together and they are actually shareholders of the company. The company allows them to purchase a piece of equipment, and then that equipment works on shares, and they chose that rather than unionizing. It's a way to make—show—build some equity as an employee in a company. And those non-unionized companies are now—thank you very much—are now—individual employees own a part of that company and they will also have their voice muted by this minister.

So, again we asked about who the minister consulted with, and there was very, very few—other than the unions—very few companies that I heard and representatives of those specific companies that were listed, but one major one—or, almost all the ones that were left out—were non-unionized companies.

Sorry, Honourable Speaker, I still have a throat—I got a grandson that is in daycare and I swear he's a petri dish so every time I see him I get something—catch something new from him but I've had this for a while so it's not contagious. It's all good.

But again, back to the consultations, or their lack of, by this minister. I think that she still has the time—they still have the time to repeal this bill and do fulsome consultations. It's so important to engage Manitobans.

Previously, the previous previous NDP government, they did not consult at all. Our government

brought in EngageMB and it's a powerful tool that allows not just unions to have their say, but everyday Manitobans can have discussions on topics if that tool was used.

And we have not seen it on EngageMB. We have not seen it there, and if I'm mistaken, I would be more than happy to go on EngageMB and fill out my opinion on this legislation, but so far, the minister has not put it on there.

So, they're consulting with their union friends but not every single Manitoban. They're not given the option to have their voice heard.

Now, of course the unions do. But not every single member that belongs to a union actually supports where their union dollars go to. They may support the union; they don't necessarily support where theirs—those dollars go to. Especially when those dollars become political.

So, I have had a lot of people come forward in my constituency that disapprove of how their union dollars are spent. So, those specific individuals, through EngageMB, should have the opportunity to have their voices heard.

But, as we've heard, the unions are the NDP. The NDP is the unions.

Now, I've worked in the union sector, I've worked in the non-union sector, and members that are in the non-union sector, they shouldn't be discouraged from being able to work for some of these companies that will be handed out these jobs from the NDP Treasury Board, just given to the union companies.

That's not how the stewards of our dollars should be. It should be competitive bidding.

So, again when we actually brought this bill in originally, the one that's being repealed by this minister, we did the consultations. We did the consultations with labour. We also did it with employers.

And this minister has not given what I would consider a fulsome list of people who were consulted with. And the more people you consult with, it gives a more balanced approach. You can weigh everybody's input. Whether you like it or not, you still have to weigh it, take into consideration. And that's why I would ask this minister to repeal this motion that she brought forward today.

Now, the minister has—will hopefully continue to consult with a fulsome list, where that hasn't happened

yet. How about the Canadian Federation of Independent Business? How about the Winnipeg Construction Association? There's many companies around the province that do work and they bid on work—so much as snow removal. In our schools or our hospitals, are they now going to be forced to pay union wages? Any work for the Province of Manitoba, is that what's going to be brought in, here? Just based on ideology?

That's not fair to Manitobans, and it's definitely not fair to the taxpayers. That is a responsibility of Treasury Board and this NDP government. So I don't know if the minister even consulted with Treasury Board, or did they just jam this through Cabinet and bring it forward?

But they definitely didn't consult with as many people as they should've. How about the Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba? Fulsome discussions with Manitoba Heavy Construction Association—that hasn't happened yet. I hope it will.

And based on their ideology, it sounds like it'll be a five-minute phone call, and ram it through. And end of story. That is not fair to the taxpayers of Manitoba.

Now again, back in 2018 we actually did the research and we did the surveys, and we—I talked about that already. But I want to reiterate that the survey found that 58 per cent of respondents agreed that forcing members of a non-union company to join a specific union or pay union dues trampled on their constitutional rights to choose which people or organizations that they are associated with. So that's saying that the future employee, now, with the Province of Manitoba, on any construction job that we have, will not have a say, even if they're non-unionized, where their union dues go. They have to pay union dues, even if they are not unionized. How is that fair?

Now I talked about—64 per cent of respondents also thought it was unfair where they were—if they believed it was unfair that Manitobans are denied work on big government construction projects because they refused to pay union dues. I have multiple construction companies in my constituency, and a lot of them are Indigenous-owned, and they're very proud of where they come from and what they have now. And I know that the majority of them are non-unionized. And they will be forced—these Indigenous construction companies will be forced to pay union dues, whether they believe it is right or not.

And our study shows that the overall Manitobans' opinion says that it is unfair for this to be shoved down their throats. Now also, 84 per cent of the respondents

thought it was unfair when they were asked if they believed it was fair for Manitoba workers to be forced to pay union dues to other unions than the ones they already belong to. So if they belong to Operating Engineers, for example, and they will be forced to pay to Teamsters, or vice versa, maybe they belong to Teamsters and they'll be forced to pay to Operating Engineers.

Who is the judge of where the union dues will go? Is that going to be Treasury Board? Is that going to come right off the minister's desk; they decide what union gets the money from these union dues? Who makes that decision? What if it's a mixed contract of labour and operators, Teamsters?

* (15:30)

And where does that money go? Does that money just go to their favourite union of the day, the ones who've put out the most ads supporting the NDP government? That's not fair, and that's not fair to taxpayers.

And, again, increasing the number of people who bid on any work, whether—Honourable Speaker, if you were to get a roof fixed on your house, would you just, you know, narrow it down to one or two tenders, or would you encourage to get prices and quotes from, oh, I don't know, 10 or a dozen different ones? I would think it would be the latter. You'd get as many as possible, because you have more competition, and the more competition you have, the more money that would stay in your pocket because there is competition there. And you owe it to your family.

This NDP government owns it—owes it to Manitoba taxpayers to keep that money in the taxpayers' pockets.

But, as we've seen in the previous 17 years with the NDP government, there wasn't a tax that they didn't like or hike. And this is just the start of it. This is undoubtedly going to increase the dollar amounts of tenders for work that is going to be done here in Manitoba.

And that—like I said, it doesn't come out of the NDP caucus coffers. This comes out of Manitoba taxpayers' pockets and goes to the, as it says here, the NDP union friends: The NDP is the union. The unions are the NDP.

So I would endeavour to ask the minister to consult. And the lack of consultation so far, I think this bill should be repealed today. There's still an opportunity to do that. I'll check with the clerks what the

process would be for the minister to do that. I'll finish speaking first, but I'll check that process to maybe pass on to the minister so they would be aware of how to repeal this.

I just—it's not fair, and it's not fair to the taxpayers of Manitoba. And every single taxpayer in Manitoba is paying our salaries here, and our decisions should be based upon protecting the taxpayer dollar.

Now, again, the bill briefing, I just want to say a few things about that. It's a long, long-standing tradition to have a bill briefing for the critic and one staff member. When we were in government, we did it for NDP caucus, did it for Liberal caucus. And not just the MLA, but a staff member they could bring along to help them and take notes and ensure that the understanding of the bill was there for the critic.

That has not happened here on Bill 7, and I appreciate that the minister apologized for her missteps, but it is important that that happens. And I'm hoping that we can adjourn the debate so we can have our critic more informed on this topic. Maybe there's something we're missing; I don't think so. I think this is just ramming through NDP ideology without consultations, without letting the critic know what the repercussions and the ripple effects of this bill are going to be.

And, again, Merit Contractors. As I said, Yvette Milner was quoted in the Free Press on March 6th, right after the minister introduced this bill, and I just want to end on this quote: This is a step backwards, quite frankly. The repeal of this bill will have a negative impact on all members on a go-forward basis.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Honourable Government House Leader, that the debate—*[interjection]* I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), that the debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: The debate is adjourned and shall stand in the name of the honourable Minister of Justice for 30 minutes remaining.

Bill 6—The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act

The Speaker: As agreed, we'll now go on to second reading of Bill 6, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I move, seconded by the Minister for Justice, that Bill 6, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Fontaine: I'm proud to stand up in the House and bring forward some brief comments in respect of Bill 6, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act.

The Manitoba Assistance Act establishes and defines the financial assistance and other benefits that are available through the Employment and Income Assistance Program to Manitobans that have no other way to support themselves and their families.

The act also establishes employment obligations to maintain ongoing eligibility for benefits. Persons enrolled in the medical barriers to full employment category of EIA, and the single parents under—with children under six are exempt from employment obligations.

The majority of other programs beneficiaries generally engage in employment enhancement measures or supportive planning to remain eligible for full financial benefits.

Bill 6 updates The Manitoba Assistance Act by making it explicit that the director must consider whether adult education is the most appropriate employment enhancement measure for an individual to undertake in fulfillment of their work expectations.

In practice, the activities that will fulfill work expectations are determined through assessment of the recipient's personal circumstances, and through discussion between the EIA recipient and their case counsellor. Activities that fulfill work expectations can range from participation in employment programming, educational upgrading or rehabilitative treatment, to working with the counsellor to make a plan to address other social and medical barriers.

The assistance regulation further specifies that satisfactory employment enhancement measures may include vocational or other employment-related training and literacy or education upgrading.

While this bill will not substantially change the current practice, it will legally entrench the consideration of adult education in the process of determining how an EIA recipient will meet program expectations.

I'm pleased to be introducing these amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act. These amendments

will ensure that Manitobans will have the opportunity to pursue employment enhancement measures appropriate to their personal circumstances in the fulfillment of EIA program requirements.

* (15:40)

Miigwech.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any opposition or independent 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. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Question to the minister is, during the first reading you said Bill 6 will not substantively change current practice. You said this again today. So leaves me to wonder and ask the motivation or, quite frankly, the need for this bill.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I want to take an opportunity just to acknowledge some pretty phenomenal Manitobans that actually did an assessment of adult education in Manitoba, who helped inform some changes that we could make legislatively, including Bill 6.

And I want to acknowledge Fran Taylor and Jim Silver. Jim Silver produced two reports in respect of adult education, and these were one of the recommendations that Mr. Silver had brought forward that we could look at, at entrenching legislatively and supporting education as a means of making and meeting those requirements.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Can the NDP minister explain why they froze funding for adult learning and literacy centres last time they were in office?

MLA Fontaine: I'm not going to go back to something that perhaps may or may not have happened. I only was elected in 2016.

What I would suggest to the member is that perhaps the member would like to look at his colleagues, particularly the colleagues that are sitting in the front bench, and ask them why they haven't, in any way, shape or form, actually supported or enhanced education

overall, but certainly in their time as the former government in the last seven and a half years, didn't actually make any sound investments in adult education.

I would suggest to the member to talk to his front bench there and ask those questions to them.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): The minister mentioned that measures range from employment or vocational training and treatment.

Can the minister tell us what vocational treatment consists of, please?

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for the question.

I also just want to take a quick moment to acknowledge all of our front-line staff that are working with Manitobans to develop case plans, which would include some of those avocational training options that would be made in concert with Manitobans that are presently on EIA but are looking to meet the criteria but also looking to getting out of social assistance.

I had the opportunity very early on as minister to go and spend some time at one of our EIA offices and sit down with one of our caseworkers. They are phenomenal—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Would the minister tell the House why her party voted against income tax changes in the 2023 budget, which will help lower income Manitobans?

MLA Fontaine: Again, I know that members opposite want to keep reliving their failures as government. I don't know why they want to keep asking questions that point out the utter failure and lack of commitment that they've had for Manitobans that are on EIA.

We can continue this line of questioning, but I would suggest to members opposite—and that member would know, he was here in government, in the former government, and he would know the lack of commitment and the lack of financial assistance that was made by the former government to enhance adult education.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Has the minister considered what effect the bill will have on a year-over-year caseload changes?

MLA Fontaine: The bill—what the bill does is that it entrenches legislatively work that we are presently doing within the EIA system.

But what it does is, it ensures that folks—that Manitobans know that this government supports education. This government supports the human rights of Manitobans to seek education as a means of getting off EIA or meeting the criteria that they need to be able to sustain the benefit.

I think that Bill 6 is—it highlights the commitment of this government to adult education on behalf of all Manitobans.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Is the minister aware if the adult learning is currently available for EIA clients to develop and gain skills and abilities in their journey to financial independence?

MLA Fontaine: I'm not sure if there was a question there, it wasn't clear. I could ask the member to ask again. I wasn't quite sure what the question was.

Mr. Piwniuk: The question I had was: With this program here, is the ability for a person to gain enough education to become financially independent, is that the goal for this bill?

MLA Fontaine: I mean, certainly as a government, if we support Manitobans being able to access adult education, I would suspect that that's the goal of this bill.

And I would also submit to the House that that should be the goal of all of us as legislatures—legislators. We want the best for Manitobans. We want the best for Manitobans and if that includes Bill 6 and if that includes entrenching the right to adult education, I would suggest and I would hope that everybody in the House would be on the same page and would want that for Manitobans.

Mr. Balcaen: My question to the minister is: Will this add cost or staff time to these considerations? I'm assuming it will and, you know, these costs will be borne by Manitobans.

MLA Fontaine: Well, the member opposite shouldn't assume anything. That's my first piece of advice to him as a new member in this House. I would really encourage him not to assume anything.

We are doing this presently. So, it's not going to be more staff time or more money. What it will be is an indication to Manitobans that we support adult education.

So, again, I would really encourage the member opposite not to assume anything.

Mr. Perchotte: Can the members opposite explain how this bill would impact the current EIA transition programs?

MLA Fontaine: Again, this is work that our amazing staff in our variety of our different EIA offices are doing. Really committed staff, dedicated staff who, like us on this side of the House, want what is best for Manitobans.

Again, I just, in case any of our staff are listening, I want them to know that their minister sees them and respects them and really appreciates the work that they're doing on behalf of government, certainly, but on behalf of all Manitobans.

* (15:50)

MLA Berez: Can the minister tell us who was consulted on the amendment to The Manitoba Assistance Act?

MLA Fontaine: So, again, I did allude to this in one of my answers. I'll say it again. I think it is important and I'm sure that the member opposite also thinks it's important, because I did already mention this.

Some of the folks that we've spoken to are folks like Fran Taylor and Jim Silver. And I would hope that members opposite, I mean, I would be surprised if they knew who Jim Silver is, but I would hope that they would know who Jim Silver is.

Jim Silver is a phenomenal Manitoban who has dedicated his career to uplifting and really cementing the need for adult education, but really uplifting those that, you know, those that are on the financial marginalization of our society. And I really want to lift him up and say miigwech for the work that he's done, including for this—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

The honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk).

An Honourable Member: It's Riding Mountain, but you were close.

The Speaker: Riding Mountain.

Mr. Nesbitt: During first reading, the minister said Bill 6 will not substantively change current practice. So can the minister please speak to the motivation and need for this bill?

MLA Fontaine: I know that the member is attempting to construct this as some nefarious bill. It is simply a bill in which our government feels is important to, again, legislatively entrench the right of Manitobans to access adult education when they're on EIA, and to support that work, for Manitobans to be able to pursue the path of education.

I would imagine that everybody—or I would expect that everybody in this House would support Manitobans pursuing education. We know that education is a transformative effect in people's lives. So I would hope that they would support that.

Mr. Piwniuk: Can the minister give a comprehensive list of employment enhancement measures that this bill will actually create?

MLA Fontaine: Again, I think one of the most important things that this bill will enhance or, certainly, entrench is the enhancement of Manitobans' axing—accessing adult education, and enhancing Manitoba overall as a province. Again, I think that this bill goes to supporting the type of province that we want to be.

Manitoba—we want to be a province that supports adult education. We want to be a province that supports those that are economically marginalized to get out of that, if they want, and pursue that education. We on this side of the House—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Wharton: Building on the minister's comments, can the minister give a comprehensive list of employment enhancement measures that the government is considering?

MLA Fontaine: Again, this is some of the work that is already going on in our EIA offices, with our case managers and the phenomenal folks that work there. This bill further entrenches that work and really further cements the ability for Manitobans to support adult education.

Mr. Balcaen: This is very—sorry, Honourable Speaker. This is very specific to the director of assistance. Are there other civil servants engaged in this type of consideration who should be included in this act?

MLA Fontaine: I'm not sure what the member is asking in respect of civil servants being engaged in this legislation. I—again, I know that the member is new, but I don't understand what the member is trying to ask in that.

Again, this bill legislatively entrenches work that we're already doing in EIA offices across Manitoba to be able to support Manitobans to access and to pursue adult education. That is the crux of this bill. And, again, I would suggest that, I would hope, I would expect, that folks in this Chamber would support the right and the need for Manitobans to access adult education—

The Speaker: Time has expired.

Mr. Perchotte: Can the minister let Manitobans know if this will make it easier for people to access EIA?

MLA Fontaine: I'm not sure if members opposite understand how EIA works.

Like, this bill is for folks that are on EIA, that have to meet criteria to maintain the benefit. But this is a bill that then entrenches the legislative right of Manitobans to be able, in that pursuit of maintaining and working in the criteria of that benefit, to be able to pursue adult education.

Again, this is an important bill. It entrenches work that we're already doing and it really does lift up Manitobans and help Manitobans enhance our province, and certainly the transformative effect of education in their own—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak to the importance of this bill and educational opportunities for any Manitobans, but specifically those who may need to have some education upgrades, vocational upgrades or other areas that they can look at through their journey; those looking to enhance their ability in the workforce; and those looking to make sure that they can be productive members within our Manitoba society.

And that's very important to us here on this House is to make sure that we have people within Manitoba that can have meaningful work and employment within Manitoba. So, again, I'm happy to speak to this bill and bring forward the needs that arise for education.

So, I'm sure the minister opposite is aware that I spent many years in law enforcement and have seen many people incarcerated in the justice system. Many of those people have had a lack of basic education and the need to have education brought forward and to have some additional learning put forward. And there's many programs that are offered through the institutions as well as within the city of Brandon, my city, to make sure that people can glean this education and they can move forward in their educational journey.

So, it is important to make sure that not only work is part of this but that education, vocational education, different services so that people can better themselves. And I think that's very important.

As a matter of fact, bettering themselves is what I've worked towards throughout my career and helping people as a person who cares very much about those in my community.

I'm a member of an organization called IANE, which is the Interprovincial Association on Native Employment, and they right now are hosting the champions of Indigenous employment virtual career fair. And that is again going to help a number of people out today and into the future getting meaningful employment and being able to transition from EIA to working within our communities and helping invest within our communities.

So, I'm very proud to have been a member of that for over 10 years, and make sure that yearly, these seminars are put on so that we can attract employment and help people off of EIA and into the workforce.

Education, though, is very important for all of us, and I would like to thank all of the educators that have taken the time to commit to not only their clients and their pupils, but all of Manitoba, because we all benefit from this. When somebody learns, you can't take that away from them.

* (16:00)

And I learned this lesson early in my career. I had a police chief, and his name was Dick Scott, and he was one of the police chiefs in the Brandon Police Service, and he told me one day that there's many things that can happen in the police services—a police chief's ability.

He can—he or she can discipline an employee, they can suspend them, they can fire them. But one thing they cannot do is take away their education, and the more education that individuals have, the better they are able to perform within their jobs and it actually helps build on that next level of post-secondary education, university, going forward onto master's degrees or doctoral degrees, studies within all of their areas of interest. So the sky is the limit when we actually give somebody an opportunity to have education and move forward within that plan.

So it's important to recognize a lot of the work that has been done. So, currently, adult learning centres and adult literacy programs have no restrictions in accepting EIA recipients, and in 2021-2022, 17 per cent of the learners and 20—sorry—and 27 per cent of ALP learners identified as EIA recipients. Participants of ALPs and ALCs do not pay any tuition.

In July of 2021, the Department of Families partnered with AET to administer the GED testing services and the Manitoba Adult Literacy programming.

So, you know, that's important to recognize too, is the work that has been done previous to this and the background that has been brought forward so that people can glean this education that is needed and this next steps in their educational journey and assist them with another option for EIA. And it's—you know, this bill has been brought forward to make sure that those receiving, or that can receive EIA, can be looked at on an educational basis as well.

And, again, I cannot reiterate enough how important education is for training—is for individuals. And I liken this back to my father, who spent years in the military but then became a vocational teacher at one of the local high schools in Brandon. And, oftentimes, he had students come in that needed that boost and needed to have the vocational learning, because sometimes traditional learning streams aren't best for everybody.

Vocational training is something that other individuals can benefit from. And having that enshrined in this sort of legislation would be important to make sure that individuals who want to take that vocational path can have the opportunity to learn and do it in an area where they still receive a little bit of financial boost.

It's difficult in today's day and age to make ends meet, and, you know, with increased taxes and decreasing affordability that's happening, it's important that people have the ability to have EIA or other areas of income to make sure that they can help out, but not only have education here but transition from this part to again the job force and the workforce that's open right now.

There is so much employment opportunity open within Manitoba, and if we can help people meet these goals and become workers in the service areas that have dire needs right now for employment—areas all across the province are screaming for people who can work. So, if we can give people the proper education and the ability to learn enough to move into that skilled workforce and the skilled job sector, I think it's very important that we look at all of those different areas.

EIA is another area that helps our constituents in—I imagine in each and every one of our constituencies we have people who either are on EIA or will need to be on EIA. And for them to be able to look at this and

say, you know what, maybe I can look at upgrading my education while still receiving EIA—it would be important.

I'm quite sure, as I look over at the member from Portage, that—and he's confirming—that there is people within his area that need this sort of assistance. They rely on EIA. They rely on that income. And to have better education, it will help them understand the next moves into the workforce.

Agriculture is a huge area right now where they are really struggling. I think there's about a 30 per cent vacancy rate in agricultural positions right now. So farming, agricultural work—a huge importance.

So, you know, I'll give a shout-out to ACC in Brandon, who is the agricultural centre for excellence, and the school there is working very hard to train up our new individuals all across Manitoba to learn these great skills in our agricultural area. And without this sort of work, Manitoba farmers are going to suffer and the ag industry is going to suffer.

And so, rather than having somebody receive EIA, if we can give them the educational training that they desire, that they will take into their knowledge network and then be able to bring to the workforce, it is truly a win-win situation for not only Manitoba, but all of Canada and, you know, certainly will fill a lot of the job voids that are there.

So, you know, we looked at any of our post-secondary education or vocational areas. There's a need in so many of them. And, you know, again, I came from a justice background and I know that there's many areas that are underfilled, understaffed and are struggling, and should be staffed up, areas such as the clerk's areas of the courts, to allow cases to move forward.

And if we can train people in these areas, give them the education that is needed, they could come forward and they could be productive workers—and meaningful employment—which is very, very important for individual self-esteem and self-motivation.

If you don't have that self-motivation, that self-respect, then you get down on yourself, and that can lead to all sorts of other areas—mental health. It can lead to addictions, and ultimately it can lead to people self-harming, and we certainly don't want to see that.

So, if we can look at educational processes, ways to help people better themselves, that, as legislators, is something that is incumbent upon us to do.

And I know the minister mentioned that I may be new, but, you know, I would like to reinforce that I have 35 years of life experience in law enforcement and the justice system. So, I may be new to the Legislature here, but I'm certainly not new to life and the trials and tribulations that we may see throughout our lives.

So, I do thank you for the education, so I'll always take education wherever I can. And it's funny that the minister would offer that education when we're actually talking about educational needs for EIA bills. So, you know, they kind of transition to each other.

* (16:10)

Now let's talk about some of the things that I know are happening within my electoral area. And I always like to give that a shout-out, because it's important that we recognize the hard work that is being done by anybody who teaches, who instructs or who takes the time with individuals to better themselves. And that is something that all of us should be proud of, and we should support and we should thank.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So, again, in my area you have the John Howard Society, and one of the programs that they've started is a Men's Resource Centre. And maybe this could be something that's looped into this bill, is some of the training that is done there. And it's very culturally sensitive, culturally appropriate, and if you've ever been inside of the Men's Resource Centre—and I would invite any of you here or opposite to take a look there—they look at all sorts of different programming outside of traditional custodial sentences.

But they do an educational portion there now too, where they do teachings on the seven sacred teachings. They make sure that people are understanding—not only Indigenous people, but non-Indigenous as well, so that we have the opportunity to understand where these teachings come from and appreciate some of that knowledge.

If you walk into the Men's Resource Centre, the tables are set up in a circle and the tables are painted the black and the white and the yellow and the red to represent the medicine wheel, and, you know, it really is a culturally appropriate space, where they take people and have the educational components. They have speakers come in each and every week and talk about different areas that they can teach within this centre and that they can help out.

So a shout-out to this area. That's just one of many I know that are within the city of Brandon.

You look at Brandon University. You know, if we can give people a chance to better themselves on an EIA educational journey, as this bill suggests, you know, they're destined for other areas of education. And you look at Brandon University, and they offer next levels of education, including all of the different programs that can get people ready for those next steps in life. And having degrees and master's degrees is something that a lot of barriers have been placed for people, because you have to have that educational area.

And if we can give people a chance on EIA to step up, give them a hand up, not a handout. Give them a hand up so that they can help themselves, they can help our communities and they can be better within themselves.

And, again, I can't stress enough how impactful it is when people have an education, when people have a feeling of self-worth, when people can talk with a number of topics on mind and really feel good about themselves and the journey that they've taken on this educational road.

You don't realize how dry your mouth gets when you talk for 20 minutes, so just had to take a little break there, Honourable Deputy Speaker, so—[interjection]—yes. So I appreciate it very much.

You know, I look at some of the notes that I've made, and I think it's really important, the minister mentioned earlier about single parents and single parents with young children and, you know, the ability to take on educational steps, have different vocational learnings, and, you know, a lot of times this will help raise them forward and feel, you know, much better for themselves.

I've talked many times about a restorative justice program in Brandon, Community Mobilization Westman. And they actually looked at individuals that are at what's called acutely elevated risk. And many of these people don't have educational needs.

And so, some of the things that we can do to help people and bring them out of acutely elevated risk is set them up with education or employment opportunities. And so one leads into the other. If we set somebody up with education, then the sky is the limit as to what they can do in this world.

So let's face it, we all go through schooling of some sort. A traditional path might be to finish high

school and go on to college or university, and the next step is to get into the workforce.

And, of course, we all pay into employment insurance so that those that maybe don't have that opportunity can collect employment insurance, or those that maybe haven't been able to be successful in the job that they've had or a job stops and they get laid off, they move onto EIA and they can get some education to help them into those next steps.

And I've seen it many times where people will get education, they'll take the time that they need to look at where does their career path want to go? Where is their interest and where can they look at really excelling and helping out the community? And many times, that happens by happenstance. They may lose their job, they may be laid off, there may not be enough work. And then the person is forced to start a new journey.

And, you know, I can't think any other opportunity would avail itself if it wasn't for education and the ability to take some time to actually dig into what is important and vocationally look at the job opportunities that are out there. And, you know, if you can change that and then accelerate in a new career, it gives you a new appreciation for life and a new appreciation for just helping your fellow man and enjoying all that education has.

So, many people go on an education journey throughout their lives and make sure that they're following areas that they have extreme interest in, and I think, you know, that this bill gives people an opportunity to study in an area that they have great interest in, and move forward into areas that may want to, you know, sink their teeth into and really make a difference.

So, you know, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Manitoba Adult Literacy Program funds organizations to deliver programming that addresses the literacy needs of adult Manitobans. Last year, 29 agencies received more than \$2.5 million in operating grants, including a one-time COVID-19 relief grant that totalled \$50,400 to support additional operating or capital expenditures that have—may have occurred during that pandemic.

And I'm sure the pandemic put a lot of people out of work. I know in my area there was lots of people that were put out of work. And, you know, we look at the importance that they had to transition and have some new education, some new opportunities for employment because, let's face it, Manitoba shifted, the

world shifted and Brandon West shifted. There was a need in other areas to really look at where we can have the workload come in.

So, I think if we take the opportunity through this bill, it's an opportunity for us to discuss today and to look at the abilities of those people that are on EIA or that may have to go onto EIA, to have a different route. You know, the traditional route is applying for jobs and getting work and having to do this. But let's face it, let's—everybody wants to learn more and be better at what they do.

* (16:20)

I know that's a desire of mine, is to continually upgrade my education and to continually learn. It's a learning journey, and I don't think it should stop until the day that we stop on this earth and, you know, making sure that we're constantly, constantly learning. And, well, that was one of my goals for coming in and becoming an MLA is to learn this process, and I have a great team that has been very supportive and very helping.

And just like the team at EIA and the counsellors and the teams that will work with the individuals, you know, it's important to have that team atmosphere and that teamwork and the, you know, that feeling of, I guess, a holistic approach to the education of everybody caring. And I look, you know, on the opposite side; there's many teachers there, and I thank you for the work that you've done in your professions because, obviously, teachers are the cornerstone to education.

But it's not just teachers. It's people with world views, it's people that have a lived experience and past life that can also teach a lot of these vocations, a lot of these teachings and learnings, and, you know, again, people that have invested their lives into education to help the betterment of their community, Manitoba.

You know, I tip my hat to you and I say thank you. You've done wonderful, wonderful things for this province, and I think it can continue as we look at this bill that we're discussing today. And, you know, I would like to take this opportunity again to say how thankful I am to be able to speak on this bill and the importance that education has to each individual in all of, not only Manitoba, but all of society.

And giving an opportunity rather than just work, but upgrading oneself' education is something that we should really consider, and I'm glad we have the opportunity to put words on the record today about that, and about not only literacy, but numeracy that comes with this important aspect because, let's face it,

when we're learning all of these different areas, they will both be of equal importance as we move forward. So, again, this bill coming forward is so important to not only people in my constituency, but all across Manitoba.

Getting back to some of the education that could maybe be embedded in this is, you know, we look at the high school areas, and there's sometimes some of our youth that don't have the opportunity for education, and many of our high schools are offering vocations now. And maybe that could be a partnership to look at and teaching the vocations, post-secondary education. And I look specifically to Brandon; the Assiniboine Community College there has an array of vocational options, you know, that people can go into.

And you look at the welding, you look at building, you look at the Manitoba institute of excellence for farming and agriculture. That is really the areas that are needed to be tapped into by these individuals who could benefit from training rather than just applying for the jobs. They can learn what's required for each job, for each profession. They can really absorb that and then get hired and move away from EIA and on to productive work.

And that's—I've mentioned that a few times, but I think that's a goal for all of us, is to be able to be employed within our areas if we're so capable. And looking at areas that are impactful to the individual and making sure that they are comfortable with what they're doing really, really turns around.

And just a quick note, I was an average student, maybe even a little bit below average, when I was in high school. But when I hit college and I sunk my teeth into something that I really, really liked, I became an A+ student. I loved to learn, I loved to read. The education was so important.

So that's why I think this bill is important, is to give an individual—or individuals—the ability to get education in areas that they're passionate about, areas that they have a commitment to not only themselves, but their community, and maybe they can fire up and make sure that they're ready to really tackle those areas.

And, you know, the passion that they can put into their education can be the passion that they bring to a workforce, and have that change and make that change. You know, all of us want to make change. I think that's why we're all here in this Legislature. We want to make sure that people have the best that Manitoba can

offer, and that's incumbent upon each and every one of us.

And, you know, when we take our oaths and when we look at where we want this great province of ours to go, we want it to continue to grow. We want to continue to grow the economy, and that's been something that our party has always looked at is, you know, growing our economy and making sure that it continues to support all of Manitoba.

So, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to say thank you for being able to put words on the record about this bill and the importance of education when it comes to EIA.

Thank you.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Honourable Deputy Speaker, what an exciting day for me today. I feel like I've been up here all day long talking. I've got months held back; I'm just ready to go.

Very excited today to speak on Bill 6, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act, regarding adult education. As a Progressive Conservative, I know firsthand that our party wants to lift persons out of poverty. The saying a hand up, not a handout, cannot apply more accurately than it does in regards to this bill.

I know knowledge is power, and education is the path to that power. Knowledge sits at the forefront of everything we do. It gives you power over the direction of your life. In my background, I left home at 16. I was a good student, but I didn't want to stay where I was living. So off on my own I went. I did not graduate high school, and I was forced to take jobs that were available at the time. I sought out education and eventually enrolled as a mature student in college.

I was always—had a desire for education and a desire to learn more as time went on. Based on that journey, I'm probably one of the first 4.0-grade students that never graduated.

As the opportunity to become critic for Advanced Education and Training came up, I was extremely excited. My path has led me to many endeavours, including being a business owner. And having an opportunity to employ people gainfully, respectfully, having them progress through the company, having them receive training and go get further education that they bring back to the organization, was a big step, and again, the power that education has.

As the critic for Advanced Education and Training, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit several of our teaching institutions. The education facilities that I

had seen in this province left me with tremendous respect for the industry and the people in it. Every single institution I had visited all have demonstrated a great professionalism and respect toward their students and the students' paths to success.

* (16:30)

In my early business life, I was an owner of a machine shop. That shop was located here in Winnipeg, and we needed people to be trained. Sometimes people don't fall in the same basket as everybody else where schooling works for them. So we approached Tec Voc High School and asked if they could set up a program designed around our industry.

Tec Voc chose to move forward and put a program together, and between our company and a number of companies involved in the Manitoba Aerospace Association, we were able to put a program together that educated many, many students that the system would have failed.

Upon completion of their program, some of the students end up walking through our doors. These students were taught on the basics of machining and manufacturing, but were also given the soft skills needed to succeed in the world, the small yet discernible skills to come into a place of business, show respect to your employer, expect respect back, to have the right to say no in a non-safe environment.

And one of those students excelled very, very quickly in our organization, and Valerie Lang, at the age of 19, became a shift supervisor, taking charge of a shift of 22 people. Many of them were almost three years older than her.

That year, she won the Aboriginal Youth Achievement Award, and she was presented the award at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. That is the power of education on your life. Valerie has continued to be successful throughout her journey. Now this goes back almost 25 years ago, and today Valerie is doing very well and very successful.

In the schools that I stopped in—I try to make myself available to see every school in our province. Whether you are looking into a career in the trades or a more professional designation, education is your path forward. I was able to visit and to tour, locally here, the Industrial Skills Training Centre, and met with the director, Scot Taylor and several of the teachers in the program.

The program is designed to have students come in and learn skills in metalwork and welding. I walked

through their hands-on facility, stopping, looking at the equipment, seeing how it related to real world, stopping, speaking with the students, finding out what their backgrounds were, what the opportunities or the challenges that they had getting there.

Many of the people had very similar stories to myself, where they didn't have an opportunity to continue the education at a young age and needed to come back a little bit older in life. Got tired of meaningless jobs, bouncing from company to company and getting laid off over and over and over again. They took the needs upon themselves to move forward and seek out the education that's available. Some of them were through government programs and some of them were on their own.

As I looked at their equipment, I've seen the projects the students were doing. They were building something useful; they were building toolboxes. That was their final project that they would—could be completing to ensure that they get a passing grade.

The students that I spoke to were all excited about the opportunities that laid ahead of them. Many employers were already knocking on the doors. In the province, we have a shortage of approximately 500 welders, and this is an opportunity to fill a big gap in our manufacturing sector and get people gainfully employed in trades that they would be proud of to work at for generations.

The ability of a family to provide a decent wage, to provide for their children, to get their children in sports, to support their children when their education needs arise is paramount. The director, Scot Taylor, took tremendous pride in showing me around his facility.

I went to the Louis Riel centre for arts and technology. I spent a tremendous amount of time there, meeting with the faculty, meeting with the children in the classroom, the adults, the returning adults of closer to my age even, and people who just wanted knowledge for different things in life, people who wanted a better opportunity and better incomes. I walked through there, throughout their programs, and they have an extremely diverse program option list. It's gaining students opportunities in many sectors of employment.

Again, hitting home were the trades that I'm trained in. The electrical department that I walked through, and showing the students doing the calculations on voltage, amperage, ohms, working with their voltmeters, defining the proper way to install the wire so they're not going to get electrocuted, it was very

impressive. I walked over to their plumbing department and found out how they're teaching plumbing and how they were mocking up and doing real-life training on how a plumbing system works.

Talked to them about their power mechanics shop, which I have an avid respect for people in power mechanics and automotive. I've got a passion for auto-body, and I got a passion for motors. So when I got there and I took a look at their equipment, everything from their tire balancers to their wheel-alignment machines to the specialty tools used for changing ball joints. Or even into their other programs, talking to the people in their cosmetology area where people come in from the street and make appointments—they come in to get their hair done, get haircuts, get their nails done, pedicures—it was great, absolutely great.

I met with approximately 15 different teachers there, and every single one of them had an exuberance and a passion for what they were doing. As many members in this Chamber—and especially members opposite who have been in the education field—know the pride you have when you're reaching your students.

My daughter is a teacher. It's something that she wanted to do since as far back as I can remember. She is passionate about it, and she does very well; she's very well liked by her students.

February was I Love to Read Month, and as a proud father I had the opportunity to read to the students in my daughter's class. Going around the area of Selkirk that I represent, I went and read to several different schools and several different grades. The excitement that I seen in those children was incredible. One of the schools in particular, the kids were ready for me. They had studied myself and the role of government prior to the election and watched us all the way through. And speaking with those children, I found out more about myself than I thought I knew before I walked in. Their questions were intense and very exciting.

I made my way over to Herzing career college—was another one of the institutions that I went to. The board over there was incredible. They were so excited that they had somebody come down and meet with them.

* (16:40)

And again, walking through their programs, seeing what they had to offer, I was blown away by the level of instruction that was given, the level of respect, the level of intensity and the level of professionalism. It was very evident with all the instructors

I spoke with, that the students' success was first. Without their success, they would not be successful.

But it also did something else. Meeting with the Herzing career college board showed me opportunities that are available to fill the gaps—gaps in our nursing programs—where we can only have so many nurses go through. They are willing to move forward and invest in a program for nursing. They need government to help them make that transition. They need government to remove the barriers that have stopped them from doing this.

They have—the owner of the organization, Mr. Herzing himself, prepared to put hundreds of thousands of dollars to get this program up and running.

These types of opportunities are available. We just need to ask the right questions. We need to make sure that we have a working dialogue that can get people off of EIA into meaningful, long-term, rewarding professions. I hear from so many people they get stuck in a rut. They're at a job that pays very little. They have an apartment that's very expensive. They can't afford to save any money for a down payment for a house, and they can't afford to save and take time off of work to go to school.

We need to find a way that we can help these people bridge that gap to get themselves out of poverty and into meaningful long-term professions.

We need to offer assistance as a means to better yourself, not offer assistance as a way of life. The Manitoba PC launched a disability income support program that was designed to recognize and to support Manitobans with severe and prolonged disabilities. Bill 72, The Disability Support Act, and the amendments act, to the Manitoba assistant act, did that in October of 2021. The PC government engaged with public stakeholders, consulted a dedicated community advisory committee to tailor programs that responded to the specific needs of clients.

These cli—clients—pardon me—once enrolled in the program had access to the same financial, health and other benefits available to EIA clients. This program was also—will be indexed annually to the inflation rates effective April of 2023. The client in the program received an assigned financial worker to issue monthly benefits and the benefits increase of approximately \$100 per month and phone allowance automatically were added to the budgets.

The ability to earn up to \$12,000 per year before benefits are impacted was added, and access to health benefits for two years after a file closes was added.

The persons enrolled in the program could also choose to access a comprehensive sweep of personal-centered community navigation supports, including referrals to other programs and benefits assistance with building support networks to help increase the community participation and inclusion.

The Speaker in the Chair

Jessica Croy, the special advisor to the minister on disability related issues, said these changes are exciting to herself and to the other members of the disability community in Manitoba, and they were pleased to see them begin the rollout, which happened in January of that year.

That new program launched by the PCs in 2023 gave persons living with disabilities support, dignity, and the respect that they deserve.

You know, Jessica Croy has been in this House. She was—on my first private member's statement she was here as an honoured guest, a part of Inclusion Selkirk. Jessica Croy's abilities in the community are nothing short of impressive.

The program rolled out in January 2023 and was open to Manitobans currently receiving EIA through the persons with disabilities category who are in one of the three pre-described classes.

People who receive the services come from community living disabilities, people who live in personal care homes and people who are receiving the Canada Pension Plan.

Disability benefit individuals in these prescribed classes did not need to provide any new financial or medical information and were automatically enrolled in the program. All other Manitobans were able to apply to the program beginning April 1 of 2023.

A new financial assessment and an intake process was established to determine if the individuals are financially eligible to participate in the program. The program continues to be a success today and thanks to the hard work of the Families minister under the PC government.

That hard work was only the beginning of repairing the past NDP damage and moved towards balance in a sustainable way. The previous PC government had invested more per person on health care,

education and social services combined than any other province.

We stand for economic and job creation. In our province, we look forward to an integral, stronger, more prosperous PC future. Manitoba increased the basic personal amount that you receive on your taxes and the NDP voted against it, holding people in poverty.

Education is important. In the area of Selkirk, at the same time that I had left school, I had several other friends leave school, and many of us were destined down a path that we should not want to go down. Many of my fellow friends and colleagues at the time were bouncing around, not making very much money, and getting into trouble.

After some time, they decided that they wanted to turn their lives around, and Selkirk had a program. They had a program for mature students to come and learn some trade skills, to find something beneficial that they could take on their journey in life.

They began in the program. They learned a little bit of everything. They learned how to sew; they learned how to cook; they learned how to do construction work, how to build houses and sheds, do some framing. They learned a little bit about plumbing and they learned a lot about themselves, and their abilities were only just starting to get tapped.

Every single person who went through that program that I know is a success today. Those successes range from being shop supervisors to be lead hands, to be managers. Some of them are business owners. Some of them have franchises that they run, and several of them.

Again, education is the way forward. It's the way that everything begins. Without education, you will become a victim.

I have many different skills that I've learned along the way, and I developed skills because I didn't have money. I couldn't afford to hire people to do things. I couldn't afford a plumber when I was doing renovations, so I learned how to do it. I couldn't afford to hire an electrician, so I learned how to do it.

* (16:50)

And when I had a quote to do my kitchen cabinets, that I could have hired somebody for a year and a half, I decided to learn how to do that. So I added cabinetmaking to my skills of things.

When you take your vehicle in and the guy gives you an estimate on what it's going to cost, I know if

I'm going to get ripped off. And then I have a choice to go through—somewhere else. Education provides that.

Recently in my home I have an in-floor heat system hooked to a boiler. It—

An Honourable Member: A heat pump.

Mr. Perchotte: Not a heat pump. It failed, and I contacted somebody to come out and do a repair. They quoted me \$14,000. They also told me that the glycol used in the floor system is \$280 a five-gallon pail and I need 10 of them. They told me that they would have approximately 40 hours of work, at almost \$200 an hour. They told me the equipment cost to repair, again, was around \$8,000.

Because I had the education that I had, I said, this doesn't make sense. Let's do a little research. I found the exact same glycol, \$101.33 for a five-gallon pail. The parts that I purchased added up to \$1,255, and it took me eight hours to get the job done. I think that was money well spent. And it's working very well, by the way.

But I hear this all the time. I hear from people, friends, family, neighbours, people I barely know; they tell me they can't afford something. They can't afford to fix their car because it's four grand or five grand, now that it needs struts and it needs front-axle bearings and the CV joints are gone. Well, I'm fortunate that I've got four-post lifts; I've got two-post lifts at my disposal; I've got an arsenal of tools. And when you get somebody to come down and you help them out, and all they have to do is pay the parts and those parts equate to \$400, you know somebody's getting taken advantage of.

Education is the power forward. Education will lift you out of your current position and put you anywhere you want to be. Those kids that I read to, the common theme I kept telling them is be who you want to be. Invest in yourself. Spend the time. Learn what you want. It's very important. You can do anything you want in this world. And as a representative sitting here today, we have proved that. All from different backgrounds, we have made it to represent Manitobans here today. Education, knowledge and, hopefully, being a good person got us here.

When you reach out to somebody and you can help them, to give them a hand up, to give them an opportunity to better themselves, as my colleague said, nobody can take that away. That is something you own, and you will own that forever. Knowledge is power.

My son runs our organization now. At 15 years old—when he was 15, my primary welder gave notice; he had a better opportunity that came up. I called my son and I said, hey, listen, I know you're going to be 16 right away. I'm looking for somebody to become my primary welder. We manufacture buildings; we have to do this correct. Do you know of anybody?

And he said, I'll ask around. I'll talk to the teachers. I said, but you've already been taking the program. Are you interested in applying? He was blown away that I asked him. I didn't ask him because he was my son. That probably gave him the opportunity because I knew who he was; I asked him because of his work ethic and his ability to do things. He showed up and within three days his work was perfect.

Now, it's not just perfect; we have to make sure that we meet a standard. We have to have the Canadian Welding Bureau come out and test and make sure that we meet the 47.1 structural welding specifications.

He got that opportunity because he worked hard. He invested in himself. And he continues to do that. We encourage everybody we know to get education, and if you have an opportunity that comes forward—and the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) had said earlier, and I really like the comment that she had said—she had said, live your best life and take advantage of all the opportunities.

Now, she did that in the spirit of the moment of what we're celebrating tomorrow. But that statement is for everybody. Move forward. Be who you are, but be the best at it. Invest in yourself, invest in the education and make life worth living.

When you are bouncing from job to job to job to job, and EI is the only thing that shows up to bail you out a little bit, that pattern will continue. But when you have an opportunity, a true opportunity for education, you can better your position in life. You can better your family's position. And your children will follow suit under the right guidance.

My hope is that my children become more successful than I ever dreamt I could be. My hope—that my grandchildren become more successful than my children, and I hope that my community steps forward and everybody becomes to the level that they want to become.

I believe in education. I believe in the people who provide the education. I believe in the opportunities that are in front of us. We just need to grab them.

Thank you.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): What an opportunity for me today in this last part of the day to talk about something that is so incredible, that we all take for granted—is being education.

Education is critical to all of us here. Unfortunately we don't always get education at the same period of time as we'd like to. So again, let's talk a little bit about adult education, and I want to talk about my family's experiences as well, here.

You know, when we're kids, I had the opportunity to grow up—my mother and father both never graduated high school, but the one thing that I learned from them was hard work, and to learn about education and to make sure that you're always learning every day. But I think as all of us as members in this great Chamber here, that we're all educators, and we all have the ability to make a difference out there, to be able to help some of our fellow people out there that may not have the opportunity right now, and we want to make sure that we're taking full advantage of that.

In Portage la Prairie—sorry. In Portage la Prairie, we have many opportunities where adult education is critical. The Portage Learning and Literacy, where people that are new to Canada, people that are adults, people that haven't had the chance, get the opportunity to go and to learn. No one is turned away, and no one should ever be turned away when it comes to education.

We must always be learning, every day, regarding that. It's not always about reading and writing and arithmetic. What it's about—

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member will have 27 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is now adjourned—*[interjection]* Twenty-eight minutes; I'm sorry. Some people are more generous than me.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is now adjourned, stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 7, 2024

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