

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

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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

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 18—The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act

Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara), that Bill 18, The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Altomare: Child Care Standards Act to enable funding to be flowed directly to post-secondary institutions to support the construction of learning labs for their early learning and child care training and education program.

This is an important step, Honourable Speaker, in our government's commitments to develop a comprehensive strategy for recruiting and retaining early childhood educators.

Miigwech, merci and thank you.

The Speaker: Further introduction of bills?

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

Bill 19—The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Altomare), that Bill 19, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wiebe: Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 19, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act.

This bill contains amendments to The Drivers and Vehicles Act that will enable Manitoba Public Insurance to apply provisions dealing with written-off, salvageable and irreparable motor vehicles and heavy trailers.

The proposed amendments to The Drivers and Vehicles Act will allow MPI to designate trailers for the status that accurately reflects their roadworthy condition and claims history, improving road safety and consumer protection. The amendments will apply to heavy trailers, those with a gross vehicle weight rating of over 4,500 kilograms.

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

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

Bill 20—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and Consumer Protection and Government Services, that Bill 20, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 20, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act.

This bill amends The Highway Traffic Act to prevent impaired drivers who agreed to alternative measures from appealing to the Licence Suspension Appeal Board if they have their driver's licence

suspended for failing to comply with terms of the program.

Barring appeals of licence suspensions will prevent individuals from delaying the installation of the ignition interlock device, and therefore support measures that combat impaired driving. Closing this loophole will improve road safety and protect Manitoba families.

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

Thank you.

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

Bill 21—The Public Schools Amendment Act

Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Manitoba, that Bill 21, The Public Schools Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Altomare: This bill proposes amendments to The Public Schools Act to facilitate student attendance in school by removing barriers that prevent students from attending their local school when they do not reside with their parents or legal guardians, and to change the right to attend school-age and compulsory school-age programs.

This is important to support and encourage school attendance, which we know is directly linked to student achievement, graduation rates, transition to post-secondary, employment and social inclusion.

Miigwech, merci and thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Nepali Cultural Society of Manitoba

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, today I want to honour the Nepali community in Manitoba, specifically the Nepali Cultural Society of Manitoba.

I have had the privilege of living near, working alongside and advocating with the Nepali community in south Winnipeg over the past 10 years.

* (13:40)

The Nepali Cultural Society's programming ranges from cultural events, women's engagement programs, youth development, programs for Nepali seniors and traditional and national games of cultural importance.

The Nepali community members make great contributions to our society every day. They work in different areas of government services and non-profit work, and many are business owners.

It is incredible for the next generation to have such strong cultural knowledge of their community. Future generations should feel welcomed, valued and empowered to contribute to the common good, and proud of their Nepali heritage.

Although the Nepali community is comparatively small, it is growing and thriving. Recognizing communities, whether small or large, is important to ensure their voice is at the table.

In April, the Nepali community will be celebrating Nepali New Year 2081. It is absolutely one of my favourite Nepali festivals. When you get to know the Nepali community, you will immediately feel comfortable with their hospitality and be moved by their bright smile, happiness and peace.

As the MLA for Fort Richmond, I feel blessed to have the Nepali Cultural Society of Manitoba in Fort Richmond. And I am grateful for calling many of you my friends.

Happy Nepali new year. Nepali naya barsha ko subhakamana [*Good wishes for the new year*].

I want to invite my colleagues to join me in thanking them for their hard work, dedication and commitment to our communities in Manitoba.

Thank you. Dhanyabad [*Thank you*].

The Speaker: I need to recognize the honourable member for Fort Richmond again. The honourable member for Fort Richmond.

MLA Chen: Sorry; I would like to add the 12 guests' names who—present today to Hansard.

Lila Adhikari, Tika Adhikari, Subas Dahal, Bishal Dhakal, Sunita Dhakal, Shyam Ghimire, Nabin Katel, Ashish Mishra, Manika Pradhan, Purushottam Raj Singh, Tara Subedi, Deepak Timsina.

Kate Cameron

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for being able to recognize the tremendous sporting accomplishment of a La Vérendrye constituent.

Kate Cameron, a Canadian curler hailing from the great community of New Bothwell and representing Manitoba, recently skipped her team of Mackenzie Elias, Meghan Walter and Kelsey Rocque to the third place finish at the 2024 Scotties Tournament of Hearts.

Cameron, who currently curls out of the Granite Curling Club in Winnipeg, snagged the sixth and final Hearts payoff position.

Cameron is not new to curling. Success started with a U16 provincial championship in 2008. Then in 2017 Cameron's team achieved remarkable success by winning the Manitoba Scotties Tournament of Hearts, defeating Olympic champion Jennifer Jones, securing a spot at the 2017 Scotties. From here Cameron had gone on to representing Alberta in the Scotties playing as a third.

Cameron returned to her home province of Manitoba to skip this season for the first time in a decade with a completely new team.

Cameron had a bumpy start to the season. During the first four of five events, Cameron played with almost no vision due to laser eye surgery. Her second, Taylor McDonald, faced challenges of playing while pregnant and was swapped out just prior to the Scotties. Adding to the challenges, Cameron's team was down to three players in one game of the Scotties due to Meghan Walter falling ill.

Despite adversity, Team Manitoba-Cameron walked away with the bronze medal at the Scotties after qualifying with a wild-card spot. They turned heads and won games that people weren't expecting.

The community of New Bothwell gathered to celebrate Cameron's accomplishment at an event to honour her February 29 at the New Bothwell Rec Centre. It was here that I was able to present—

The Speaker: The honourable member's time has expired.

Is there leave for the member to finish his statement?
[Agreed]

Mr. Narth: It was here that I was able to present recognition for the team's tremendous accomplishment.

Kate Cameron's journey in the world of curling is a testament to her skill, determination and love for the sport. I wish her and her team much continued success.

Burma Bushie—Rocky Mountain Woman

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): I rise today to pay respect and admiration to Burma Bushie, spiritually known by her traditional name of Rocky Mountain Woman.

A proud member of the Hollow Water First Nation, Burma was a day school and residential school survivor.

Burma continuously broke the ceiling for Indigenous women of her generation, and her legacy lives on today to continuously break that ceiling for generations to come.

Burma was proof that Indigenous women are strong, resilient, dedicated and will always have their matriarchal impact on society.

Burma was a trailblazer and visionary in every aspect of her life, from being the first community-based executive director of Southeast Child & Family Services to the co-founder of the community-based Community Holistic Circle Healing—or CHCH—Program, a restorative justice program in the Hollow Water First Nation, a program that is internationally known for its community-based work with victims, families and offenders that are suffering the impacts of inter-generational harms on Indigenous people.

Burma was a tireless advocate for Indigenous people, for her culture and her language. She helped implement the grandmothers program into the Wanipigow School. The grandmothers program is having a profound impact on the students, teachers and the elders themselves so that elders can share their language and lived experiences with the students.

And I must say, Honourable Speaker, it gives you an overwhelming sense of love to see that interaction in the school environment with our community elders and students.

She was famous for saying, we need to focus on the children and bringing spirit back to our people, and also for saying, we need to bring women back to a place of honour.

Her tireless work for Indigenous people speaks for itself. I was honoured to present Burma with the queen's jubilee and in that, Honourable Speaker, she had some hesitation as to whether to accept: one was because of the Crown's historic relationship with Indigenous people, and two was because the Chamber

was not always welcoming to Indigenous people, let alone to an Indigenous woman.

Honourable Speaker, we had a long talk about what having her join me here in the Legislature for the queen's jubilee presentation meant for Indigenous people today. It was truly an honour for her to join me in person, along with the first female premier of Manitoba, to present her with the queen's jubilee medal.

And now today, Honourable Speaker, I will proudly say the name Burma Bushie in this Chamber, for it is due to her resilience and perseverance for Indigenous people that I myself am able to stand here today.

Burma was proof that Indigenous women are strong, are resilient and have done great things and will—

The Speaker: The honourable minister's time is expired.

Is there leave for the minister to finish his statement? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Bushie: Burma was proof that Indigenous women are strong, are resilient and have done great things and will continue to do great things as the matriarchs of our society.

Honourable Speaker, in June of last year Burma passed into the spirit world but I wholeheartedly know that she is with us today. And to her children Michelle, Derek, Kelly and Shavonne, I want to say miigwech for sharing your mother with us.

Honourable Speaker, I ask for a moment of silence to pay respect to Burma for all her work, dedication and resilience for Indigenous people and for society as a whole, for we are all at a better place for having had her in our lives.

The Speaker: Is there leave for a moment of silence? [*Agreed*]

A moment of silence was observed.

Canadian Border Services Agency

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): I rise today to recognize the incredible dedication and hard work of men and women of the Canadian Border Services Agency.

This January, officers at Boissevain intercepted and seized over 406 kilograms of meth bound for Winnipeg. Crown attorneys have estimated that these three—this is enough doses for three people for every Manitoban, and be representing over \$50 million that organized criminals were deprived of.

This was reported as the largest narcotics seizure in prairie region history, which is not a record no one wants to set, though we are all thankful for the recipients never received these drugs.

We have had many 'controversations' in this Chamber about addressing illegal drugs, and while we are fundamentally disagree on the solutions, I want to hope that each and every member of this Chamber can agree that taking a semi-trailer of narcotics out of the hands of criminals is making our communities safer.

It was disappointing to see that neither the minister of addictions nor the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) acknowledged the important work, but I hope they can join me and all Manitobans in confirming these officers for protecting our communities and keeping drugs off the streets.

* (13:50)

On behalf of all Manitobans I want to thank the CBSA and the RCMP officers for—that they do their duty day in, day out to protect our communities. Large actions such as this brings the vital work to the forefront, Honourable Speaker.

Thank you.

Hoffman's Fine Foods

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I rise this afternoon to share a bit about a small business in Tyndall Park, called Hoffmann's Fine Foods.

Hoffmann's Fine Foods was established in 1986 by Klaus Hoffmann. He ran a family catering business while working as head of Red River College's culinary arts program.

In the late 1980s, he decided to put a sign out in front of the catering office located at 107 Plymouth St. This sign advertised their homemade chicken fingers.

The initial response was so good that Klaus added a retail component to the catering and food-manufacturing business, and in 1996, the family opened a retail store in the lucky constituency of Riel.

The impressive production site I spoke of, located in Tyndall Park, has a storefront and is owned by a strong woman named Brhan Abrha, who has joined us today in the gallery.

Honourable Speaker, I have witnessed first-hand how their products are made. All of their delicious products are specialized, predominantly chicken-based and are homemade-style. These include chicken fingers,

chicken Kiev and chicken cordon bleu. And my favourite is the brie-filled chicken.

Something unique and commendable about Hoffmann's Fine Foods is that they go out of their way to hire youth, including youth from visible minority groups. They train and give them the opportunity to become successful in their future careers.

Now, we know that small businesses are the backbone of our economy and that the food industry is facing challenges with supply chains at this time, and this requires our attention.

We all need to support businesses, especially small businesses that are run by women and put a special focus on youth. And so, I would like to sincerely thank this government for their recent support for this small business.

In closing, Honourable Speaker, Hoffman's Fine Foods is a family and a team. They work exceptionally hard, provide delicious food made with local products and contribute immensely to our province.

I'd like to ask my colleagues to join me today in recognizing them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Finances Borrowing Inquiry

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier recently announced the upcoming budget date on his trip to Toronto, signalling that he has no intention of putting Manitobans first. Perhaps it's because he intends on sending more and more of Manitoban's hard-earned money to Bay Street.

The question is a simple one today, Honourable Speaker: How much money has the NDP government borrowed in their first six months?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We're cleaning up a significant fiscal mess that was less-left by the member opposite and the others who sat at the Cabinet table prior to the recent election.

I wonder, though, if the member opposite is going to follow his recycled questions by going out into the hallway and making more divisive comments again today.

You know that yesterday, not only did he make divisive comments about pronouns, he also told The Canadian Press, and I quote here, whether it's the topic

of pronouns, whether it's some other topics in the education world. End quote. That's what he means when he makes these divisive comments.

So, I really would like him to clarify for the people of Manitoba: What are these other topics that he's speaking of? Beyond pronouns, what does he want to put on the table in terms of dividing Manitobans? Surely, he doesn't want to revisit conversations about LGBTQ kids. Surely he doesn't want to put health curricula in the conversation.

So, please, I would ask him to clarify his comments—

The Speaker: Premier's time has expired.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Obviously, the Premier today is trying to stand up and distract from the questions that we're asking.

And I think possibly it's because he just does not know the answers, Honourable Speaker. For his benefit and the benefit of all members, I would like to table the following recent order-in-council authorizing borrowing to the tune of nearly \$10 billion. December, \$7 billion. Mid-January, \$1.5 billion. Mid-January, \$500 million. Mid-January, \$250 million. And in February, \$700 million.

For context, the NDP's borrowing exceeds what was borrowed by past governments during pandemic years and Premier Selinger's floods.

Why is the NDP hiding their borrowing of almost \$10 billion from Manitobans?

Mr. Kinew: We had to refinance the debt that was accumulated under the PCs at record amounts. Again, everyone knows that the 2020 deficit and the other pandemic deficits were among the largest ever. Those roll over. We have to refinance that. We're cleaning up the fiscal mess that they left behind.

But I wonder who will clean up the mess that is being caused by the member opposite's divisive commentary. He goes out into the hallway and he makes comments dividing Manitobans one against the other and, of course, he puts the issue of pronouns on the table, but then he also says that there are some other topics in the world of education that he wants to revisit.

What are those topics that he wants to revisit? Hopefully, it does not include LGBT issues that were

hard-fought for in this Chamber and across the province. Hopefully, he doesn't want to revisit health curricula. Hopefully he doesn't want to put birth control—

The Speaker: The Premier's time has expired.

The Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Ewasko: Obviously, obviously, the Premier wants to distract from the abysmal record of not only his doing but his Cabinet minister's, Honourable Speaker.

Today we're hearing and we're seeing and this is news to the Premier, I'm sure, as well, that borrowing before opening up the spending floodgates, Honourable Speaker. Despite the Premier's fictional forecast, PCs left him with a over a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar surplus.

Now, since the NDPs have been in charge in October, they've borrowed nearly \$10 billion interest which will cost more than a half a billion dollars each and every year.

Will the Premier stand up today and defend giving Manitobans a higher debt cost?

Mr. Kinew: We're cleaning up the mess left by the PCs.

I also want to clean up the mess caused by the PCs when they want to act like people who use different pronouns are something that our children need to be protected from. I am a parent with kids in the public school system. My colleague from Union Station, my colleague from Kirkfield Park are not people that my kids need to be protected from.

In fact, if my boys grow up to show some small measure of the courage, integrity and grace of my colleagues, I will die a happy man knowing that my work as a father was successful.

We are going to continue calling this out each and every single day because the real thing that kids in Manitoba need to be protected from is hatred and bigotry.

Provincial Taxes Affordability Concerns

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Honourable Speaker, they say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. So on this side of the House, we say thank you to the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) for copying the PCs.

It is clear this NDP government has no plan to make life more affordable for Manitobans. We just

heard the Premier. He has no plan other than taking credit for what previous PC government had—did with tax savings.

Everyone in Manitoba was happy to see the ads, but little did they know it was the previous PCs, not the NDP. This minister and his entire team voted against our PC tax cuts.

It takes a lot of courage to admit you were wrong. Will the minister stand up today and say he was wrong for voting against the tax cuts that make life more affordable for Manitobans?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We're advertising our tax cuts because we're the team that's putting in the hard work of figuring out how we are going to pay for these things.

* (14:00)

But let's talk about ads. Let's talk about ads from the poster child from this divisive rhetoric, the person who've brought this out into the public sphere. I invite the member opposite to explain to the people of Manitoba why he wants to put on the table for discussion division and hatred rather than bringing people together to do things like fixing health care or making life more affordable.

Can he please clarify his thoughts on trans children and their rights in our schools today?

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

Upcoming Carbon Tax Increase Federal Rebate for Business

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Honourable Speaker, to be clear now, that's four questions on the province's finances and zero answers from this Premier.

Manitobans are going to wake up to a 23 per cent carbon tax increase on April 1. Despite the NDP-Trudeau talking points about carbon tax rebates, Ottawa still owes more than \$3,000 to over 43,000 businesses. That's \$130 million. Saskatchewan deputy premier and finance minister have sent a letter to Ottawa calling on them to release this money.

Will this Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and Premier do the right thing, stand up for Manitobans and send a letter? And just for the record, I'll table this so they can copy another document.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Standing up for the people of Manitoba is something that we do each and every day. The letter to ask for Manitoba's share of

the \$144 million has already been sent. Because again, on this side of the House, we put the work in first and we put out the press releases later, unlike the member opposite.

But when we're talking about publicity, I do have to call the member out for the ads that he was the poster boy for that were very divisive, that were very harmful to people in Manitoba. There was a lot of dust kicked up during the election, and then poof. After October 3, the issue disappeared.

It seems that it was very craven; it was very divisive; it was very calculated. But I'll give the member opposite the opportunity to clarify his views today.

Does he support the rights of trans children in Manitoba?

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

Provincial Taxes Affordability Concerns

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Honourable Speaker, I know the Premier's doing his role. He doesn't understand how question period works. That's five questions now on finances and zero answers from this Premier.

This government has been flip-flopping like a pickerel on a dock since they took office. When they debated the budget last year, tax cuts were evil, and now they voted for them. Suddenly this minister has seen the error in his ways.

Now, Liberal Premier of Newfoundland, Andrew Furey, has joined the call of six other premiers across Canada and across party lines to make life more affordable for their provinces.

When will the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala)—I guess the Premier, since the Premier won't let the Minister of Finance speak, stand up, do the right thing and stand on the side of Manitobans to make life more affordable?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): One of our first actions was to take the 14 cents a litre fuel tax off of Manitobans' backs. That's something that the member opposite charged every single day when he served in the provincial government.

But in his desperate bid to try and hang on to power, he was the face of very divisive ads which we know targeted trans youth in our province.

Now we hear that he's entertaining thoughts of running for leader. I wonder how he's going to talk to Pride Winnipeg when he begs for the right to be able to march in the parade this year. He's going to be hemming and hawing and, oh, you've got to understand what the campaigns are like and what the party asked of me. Please, please, please let me march.

No. On this side—moral clarity. We support young people, no matter how they choose to identify and we know that they deserve to be safe. And we will stand up against the bullies every time they want to engage on this topic.

STARS Air Ambulance Licence Renewal Inquiry

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Honourable Speaker, there are many families in my constituency and across this province that thank STARS for the fact that terrible days were not infinitely worse. In our community, STARS has been a lifeline and is a lifeline that almost everyone has either been impacted by or knows someone who has.

In March of 2022 a two-year extension on their licence was signed.

Can the minister of government services and consumer protection commit to Manitobans that she will renew this agreement?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Thank you to the member opposite for that question.

I'm glad to finally have a chance to stand up in this session to answer a question. It gives me the opportunity to remind folks on the other side of the House what a mess they made of health care.

You know, it's gratifying to hear that there was a handful of people that got some service during—under the previous government. But all we've heard is the lack of health care, the cuts that were made in health care and how many people were flown out of province to access health care instead of being able to access it here at home.

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

Mr. Guenter: Honourable Speaker, the question is about STARS, a service that has incredible support across the province.

The member—the minister would prefer to talk about health care and we can talk about the 22 ERs that they closed in rural Manitoba, but rural Manitobans

know that STARS is there for them in their very worst days.

And so, this government needs to come forward now and clarify whether or not they have the intention to renew the contract. They owe it to each and every Manitoban to own their decision here and now.

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

If there's any question about the value of health care to—for Manitobans, I want to say clearly that this government in every department supports our health-care mission. That includes in our government services department.

We know how essential air flight services are to Manitobans, particularly in rural and northern and other remote areas of the province.

So I want to assure Manitobans that the health-care service you need will be here for you. That is a part of our agenda as government.

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

Mr. Guenter: Honourable Speaker, no political dancing around, no games. This is a life-and-death—this is life-and-death matter for Manitobans. Manitobans deserve more than hope. They deserve a sense of safety and security. This NDP government has no right to infringe on that.

And I get—I understand that they may be ideologically opposed, but I ask this minister a simple question: Will she let her ideology get in the way of life-saving emergency services for Manitobans?

MLA Naylor: I'm—I do appreciate the opportunity to thank STARS on behalf of our government.

I know that they've had the opportunity to meet with our Health Minister, and so that we have a good understanding of their work and we're grateful for the work that they do provide to folks across the province.

It's unfortunate that the previous government made such a mess of our health-care system, cut so many services, but Manitobans can count on this government going forward to put their needs first.

Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program Application Approval Process and Backlogs

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): It was a PC government that established the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, and it was our PC team here that expanded it.

This Minister of Labour and Immigration has chosen to ignore the fact that it was our PC team that brought in 170,000 immigrant workers and created an advisory council.

It is the NDP that is ignoring this file with applications being backlogged for eight months and ignored.

How will this minister address the thousands of applicants in the queue and eliminate the backlog?

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

On this side of the House, it is going to be our honour to be able to welcome many more newcomers to Manitoba, and their families. And we're going to be doing that with an aim for more family reunification because we know that that's what Manitobans want.

We're going to be doing that by also meeting the needs of communities and employers across this province by meeting with them and understanding what they need to make sure that we'll be bringing thousands of newcomers here and helping them integrate into Manitoba.

* (14:10)

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Ms. Byram: We currently have MPNP applicants here to provide for the labour force needed. What is it the Minister of Labour and Immigration going to tell those applicants who have completed additional education, met the language standards, completed the additional work experience and they surpass the scoring benchmark, Mr. Speaker?

But based on the new NDP policy put in this—put in place, these draws have become irregular, random and excludes many applicants who are here in the queue and ready to work.

What is this minister going to tell these people when their application for MPNP is denied and they must leave our country?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you to the member for their question.

This government is so laser focused in making sure that we are putting all the resources that we can to improving this process and making sure that we can get through as many applications as we can. At this

time there are tens and tens of thousands of applications, and we have a federal allotment that is a lot less than that. So we are choosing the best and the brightest from all over the world to join Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Ms. Byram: Immigration in Manitoba contributes greatly to the diversity while contributing to economic growth and prosperity, all while considering fairness and inclusive business. We have many people here in Manitoba waiting, ready and willing to work.

However, the minister is on the record stating, we are going to make sure that we focus on the right kind of immigrants to come to our 'coundry'—country.

So I would have to ask the minister: Can she elaborate on who she feels is the wrong kind of immigrant?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you to member opposite for their question.

You know, due to the years and years and years of PC cuts to this department, we were not able to welcome 2,000 people from other countries to come here to Manitoba and their families. That's 2,000 people that we had to say no to, that we had that federal allotment for, due to their excessive cuts.

Because there was nobody driving this department, this—due to the PC mismanagement on immigration. We had an Immigration minister that didn't even know the difference between a permanent—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Internationally Educated Health-Care Workers Recruitment and Settlement Funding

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): We know the NDP government is on the record saying, no workers came over through the Filipino nurse recruitment program. That's patently untrue; I've met them myself.

We also know that the NDP government cut funding to this program without having any plan of their own to train, recruit or retain health-care workers in Manitoba. And, of course, we know that we are in a worldwide health-care staffing crisis, and now, as detailed in these documents that I'll table today, we know the NDP are directly blocking more health-care workers from coming into Manitoba.

My question today is simple: Why?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, our No. 1 priority as a government is the No. 1 priority of Manitobans across the province, and that is health care.

And it's been wonderful to hear directly from folks across Manitoba, including front-line health-care workers, who shared their ideas, their hopes, their concerns and, quite frankly, their dreams for health care here in Manitoba.

And I have to say, the resounding feedback that I've received, the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) received and are listening to, are something that the members opposite are very critical of, is that they feel hopeful for the first time in a long time that they have a government who cares about health care.

Manitobans were let down by the previous government. We're taking a different approach, and we're getting the work done.

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

Mrs. Cook: These are nurses who dreamed of working in our health-care system, and they've had their hopes dashed by this NDP government. They were told Shared Health was stuck in talks with the government for three months, and then suddenly their job offers were withdrawn. We need every nurse and health-care aide we can get in Manitoba, and this NDP government is slamming the door shut.

Will this Health Minister do the right thing and commit to reinstating the recruitment and resettlement funding today?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, staffing a health-care system is the most important step that we as a government have to take in order to make sure that the health care Manitobans depend on will be there for them.

That's a very different approach than the previous government. The member opposite is well aware of the fact that the PCs fired nurses, they cut health care, they froze the wages of health-care workers and drove them out of health care, some folks out of our province.

Now I'll say specifically that what the member is presenting today is patently false. That money has not been frozen. But I will say also that the previous minister under the previous failed government took a trip, spent millions of dollars to not even meet their

own target of 300 nurses from the Philippines here by July of last year.

Our government's taking a different approach. We're getting things done for Manitobans.

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

Mrs. Cook: Honourable Speaker, the NDP has no plan to increase staffing in Manitoba. If they have a—where is it? Where's the plan? Not only have they failed to produce a plan, they've closed the doors to health-care workers who want to come here.

These nurses were willing to change course and come as health-care aides if need be. They were willing to do whatever it took to come to Manitoba and work here. Still they were denied because the NDP is putting politics ahead of the needs of patients.

Why would the NDP slam the door on these health-care workers? Is it because they consider them to be the wrong kind of immigrant?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I think the member opposite is a little bit confused. She's talking about an approach rooted in division, quite frankly hatred, that has been perpetuated by the previous government, perpetuated during the past election, perpetuated even to this day by members on that side of the House.

On this side of the House, we welcome health-care workers of all backgrounds, of all identities, to be a part of our health-care team here in Manitoba. Now, it's a shame that the previous government's own target of hiring 300 nurses to our health-care system by July of last year was an abject failure.

But our government is continuing to welcome those, no matter where they come from, to be a part of our health-care system, and we're taking a better approach. We're saying to Manitobans that no matter who you are and how you identify, health care in Manitoba is a—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

STARS Air Ambulance Services Contract Renewal Inquiry for Interlake-Gimli

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Honourable Speaker, I have the honour and the privilege of representing the people of Interlake-Gimli. Long travel distances of individuals that need to seek emergency care on the other side of the constituency due to NDP emergency-room closures means that travel time from one extreme to another can be upwards of three hours.

Last years, STARS flew 28 missions to Ashern alone, allowing patients to receive care 400 per cent faster than being transported by ambulance. STARS plays an absolutely vital role in providing timely emergency medical transportation.

Will the minister of Government Services promise the people of Interlake-Gimli that they can continue to trust STARS with their lives?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Again, I thank the member opposite for their question.

I will repeat what I said earlier. Health care is a top priority for this government. We're taking an all-of-government approach to help care, so it's a pleasure for me to get to affirm that message on behalf of our Health Minister and our Premier (Mr. Kinew).

And I will just say that it's—I think it's silly that someone on the other side of the House thinks that contracts that may be under negotiation are up for discussion in the public sphere while they're being negotiated.

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

* (14:20)

Mr. Johnson: Honourable Speaker, Interlake-Gimli has a population of just under 2 per cent of Manitoba's total population. Yet, in '22-23, it accounted for 7 per cent of STARS' 697 missions flown.

They flew 50 missions to multiple communities, 50 people whose lives have been saved because of STARS. With nearly 20 ERs closed under the NDP government regime, STARS has become the de facto ER for rural Manitoba.

Does this minister intend to renew the STARS contract and let STARS save another 50 lives in Interlake-Gimli this year?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, I appreciate the question because it gives me an opportunity to say thank you to all of those folks who work as part of the STARS team. These are doctors that I've actually known for a few years, who do incredible work. Their team is highly, highly expert, and in the meeting with STARS, I learned a lot about not only what are they doing in Manitoba, but some of the innovations that are happening in that area of health care right now.

I will say that part of the pressures we're seeing in the Interlake are a direct result of the previous government closing major ERs right here in Winnipeg, and that's unfortunate. The actions of the previous government has consequences. We're cleaning up the mess that they made in health care, and we're doing that work every single day.

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

Mr. Johnson: Those doctors that she talks about has STARS—has these same questions: will the contract be renewed? NDP closure of nearly 20 ERs in rural Manitoba hinders the health for rural Manitobans.

Our previous PC government improved the health services available to rural Manitobans. We built hospitals in Portage la Prairie, Neepawa; upgraded existing facilities in—like Brandon hospital, Brandon cancer care, Boundary Trails hospital and Steinbach regional hospital.

We brought care to Manitobans. If this government can not or will not continue to do this, at the very least, allow STARS to bring Manitobans to care. Minister, for the sake of rural Manitoba—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MLA Naylor: I'm glad for the opportunity to remind the member for Interlake-Gimli of proper use of my colleague's pronouns in the Legislature and everywhere.

And then—[interjection]

I also will add that, just to put an exclamation point on it, that the folks on the other side of the House, when they had the opportunity to govern this province, cut health care, cut transportation, cut the transportation budget over and over again, made it harder and harder for people from Interlake-Gimli or anywhere else in the province to receive health care, to receive other essential services.

This government—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program Nominations Received and Planned for 2024

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Yesterday I asked the minister whether the province used every single provincial nomination they received from the federal government, and the minister completely avoided the question, so I assume it's a no.

It is shameful. These actions have affected thousands of applicants who have been contributing to our economy for years, and employers who need to fill labour shortages.

My question for the minister is, how many provincial nominations did the province receive for MPNP this year, and will the minister confirm that every single nomination provided to the province will be filled in 2024?

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

At this point we still haven't received the federal allotment. We were expecting it in February. It's already March and we're still waiting for those numbers.

We have an approximate idea of what that might be, but no specific hard numbers. And yes, our government is really focused on making sure that we're going to have enough resources to be able to process as many applications as we can so we can meet that federal allotment and welcome as many newcomers to this province as possible.

Thank you.

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

Health Care and Applied Sciences Employment Specific Draws

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): There are hundreds if not thousands of folks in the health-care and applied sciences fields that used to be drawn under the employment-specific draws that appear to have been cancelled under this minister.

We are in a dire state and need health-care staffing resources, and while we have trained and highly capable individuals who could be helping resolve our health-care challenges, the minister has not had an employer-specific draw for these professions since September.

So my question is, why has the minister chosen not to draw from our valuable, skilled workers in health care?

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

To get really into the specifics, our department, since I've been elected, has actually done three

NOC-specific draws since October, and we continue to make draws for the skilled workers in Manitoba and skilled workers overseas.

Most of those folks have—some of them have health-care experience and we're very, very lucky and grateful to be able to make sure that all these folks can come to Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Skilled Immigrant Workers General Draw Wait Times

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The changes under this current government have posed serious challenges for skilled workers. The general draw cut-off has increased and there are individuals who have been living in and contributing to Manitoba for well over two years with every intention to stay, but are not being drawn.

The time for approval used to be no more than three months, but under this government, individuals have been waiting for over nine months. This seems to be an NDP pattern.

Can the minister explain why qualified skilled workers remain in limbo while processing times continue to increase?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you to the members opposite for their attention on this very, very important topic that means a lot to the economy here in our province.

You know, on my second day as minister, I was told that we had no choice but to return the nominations for at least 2,000 people due to the cuts of the previous government. That's 2,000 nominations that we could've had and all of their families.

Do you know what that means for an immigrant and their family? It means the world to be able to settle here in a new place. And due to their cuts, we had to say good-bye to 2,000 folks.

We are working very hard on this side of the House to make sure that our department has enough resources to be able to make sure that we can process as many of these applications as possible and welcome as many newcomers to—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Violent and Repeat Offenders Five-Point Bail Plan

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans expect their governments to work within their jurisdiction to put community safety first. We know that the previous government talked a big game during the election on public safety but sat on their hands when it came to action.

We know that the previous government did nothing in their power to address bail reform, kicking the can to the federal government.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us about our government's announcement to address violent and repeat offenders?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Thank you to the member for Kirkfield Park, a former corrections worker, for that important question.

Our far-five-point bail plan gets tough on crime. It gets tough on the causes of crime. We're partnering with law enforcement to go after the most serious repeat offenders.

We're enhancing bail enforcement for those who are already on bail and need help to get back on the right track with addictions and mental health supports.

We're leading the country in collaborating on data sharing with law enforcement jurisdictions, and after five years without direction, we're instituting bail policies that prioritize public safety.

We're going to bring people together. We're going to hear from them at our public safety summit.

All the previous government ever did was blame, deflect and divide. We're getting to work, Mr. Speaker.

Federal International Student Cap Plan for Provincial Institutions

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Speaking of things from the federal government, the federal government has made a massive change to the way post-secondary institutions are able to receive international students as they implement a 35 per cent reduction Canada-wide.

The deadline for the provincial plan is March 31st and Manitoba institutions need to know the details that this will have on their operations.

Will the minister commit to a meeting and a briefing to discuss the important issue prior to this federal deadline?

* (14:30)

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I thank you for allowing me to participate remotely. I'm joining you from Treaty 5 territory, where I'm visiting UCN.

I thank the honourable member for the question. International students are an important part of our campus community and, of course, an important part of our economy. Rest assured that I've been on this issue since it was raised, and I look forward to sharing more information.

Mr. Perchotte: Institutions throughout Manitoba need to know how many less students they will receive, as well as what will happen if a student receives an offer from multiple potential places of study. This decision by the federal government will have repercussions throughout our sector and we need to work together to ensure Manitoba institutions and students are not being left holding the bag.

Will the minister commit to a meeting so we can work together?

MLA Cable: I thank the honourable member for the question, again. And I appreciate all of the comments made. I agree with nearly everything you said.

I am not certain exactly who the—or, who the member is asking for a meeting to occur with. I can assure the member that I am in regular conversation with all of our post-secondary institutions. I've had meetings with students' federations. I'm working with closely with our Minister of Immigration.

And I can assure you that I am working on a plan that is going to result in the best possible results for Manitoba. I look forward to continued conversations with the member.

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

Mr. Perchotte: Let me be very clear: I'm asking for a meeting for the people that I represent as a critic. The resolution will have a direct impact on the revenue of our Manitoba institutions, not to mention the countless—of international students planning on a Manitoba education.

Can the minister tell them the plan or are they already too busy?

MLA Cable: I'm not sure if my facial expressions are being conveyed over Zoom. I'm incredibly confused about this question, but I will assure the member that

I am having regular conversations with all of the stakeholders who are affected by this.

I am working closely with the federal minister. I'm working closely with our public-sector institutions. And the member will be happy to know that despite the multiple cuts that the PCs made to our post-secondary system, that the phenomenal staff in post-secondary have already launched a portal by which institutions are applying for their attestation letters.

So we're way ahead, and I'd invite the member to keep up.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

And I would like to take this—[*interjection*]

Order, please. Order, please.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I would like to take the opportunity to introduce some guests in the public gallery. I'd like to draw attention to—all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today Candice Narth, Theo Narth and Nash Narth, who are the spouse and sons of the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth). And on behalf of all members, we welcome you here today.

PETITIONS

Hearing Aids

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

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

(3) Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

(4) A global commission on the state of research for dementia care and prevention released an updated consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

(5) Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and well-being of Manitobans, especially to those at significant risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

(6) Audiologists are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them, based on the type of hearing age, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

(7) The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say that hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

(8) Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an 'onorgyologist' or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health on a fixed amount or—for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed amount for a digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800. However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardship for many young people entering the workforce, students and families. In addition, senior representation, 14.3 of Manitoba's population are not eligible for reimbursement, despite being the group most likely in need of hearing aids.

(9) Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid, and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, old-age pensioners and other low-income earners do not have access to health insurance plans.

(10) The Province of Quebec's hearing devices program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement.

(11) Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors 65 and over and low-income adults 18 to 64 once every five years.

(12) New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

(13) Manitobans over the age of 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they are receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health.

(2) To urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing has been proven to be essential to Manitobans' cognitive, mental and social health and well-being.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

The Speaker: No further petitions?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The Speaker: The assistant Government House Leader.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Acting Government House Leader): Could you please call all stages of Interim Supply.

The Speaker: It has been announced by the Government House Leader that we will now call all stages of Interim Supply.

Messages

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I have a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, which I would like to table.

The Speaker: To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, I have been—*[interjection]*

Everybody rise, please.

* (14:40)

To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, I have been informed of a proposed bill, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024, which will provide interim authority to make expenditures from the consolidated fund, effective April 1, 2024, pending approval of the appropriation act 2024.

The bills also provide for payments to develop or acquire inventory and against certain liabilities accrued and unpaid as of March 31, 2024.

The bill will also provide a portion of commitment authority for future years.

I recommend the proposed bill to the Legislative Assembly, and this has been signed by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: So now the House will resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the—please be seated. The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

Would the Deputy Speaker please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko): So will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

We have before us, for our consideration, four resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

The first resolution pertaining to part A, Operating Expenditures for Interim Supply, reads as follows:

RESOLVED—BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, a sum not exceeding \$12,602,005,000, being 75 per cent of the total amount to be voted for the purposes set out in part A, Operational Expenditures of those estimates.

Does the Minister of Finance have any opening comments? No comments.

Does the official critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Thank you, Deputy Chair, I believe is how you're referred to in this committee process, correct? Deputy Chair, yes.

So, thank you, it's an honour to be here speaking and this is my first go round at the interim appropriation act here, so I'm looking forward to a wholesome debate or conversation with the Minister of Finance, and understanding a clearer picture of where we're headed for the province of Manitoba.

I know affordability, costs, inflation, interest rates, gas prices is all top of mind when it comes to Manitobans, along with capital expenses, expenditures, loans, debt, hydro, for this province. Also shifting to green energy are all concerns for Manitobans. So I

look forward to getting to the resolutions and the debate and questions with the Minister of Finance.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Khan: I guess the first question for the Minister of Finance is, you know, we heard earlier today, through the leader of opposition, that the NDP Cabinet has significant—borrowed additional funds over what's normally seen.

Can the Minister of Finance put an exact number on what number has been borrowed since their time in office?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Do I need to stand or stay sitting?

Happy to speak to that particular point. So, the driver for the borrowing are cash requirements that our government has, and this is due mostly just to the refinancing of maturing debt.

What I can share gladly with the critic is that the reason for this refinancing is due to funding that was completed in fiscal 2020-21, which happened during the COVID-19 pandemic where access to markets was difficult at times, and investor interest was focused in shorter part of the curve. So that led to shorter borrowing terms.

And so that refinancing supports ensuring that we have cash required to continue to operate government.

Mr. Khan: Sorry, to clarify, so did the Minister of Finance say that \$12 billion or the \$10 billion that was earlier discussed is for refinancing charges? So is the Minister of Finance saying that that is all for refinancing of existing charges or sums for this province?

MLA Sala: Yes, so, I didn't say \$10 billion; that was a number that you provided. But the order-in-council was requested to provide \$7 billion in parameter borrowing authority, and that amount was required to complete current-year requirements, again, to meet our cash needs to support the operation of government.

Mr. Khan: Then, just to clarify, when the Deputy Chair was reading the bill—or the first reading, was it \$12 billion for the interim appropriation that this Minister of Finance is seeking, and that is 75 per cent of the total requirement?

MLA Sala: The total amount is \$12,602,005,000 and that is, to confirm, 75 per cent.

Mr. Khan: I thank the Minister of Finance for that, and I stopped writing at \$12 billion because I think everything after that's really tough to write down. So thank you.

So, curious to ask the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) the last year's interim appropriation act for 2023 sought a total of \$7.9 billion, and now the Minister of Finance is asking for \$12 billion. So an increase of \$4 billion. Can the Minister of Finance elaborate a little bit on what that \$4-billion increase in one year is for?

MLA Sala: I'm not sure—I don't have it in front of me about whether or not that number that he referenced from last year, what percentage of the year that funded. So I don't know if that's an apples-to-apples comparison. So maybe I'd ask the critic to clarify whether that is an apples-to-apples comparison.

Mr. Khan: That's a good question. Apples to apples; I guess, before I can clarify that, does the Minister of Finance have a breakdown of the interim appropriation act as far as categories for operating expenditures, capital expenditures, estimates for loans and guarantees, reporting entities and capital investment? Or is it all lump summed into one total of 12 billion 600 and et cetera for 75 per cent?

MLA Sala: I'm not quite sure what the critic is asking. He seems to be confusing different types of borrowing requirements. There's part A, which is for operating. He referenced loans, which is part C. And part B is capital for core government.

So maybe he can provide clarity on what he's asking.

Mr. Khan: So, to be clear, are we discussing part A of the interim appropriation act? Because I didn't hear part A at any point.

So are we talking about part A of the interim appropriation act, which is operating expenditures, or are we talking about the entire bill of the interim appropriation act? Because at no point did I hear part A.

MLA Sala: Yes, I can confirm that the \$12,602,000,000 is specifically for part A.

Mr. Khan: That clarifies a lot and he can ignore the question, the two questions before that then. I was not aware that was for part A of that.

* (14:50)

So, based on the—now that I know part A is for the \$12 billion, et cetera, can the minister explain a little bit what will he be using this appropriation for, other than the refinancing charges that he's mentioned?

MLA Sala: The critic seems to continue to be confused. I don't mean that to be derisive, but he's referencing an earlier question, which had to do with refinancing, which was raised earlier in the House during question period.

That has nothing to do with what we're discussing here today.

Mr. Khan: Okay, so we'll refocus this on operating expenditures for part A.

Last year the previous Finance minister brought forward an interim appropriation of 35 per cent, for a total appropriation of \$6 billion for operating expenditures.

Can the minister tell us how much more—which he has—asked for this year, and why that total is higher and what percentage of total appropriation are being sought for this total coming year for operating funding?

MLA Sala: Well, as the critic just identified, they asked for a much smaller percentage of the total year last time, so that would make up a significant portion of the difference between the two numbers.

Mr. Khan: And then the second part of that question the minister, I guess, didn't address there, was what per cent of the total appropriation are being sought for the entire coming year?

MLA Sala: The entire year? Maybe I could just ask the critic to clarify.

So we've—part A, operating, we're again requesting \$12,602,000,000, which is 90 per cent. So, I'll let him figure out the 10 per cent piece.

Mr. Khan: So, the minister and his entire government's been out cancelling surgeries over the past few months.

Can he tell us whether he'll—they'll continue to fund those surgeries again with appropriation measures to ensure wait times continue to come down, as they were under the previous government?

MLA Sala: Well, Manitobans sent us here with a top priority, which is to fix the health-care system that the last government left in ruins.

We have a lot of work to do, but I know that our Minister of Health and our Premier (Mr. Kinew) are doing incredible work in leading that—those fixes to our health-care system and making it once again something we can all be proud of.

We have a lot of work to do, and, again, continue to be proud of the work that is being led by my colleague, the Minister of Health.

Mr. Khan: Can the—sorry, I was just reading a note here. How much of this appropriated amount is coming for this fiscal year, will be going towards debt servicing and interest payments on the Province's debt and borrowing?

MLA Sala: Well, I can't speak to that specific number here. But I can say that we're bringing forward a plan here that will work to rebuild our health-care system, make life more affordable, invest in our schools and ultimately help to do the important work that Manitobans sent us here to do as the new government.

The Chairperson: The honourable member for Fort Whyte (MLA Khan)?

Mr. Khan: Part A.

The Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

Shall the resolution pass? [*Agreed*]

The second resolution pertaining to part B, Capital Investments for Interim Supply, reads as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, a sum not exceeding \$902,575,000—let me repeat that number—a sum not exceeding \$902,570,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted for the purposes set out in part B, Capital Investments, of those Estimates.

Does the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) have an opening statement? No? Okay.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comment? No? Okay.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Khan: Just to also clarify, do I have five minutes for a questions here or 45 seconds? Five minutes, okay. Thank you.

And now that I'm clear that we're on part B, thank you for the Minister of Finance for running through that. I did say it was the first time doing this here.

So in part B, when it comes to capital expenditures, can the minister tell us how much more he is appropriating in interim capital spending this year than over last year's budget?

MLA Sala: Well, what I can share is that we're requesting interim appropriation of \$902,570,000 to support capital investments to help move our province ahead.

Mr. Khan: Okay, so the Minister of Finance has no idea how much more money he's asking for this year than last year's appropriation act.

MLA Sala: I didn't catch the question there, so I'd maybe pass it back to the critic to clarify what it was that he was asking.

Mr. Khan: So I did the math for the minister, since the minister didn't have the math there ahead of him.

I simply asked how much more money they're asking for this year in the appropriation act based on percentages so we are comparing apples to apples on this one. It is an additional \$76 million approximately.

Can the minister tell us what that extra \$76 million will be used for in capital expenditures?

MLA Sala: Well, we won't be making any announcements right here. I can share that these dollars are going to go towards making important investments that Manitobans have been waiting for, for a very long time, which they didn't see under the previous government.

We saw seven years of them falling behind. We're here to, again, do that important work and make investments that Manitobans need in health care, education and other important areas of government.

Mr. Khan: So I thank the minister for the non-answer there.

So \$76 million is a lot of money for Manitobans and that's how much more you're asking for in this appropriation act. And yet their minister can't give us an answer on exactly what the \$76 million—or even an idea of what it's going to go towards other than vague, alluded answers. So I'll be more specific.

So, the minister and his Cabinet have been busy pausing, cancelling new schools, constructions, new daycares that were shovel ready under the previous government and would have led to better childhood education, convenience for parents and many other benefits along with building schools that are much needed in this province.

Will the minister commit today that these projects will move forward in the communities that have been asking for them and that some of these projects were previously approved for them with this increase in capital spending being appropriated in this bill today?

MLA Sala: Yes, one of the things that's been keeping me busy is cleaning up the gigantic fiscal mess that was left to us by the previous government.

I recognize that the critic and others on the team who are talking right now and not listening don't like to contend with the reality that they left us a \$1.6-billion deficit.

It's hard for them. I know they like to think of themselves as good fiscal managers. Manitobans know otherwise. That was a huge hole that we walked in to discover when we came into government.

You know, and fortunately Manitobans have a responsible government, a fiscally focused government now that can do the important work of making investments in health care and improving affordability while we balance our fiscal requirements in this province.

That's something we haven't had for a long time. Manitobans can now have that confidence that they've got good fiscal managers at the helm of the provincial government.

Mr. Khan: You know, actually the minister wants to go back in talking points and he wants to talk about the past.

The fact of the matter is that this minister is in government now. They're in government. They said they were a government-in-waiting for seven years. Now they have the opportunity of being government.

And we heard at committee over and over again from various committees that previous government, previous government and we're cleaning up the—and they're saying it again today.

They have no answers. They have no plan. It's evident.

And Manitobans have a right to know where \$76 million of extra asks in capital expenditure is going to be spent. I think that's a fair and reasonable question, and the minister wants to talk about cleaning up a mess.

And we'll talk about cleaning up a mess if the minister wants to go down that road. You know, I would say—and I asked this question to the minister earlier, and he didn't answer it, and I referenced my son and he could have answered it—that what was better? An \$846-million deficit or a \$270-million surplus? Because when the last report that came out wherein our government was \$270-million surplus.

* (15:00)

They're still in government for half the year. They have to remember that. We left them with a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar surplus and they left the previous government, when they left government, \$846 million in deficit.

And we'll do some simple math on that at a later question, in understanding how that breaks into their \$10 billion of asks, that they order-in-council, that they tried to hide from the Manitoba public. And that was brought forward today; \$10 billion in orders-in-council is a lot of money and Manitobans will have—need to have an answer for that. And the NDP, I believe, owe it to them on that.

So, again, I'll get into—and we can go back and forth and take shots all day if we want, to the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and previous government, and what was done and what wasn't done.

We're here to talk about this interim appropriation act, So, if we want to talk about that, in part B, Capital Expenditures, for an increase of \$76 million, since the minister can't answer if any new schools will be proceeding, or if the previous schools that were committed to will be proceeding forward, maybe the Minister of Finance can talk about the PCHs and the senior homes that were committed to, that were passed through Treasury Board, that were budgeted for to proceed. And this minister and his government then cancelled that project.

So, in the capital expenditures for this year's upcoming interim appropriation act, can the minister commit today that some of those PCH projects, or all of those PCH projects will be going forward?

MLA Sala: Yes, the critic doesn't seem to really recognize why we're here today. The purpose of this interim appropriation is to ensure that government has the funding it requires until a budget is passed.

The budget, which we'll be bringing forward on April 2, which we're really excited about bringing to Manitobans, will outline our plan. At that point, the critic will have an opportunity to cast his eyes on what it is that we're proposing for the province.

Today is about ensuring that government has the funds required to continue operating until that time, as such time as that budget is passed.

Until—I also want to comment: him, and I've seen other colleagues today, continue to identify this refinancing that occurred in January as some kind of a gotcha moment. The reality is it's all refinancing dollars

that were borrowed initially by his government, or the previous government.

So, it really makes zero sense at all for him to be raising that as some kind of a sign of a fiscal mismanagement, when these are refinancing activities tied directly to borrowing that was engaged in by his government.

So, again, I am confused why he is raising that. I don't really—there isn't clarity on that. Remind the critic for Finance, again, why those dollars are being refinanced: it's to meet cash requirements and it's refinancing borrowing that occurred under his previous government.

Mr. Khan: I apologize. The throat's a little dry today; day 3 of fasting, 25 more to go or something. So, apologize for the pause.

And with all due respect, I do understand what the process is for today with the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala). I was—at earlier stages thought that we were lumping all of the part A-B-Cs together. That was clarified. This is about financing until the budget is passed.

But a lot of these costs, expenses and projects are where this appropriation act is coming from. They need money to continue projects and pay bills and loans and guarantees and capital expenditures. This is what we're talking about.

So, it's important that we have this fulsome discussion and Manitobans can understand what the money they're asking for, where it's going to go—sorry—and so I do respectfully understand.

If the minister doesn't want to answer the questions, that's different. To cast, you know, doubt on this side is different. And we'll get back to the \$10 billion once we're a little bit later. But I want—I do want to focus on capital expenditures.

So, the minister is on the record commenting that the new schools aren't going forward. He completely avoided the question on PCHs and senior homes. He was unaware of how much money they're asking for.

Can the minister outline any other capital projects that would be funded with this capital appropriation from various departments?

MLA Sala: Yes, again, I'm just a little confused about what it is that the critic is pursuing here. Today we're here to request these interim appropriations to allow for the continued operation of government until such time as our budget is passed.

I'm excited for the critic to see all the great news we're going to be bringing forward on April 2 with our budget. I'm sure he'll be delighted to see all the great news we're bringing forward.

The Chairperson: The honourable member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan).

Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass? [*Agreed*]

The third resolution pertaining to part C, Loans and Guarantees, from Interim Supply reads as follows:

Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, a sum not exceeding \$445,315,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted for the purposes set out in part C, Loans and Guarantees, of those Estimates.

Does the Minister of Finance have any opening comments? No.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Khan: I'll start off with the same question I started for the other two parts. Does the Minister of Finance know how much more money they are asking for in this year's—

The Chairperson: Sorry, member, I was wondering if you had opening comments.

Mr. Khan: Opening comments, no. I said those earlier.

The Chairperson: No? Okay.

The floor is open to questions.

Mr. Khan: I'll start off with the same question I started off the other two parts with, is does this Minister of Finance know how much more money they are asking for in this year's interim appropriation act?

MLA Sala: It's not apples to apples, again, for—compared to last year, there was a request for 75 per cent of part C, this year it's 90 per cent.

Mr. Khan: We will—I will get that number since the minister doesn't have it. We will crunch that on our side and provide apples to apples so the minister can know that.

Is there a reason why the interim appropriation act was changed percentages this year in all of the following parts?

MLA Sala: Yes, this part C provides expenditure authority for loans and loan guarantee programs, and it will support really important work, like the work of Manitoba Student Aid and, for example, the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation. Some really important work, and we're proud to support that.

Mr. Khan: Does the minister have a number of how much of these loans and guarantees are for operating funds for various government entities?

MLA Sala: This—part C provides authority for loans and loan guarantee programs. So if the critic wants to identify which specific loan he's referencing that would later support operating funding, I would be happy to entertain that.

Mr. Khan: No, thank you, Deputy Chair. I would have assumed that the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) would know if there were any loan guarantees for any other government entities. So it seems like the minister doesn't have those handy. I can provide those. I will have those ready for him at committee, and we'll go forward to that when we break out at the next stage of the budget, I guess.

Are some of the loans and loans guarantees in part C for the capital projects?

MLA Sala: Capital financing happens for core government through part B and for other reporting entities through part D.

Mr. Khan: Keep it simple now.

The Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass? *[Agreed]*

The fourth resolution pertaining to part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities, for Interim Supply reads as follows:

Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, a sum not exceeding \$822,516,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted for the purposes set out in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities, of those Estimates.

* (15:10)

Does the Minister of Finance have any opening comments?

Does the critic have any opening comments?

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Khan: Sorry, I'll ask the Minister of Finance to repeat that number again. I just missed—I cut out for a second there. The number for the loans for reporting entities in capital investments, I guess.

MLA Sala: To clarify, is he asking about the proposed interim appropriation for part C?

An Honourable Member: D, we're on D.

MLA Sala: Part D, \$822,516,000 and that's being 90 per cent of the total.

Mr. Khan: Thank the minister for that. Sorry, it cut out for some reason. I couldn't hear you the first time. The last numbers got blurred: \$822 million for 90 per cent. Last year's interim appropriation was 685 for 75 per cent.

I'll ask the minister again, and I assume it's the same answer: Does the minister have an answer to how much more or less they may be asking for if we're comparing apples to apples?

MLA Sala: I keep getting these questions which the critic seems to already know the answer to. Again, we're requesting \$822,516,000 at 90 per cent. Last year was six eighty-five, four thirty at 75 per cent, not a significant gap there.

Mr. Khan: Can the minister tell us the percentage of total planned spending and the interim dollar amount that he's authorizing in the interim appropriation for loans, for capital investments to reporting entities?

MLA Sala: Well, loans and loan guarantees are covered in part C. That's as has been discussed: \$445,315,000 being requested as part of this interim appropriation.

Mr. Khan: Can the minister tell us about capital plans, that's money that's going to be used for reporting entities, if he's aware of them?

MLA Sala: Yes. Again, today we're here to ask for interim appropriation, which will allow us to meet the financial needs of government until such time as a budget is passed.

In terms of the questions that the critic is asking, those are the kinds of answers—or that's the type of information he can expect to get a whole lot of, come April 2, when we release our budget.

Mr. Khan: I know the minister wants to go back to this point over and over again, and he thinks it's going to make a real good talking point for him, the—but what he's asking Manitobans for is essentially a blank cheque. He's asking Manitobans for a blank cheque to

cover this interim appropriation act, to cover the finances until the budget is passed—if the budget is passed, depending on how that debate or discussion goes.

We know last year the NDP were adamant that they didn't want to pass the budget and they were against the tax cuts that we proposed. And what happens six months later? They're hailing it as a great victory that they supported the tax cuts, and this is great for Manitobans. It was great for Manitobans.

I understand what this is about. So, with all due respect, I think Manitobans have a right to ask where this interim appropriation of this money is going to go, as his government is asking for \$12 billion. That's no small amount of money, and the minister wants to go to his talking points, and we will discuss this at—more at committee once we get through this phase of the legislative process.

I don't think these questions are outlandish. Manitobans have a right to know where their money is going.

So, the question again is, you know, does the minister—can he mention or talk about the money that is being asked for reporting entities? Does he know if any of these reporting entities are building capital projects?

MLA Sala: Again, there's no games being played here. What's happening is that the critic doesn't seem to understand why we're here, and he's suggesting that we're looking for a blank cheque. But that shows he doesn't understand the purpose of today's exercise.

We cannot fund new programming with these dollars. These programs—this funding only allows us to fund ongoing programs, services that are already in play. So this is to support existing expenditures, existing programs, services. This is not about funding net new program services announcements.

So, again, I'm not sure why the critic continues to ask that question. He should understand that that's not information we can provide to him today.

Mr. Khan: Okay, we can ask a simple question. Hopefully, the minister could answer this one here. What rate of interest is the Finance Department charging on these loans to reporting entities?

MLA Sala: There would be a lot of loans offered and delivered through that part C funding. So, I mean, again, I invite the critic, if he's got a specific type of loan that he wants to inquire about, to raise that here on the floor. But that question would require, I think, digging into a number of different loan provisions. So

if you'll invite him to bring a more specific question, if he's interested.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and the minister for that.

And we will be bringing that question forward, so too, again, we do understand the process; I do understand the process on this side. This was a simple question to the minister, if he could give us a rate on what that was being charged at, he wants to defer down the road. We do understand the importance of passing an interim appropriation act so that the government and all its entities don't come to a halt, and this is an important part of the process so Manitoba can continue moving forward.

So with that, if the minister doesn't want to answer the question, we'll move on to the next part.

The Chairperson: Does the minister have a response?

MLA Sala: No.

The Chairperson: Sorry, is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass? [*Agreed*]

That concludes the business before the committee.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Committee Report

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted four resolutions respecting Interim Supply.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Simard), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Interim Supply Motion

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), that there be granted to His Majesty, on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, out of the Consolidated Fund, for the purposes set out in the 2024 Estimates, including Supplementary Estimates, sums not exceeding

\$12,602,005,000, being 75 per cent of the total amount voted, as set out in part A—that's Operating Expenditures of those Estimates; \$902,570,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount voted, as set out in part B of those Estimates; \$445,315,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount voted, as set out in part C of those Estimates; and \$822,516,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount voted, as set out in part D of those Estimates.

* (15:20)

The Speaker: I'd just like to point out there was a couple of errors in the motion as read out.

Is there leave to have the motion printed in Hansard as written?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: Read it again.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Speaker: Agreed—I hear a no, so the minister will have to read the motion over again.

MLA Sala: I move, seconded, again, by the Minister responsible for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, that there be granted to His Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, out of the Consolidated Fund, the sums of \$12,602,005,000, being 75 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part A, Operating Expenditures, of those Estimates; \$902,570,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part B, Capital Investment, of those Estimates; \$445,315,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part C, Loans and Guarantees, of those Estimates; \$822,516,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities, of those Estimates.

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), seconded by the honourable Minister of Homelessness, Housing and Addictions (Ms. Smith), that there be granted to His Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service for the fiscal year ending March 31—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense? Dispense? *[Agreed]*

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 25—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 25, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024; Loi de 2024 portant affectation anticipée de crédits, be now read a first time and ordered for second reading immediately.

Motion agreed to.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 25—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 25, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024; Loi de 2024 portant affectation anticipée de crédits, be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

MLA Sala: I just want to make some technical comments here and, hopefully, this will benefit folks here in the Legislature who haven't been through this process before. It's, of course, my first time as well, going through this in this role, which I'm very proud to be doing.

In our parliamentary system, the '23-24 appropriations lapse after March 31, 2024. This bill provides for interim appropriations that allow for government to continue operating until our upcoming budget, Budget 2024, is passed.

Simply put, this will allow government to keep the lights on, keep important programs running and payments flowing. And this is really a bridge funding to our first budget, which we will be delivering, as folks know, on April 2 of this year.

As the interim appropriation is being introduced before the 2024 budget, it is based on the '23-24 main Estimates of expenditure. The amount of interim operating expenditure authority requested, as we've announced here, is \$12,602,005,000. This authority represents 75 per cent of the sums included in part A of the '23-24 Estimates of expenditure.

The amount of interim capital investment spending authority in part B requested is the \$902,570,000. And this authority represents 90 per cent of the sums included of part B of the '23-24 Estimates.

On the part C side, the amount of loans and loan guarantee expenditure authority requested is

\$445,315,000. This authority, again, represents 90 per cent of the sums included in part C.

And the amount of expenditure authority for capital investments provided as loans to other reporting organizations is \$822,516,000. And this authority represents 90 per cent of the sums included in part D of the '23-24 Estimates.

The amount of expenditures that are authorized for developing or acquiring inventory for subsequent years is \$25 million.

The amount of payments for long-term liabilities is \$259 million.

The amount of future commitment authority included in this Interim Supply bill is \$1,500,000,000 and this authority provides for the commitment of expenditures to ensure the completion of projects or fulfilling contracts initiated but not completed during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

When Bill 25 reached the committee stage, I will provide members with a section-by-section explanation of the bill. With those technical comments out of the way, let me make a few overarching comments as we proceed here in second reading.

You know, it's been, of course, a long seven years for Manitobans under the previous government. Proud to say that this Interim Supply is a bridge to our first budget, which we're very excited about bringing to the people of Manitoba.

* (15:30)

We are committed to delivering on our government's commitments. We're going to do that in a good way that ensures we balance our fiscal needs with those commitments we've made. We're going to do that hard work of rebuilding health care after seven years.

We will lower costs for families. After years of rising costs, we will invest in our communities. We're very proud of our record so far, but we know there's a lot more work to do. So far, we've lowered personal income taxes and paused the provincial gas tax, saving Manitobans 14 cents a litre every single time they fill up. And we are, of course, listening to front-line staff in health care in implementing the solutions we've heard from them. We're also taking important action to make communities safer.

So as I said, Honourable Speaker, this Interim Supply is a bridge to our first budget, and the approach to building this budget is, of course, different than the

previous government. As our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has said many times, we are a listening government and our priorities will reflect the priorities of Manitobans.

Been very fortunate over the last couple of months to do extensive engagements with Manitobans in prebudget consultations. We've been honoured to hear from folks of all walks of life in every corner of the province. And it's clear that they want a government that will build on our strengths and will seize on those opportunities before us to make life better while we overcome the challenges we face. This Interim Supply bill is one small step in that direction. It's a path that will be walked with a benefit, knowing that we've truly engaged with Manitobans to understand what their priorities are.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm please to conclude my comments.

Questions

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

Are there any questions?

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. And I'll ask the question here, ask the question since the minister opened it up here.

Minister mentioned that he's very happy and proud of the tax credits and the savings he's giving to Manitobans. So I just want to ask the minister, when the budget '23-24 was tabled, did the minister vote in favour or against those tax cuts?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): You know, we're very proud to be bringing those savings to Manitobans and fulfilling our commitments that we made in the last provincial election.

The member opposite might not know it, but those tax cuts came into full effect in January of this year, full three months after we were in government. We had the opportunity to either reject that or go forward. We made the decision to fulfill our commitment to Manitobans, to save them money. It's exactly what we—we're doing.

We know that when the previous government made changes like this, they had no plan, no plan of any kind. We know that they had a real issue when it comes to fiscal responsibility. And the big concern is we know that in their hands, those types of changes would've inevitably led to more cuts to important services. We know what they did for seven years to health care, education—

The Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Turtle Mountain): The minister said that his prebudget consultation—that things look good for Manitoba in the coming year and that we are coming out of a brief economic tough in the fall, but that we are still seeing growth coming forward.

Can the minister tell us what our G-P—GDP growth was last year and what is it that his department and experts are projecting to be coming in the coming year?

MLA Sala: I was proud to do prebudget consultations and to speak with Manitobans across the province. I can share with the member opposite that we know that this year, we're expecting about a 0.5 per cent GDP growth. Things are looking better in 2025, and no question that that's going to be aided and abetted by our new NDP government.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): As the minister is putting forward these plans for spending for the coming fiscal year, can he also provide us with a projection of red—revenues for the coming year as well?

MLA Sala: Yes, you know, I am happy to speak to this question. One thing we know is that during the last government's time, one thing they did is they drastically overstated the estimated revenues for this fiscal year. And that's one of the reasons why we're in this terrible budget situation or the—sorry, this terrible deficit situation that they've left us in because they didn't know how to budget. They hid information from Manitobans. They failed to budget adequately and to plan and, as a result, they left Manitobans with a \$1.6-billion deficit parting gift.

Mr. Khan: Can the minister please explain why him and his government took out a \$700-million special warrant this year in January?

MLA Sala: Yes, I explained this earlier. I don't think the critic was listening very carefully.

The government has cash requirements. This is mostly tied to refinancing on borrowing that was done under the last government during COVID. There was a period of time where we were borrowing money for

shorter periods—two-year periods. Those dollars—or, that financing is coming up again for refinancing.

Again, this is tied to meeting our cash requirements and refinancing tied to borrowing that was actually done by the last government.

Mr. Pivniuk: I know, in the past, the—when the last NDP government, what they did to Manitoba Hydro. They doubled the debt within a number of years, especially during the Selinger government.

And I was wondering if the—this minister has allowed the Manitoba Hydro to have the flexibility to make the best business decisions on behalf of Manitobans and its true shareholders, the Manitoba—shareholders for Manitoba Hydro.

So I know the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) is heckling over here, so—*[interjection]*—yes, come on.

So, anyways, we just want to know what's your, when it comes to Manitoba Hydro, what are you going to do with the flexibility, making sure that they make sound decisions and not firing the CEO?

MLA Sala: Here's what we know when it comes to interference in Hydro from the last government, Honourable Speaker: they prevented First Nations communities with a directive for engaging directly with Manitoba Hydro. That's absolutely shameful, and we were very proud to remove that directive shortly after we came into government.

They interfered so heavily in Manitoba Hydro that the entire board of Manitoba Hydro walked off the job because of their leadership and the work that they were doing in interfering in Hydro's work. Not to mention their support for privatization, every creative approach to raising hydro rates on Manitobans.

That's their record. We're going to do things very differently.

Mr. Guenter: Honourable Speaker, the NDP government is authorizing close to \$10 billion in new spending—borrowing.

I'm wondering if the minister can speak to what the debt servicing costs will be on that sum.

MLA Sala: Yes, again, the members opposite continue to go back to this question about our refinancing of debt that was incurred under their government. I don't know how many times we need to repeat that in the House, but I'll do it again for their benefit. This is refinancing—borrowing that occurred under their watch approximately two years ago.

So we need to ensure that we refinance those dollars so Manitoba can continue to have the cash it needs to deliver important services and programs to Manitobans.

Mr. Khan: I mean, the minister wants to throw around all these accusations of the past government, PC government, their government. I mean, the simple facts are that in 2017 the previous government took \$47 million in a special warrant; 2018 was \$82 million.

Fast forward to under the NDP—\$700 million in a special warrant. I don't believe the minister has given a real answer as to why that money is being appropriated. He talks about refinancing charges, paying off previous debt.

Manitobans deserve an answer: Why is this government borrowing \$700 million?

MLA Sala: Yes, so, not sinking in. We're going to continue this, and I'll provide—happy to provide a little more detail here.

Much of the refinancing in coming years is due to funding that was completed in fiscal 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, where access to markets was difficult at times. Investor interest was focused in the shorter part of the curve, which is why we saw two-year periods.

Again, this was tied to borrowing that occurred under their government.

Mr. Khan: This minister and government want to talk about a fake deficit of \$1.6 billion. Well, let's run some simple math on this.

When this NDP government left they had an \$846-million audited deficit. That 'lanks' to \$2 billion of borrowing from the PC government. Simple math: if it is a \$1.6 billion fake deficit, that should equal \$4 billion, not \$12 billion that this government has asked for.

* (15:40)

Can the minister go on the record and say why they are borrowing so much money to cover previous debts?

MLA Sala: Critic seems very confused about a lot today, but I'll just—to answer his question, or he's asking about this \$1.6-billion deficit they left for us.

Look, we had MNP, which is a respected accounting firm, do an independent assessment of the previous government's decision making. And that report, which was released publicly, spoke in no uncertain terms that

this previous government made a series of terrible budgetary decisions that left us in a fiscal mess.

They made \$200-million announcements that weren't in budget, and then they failed to reflect those in their budgetary updates to Manitobans. Why? Because they were only interested in one thing, and that was getting re-elected.

Mr. Piwniuk: You know, the—when they talk about fiscal mess, Honourable Speaker, I know back in their days of the old dark days of an NDP, they actually had—not only did they double the debt for the Manitoba—the province of Manitoba, but they also doubled the debt for Manitoba Hydro, put it into a really bad situation. They even depleted the rainy day fund.

Now I just want to know, and I know we've replenished that rainy day fund, whether they have plans for the rainy day fund. Are they going to put more money into that plan?

MLA Sala: One of the most egregious things that we saw from the previous government was the fact that they hid the state of Hydro's finances from Manitobans.

And we know that, in their Q1 report at the end of July, when they knew the direction of Hydro's net income for that year, they purposefully left out that information from that report. Again, why? Because they had one goal and one goal only, and that was their craven goal to get re-elected, all while being dishonest with Manitobans about the true state of our fiscal affairs.

Mr. Guenter: Honourable Speaker, can the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) commit today that his government will balance the budget in this term?

MLA Sala: I'm very proud to say here in this House, to say something we've said many times, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has committed to: we will balance the budget at the end of our first term.

Mr. Khan: This minister, Honourable Speaker, wants to talk about money that wasn't there, and they tabled a document. Embarrassing for the Premier (Mr. Kinew), he tabled a document that said ISA. That's an internal service in government, which means money is accounted for in the budget, it's just transferred from within department, department. So if the minister is confused, maybe he should go back and look at what ISA is.

When he refers to the MNP document, in that report itself it says that economic growth has been better than expected for 2023, 2024, and it's meant to go higher in 2025.

So why is this minister putting false news—record that it's a \$1.6-billion deficit when his own MNP report says the province is performing better?

MLA Sala: The critic for Finance clearly didn't read the executive summary in the MNP report. That executive summary stated in no uncertain terms that the previous government made irresponsible budgetary decisions. Multiple irresponsible budgetary decisions.

They hid Hydro's net income direction from Manitobans in a fiscal update that was falsified. They made \$200-million investments without disclosing that to Manitobans or having made any type of budget for those numbers.

That's their record. And as a result of that, we're climbing out of a \$1.6-billion hole. That's shameful that that's the legacy that they've left for Manitobans. We're going to do better. We're going to deliver on Manitobans' priorities while we balance the budget.

Mr. Piwniuk: I know the member is saying that, right now, when it comes to balance the budget in the last term for their whole term here. I just want to ask the question. I know of the—one of the biggest things that we grow with the economy when we were in—the in government, and I know we focused really on economic development. We had a committee that was actually bringing a lot of investment into this province.

And now when they—when the NDP now had—have now all these big promises, are they going to be able to fulfill those promises, especially now when they've actually siphoned off the revenue that could be coming here because of all those projects that we were working on?

MLA Sala: One of the things that was so shocking to me as a member of the opposition for years was learning and speaking with people in the business community that frequently commented that the government had absolutely no economic development plan of any kind. For years they had zero vision or plan for our provincial economy.

Manitobans now have a government that knows about economic development. We've got an incredible minister responsible for Economic Development, right?

We're going to grow our economy, thanks to his good work and the work of our team.

Mr. Guenter: Honourable Speaker, I find it interesting to hear this theme emerging from the NDP government that our Progressive Conservative government ran a 1.6—apparent \$1.6-billion deficit, at the same time—at the same time—that we cut all these

services. I don't understand; if we cut services, where does this \$1.6-billion deficit come from? What I do know is that we left this government with a \$270-million surplus.

Can the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) speak to what impact that surplus is having on finances today?

MLA Sala: Yes, I mean, I suspect the member knows this, but I'll spell it out for him. Six and half years of massive cuts to everything that Manitobans rely on and then a desperate flurry of investments where they were hoping to stay in government. And that's what we saw for them. As a result of their unbudgeted expenditures, they left us a \$1.6-billion hole. It's not hard to understand; it's because of their poor fiscal management.

Mr. Khan: You know, it's really sad that the minister wants to get up and keep referring to his MNP document, and he actually did read the fine print in that document. It said that it was an unaudited political document with information only provided by the minister. I mean, I think that's a pretty one-sided document if you ask anyone in this room. One person's providing information, one person's writing based on that information. So this debt, \$1.6-billion deficit, is a big deficit.

The question is simply to the Minister of Finance, is how does the Minister of Finance expect to develop all of the Hydro capital projects that he's spoken about by not putting Hydro further in debt?

MLA Sala: Well, again, we're back to this MNP report. I'm not sure if the member opposite has a CPA or CFA designation. We trust the work of MNP; they're a very respected business here in the province and, of course, they operate across the country and beyond. They made a very clear set of statements in that report, which outlined and spoke to the previous government's complete lack of fiscal responsibility.

We're going to do it differently. We're going to make sure we balance our fiscal interests while we deliver on health care and affordability improvements.

Mr. Piwniuk: I just wanted to ask the Minister of Finance, what is his plan now? I know when I was the Transportation minister, I actually did a five-year budget plan for all the lists of all the projects ahead. I come from the—when it comes to the—*[interjection]* I don't know what the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie)—if he's still getting his wages garnished. Is he getting his wages still garnished?

So, Honourable Speaker, my question for the minister now, is there a possibility that they're going to be fulfilling all those budget items on the budget?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, I regret to say I couldn't catch the question.

But here's what I'll say. The previous government left us a \$1.6-billion hole. We're going to do things differently. We're going to make investments that Manitobans relying on us on to fix health care, fix affordability, fix education, all while we take care of our fiscal interests. That's what Manitobans can expect from our new NDP government.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Call members to order, please. Thank you. There's just a little glitch here that we need to figure out before we move on.

* (15:50)

Order, please.

I want to make members aware that there was an error in the wording of the motion moved by the Minister of Finance regarding the resolutions passed in the Committee of Supply.

Is there leave to revert back to allow the correct motion to be moved? *[Agreed]*

Interim Supply Motion

(Continued)

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, that there be granted to His Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, out of the Consolidated Fund, for the purposes set out in the 2024 Estimates, including Supplementary Estimates, sums not exceeding \$12,602,005,000, being 75 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part A, Operating Expenditures of those Estimates; \$902,570,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part B, Capital Investment of those Estimates; \$445,315,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part C, Loans and Guarantees of those Estimates; \$822,516,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part D, Capital Investments, by Other Reporting Entities of those Estimates.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the—*[interjection]* Oh.

It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education and Early—*[interjection]* My mistake. Apparently we're all doing it today.

It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith) and Mental Health, that there be granted to His Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service for the fiscal year—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

SECOND READINGS

(Continued)

Bill 25—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024

(Continued)

Debate

The Speaker: Resuming second reading debate on the motion.

Are there members wishing to speak?

The honourable minister of—sorry, the honourable member for Fort Whyte.

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): I want to thank everyone for today, and thank the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) for his questions. And I believe he truly, heartfully answered the questions. I know the Minister of Finance and I have gone back and forth quite a bit, but I believe we do have a respectful relationship outside of these walls and within.

The important issue at hand here is we're talking about the future of the province of Manitoba, here, the financial situation that we find ourselves in today. And it's clear, it's evident by anyone that lives in this province—has seen over decades that the NDP do not know how to run this province.

It's clear the last time they were in government that they left this province with an \$846-million deficit. It's clear that they're going to raise taxes even when they say they're not going to raise taxes. They raised the PST when Selinger promised he wouldn't raise the taxes, and I believe there probably are a couple colleagues on that side—there's a lot of new ones, so a lot of new ones that you can't hold them to, but some of them were there.

But that speaks to the makeup of what the NDP party is. They're going to raise your taxes when they say they're not going to, they're going to—*[interjection]*

You know, when it comes to civility, when it comes to talking, you have the Minister of Education heckling non-stop when we're just trying to get some records on the words and talk about historical facts.

The facts are—is, \$846-million deficit. The facts are the Minister of Education, two days ago, cancelled exams in the province and then the next day, he woke up and he added them back on; another flip-flop by this government.

We can go down the road of flip-flops, or we can go down the road and talk about financial literacy. The issue is financial literacy, if it's the NDP, are two words that do not go together.

When it comes to today's question period, six questions were asked, and the Premier (Mr. Kinew), the leader of this NDP party, stood up and not once did he answer any of the questions that were asked about the finances of this province.

Manitobans have a right to know what's happening in this province. Manitobans have a right to know how they're going to pay their bills, where they're—what their next paycheque's going to be like, what their next tax savings are going to be like—or, under this NDP, when their next tax hike is going to come, which, according to this Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), is June 1, 14 cents they're going to add back onto the gas tax.

That gas tax holiday was around for two and a half weeks in this province, and we saw gas prices go right back up just like we said they were going to, in committee. It's in Hansard. We said every other province has done this gas tax, and the gas tax gets creped away to holiday. We put it on the record. Minister didn't want to listen. Minister went forward with it. Two and a half weeks later, gas tax holiday was wiped out.

Now, that's not a listening government. A listening government would have listened and said, hey, let's look at all the facts; yes, you're right, the same thing happened in Alberta, Ontario, other provinces was—that was put in. A fiscally responsible government would have looked at that, said yes, that's not the right thing to do. Is there better ways? And on top of that, it's \$180 million to the provincial reserves, coffers.

Now, when it comes to tax cuts, and we spoke openly about this, that we are well in favour of

supporting a tax cut, that we need to make life more affordable, that there are better ways to do it than this gas tax. But they didn't want to listen.

The same thing happened—if we're going back, because we got to talk about how we got to this situation here—is that the NDP government prior to this left this province eight-hundred-seventy-fourty-six million dollars in the hole. How did that happen?

Well, one example is the Keeyask dam project. When they went—tripled the debt of Hydro. Tripled it. When advisors said, don't do it this way, don't do it that way, do it this way, they went ahead and did it the way they wanted to do. It cost \$8.7 billion to make that.

Now, that is contributing to 10 per cent of the energy in this province, and it's a great project that's going forward that's been finally online now—came online under the previous PC government. And it's creating 10 per cent of the energy of this province.

The problem is, though, is that this province is going to run out of energy by 2029, and this government has no plans to make more energy. This government has no plans to double it. How are they going to double the energy capacity in this province when Keeyask took 15 years to build? Honourable Speaker, 2029 is six years—six—five years away. Took 15 years to build Keeyask at a price tag of \$8.7 billion; that's going to be well over \$10 billion if you try to make a project like that again.

Now, we don't have the resources, we don't have the land, we don't have the water to make that type of thing, but we have to go forward in a responsible manner. Now, when you're looking at an energy crisis, you think, okay, we—how are we going to handle this? The first thing you do is you don't fire the CEO.

This minister fired the CEO. And the minister wants to say it was a board decision, and it was funny—it was not funny, actually; it was quite sad and unfortunate that it came out in committee that in the—it was reported that there was an official review process done of the CEO of Hydro. An official review process had started once this government took office.

* (16:00)

And, shockingly, what did Manitobans find out when we went to committee and we asked the board. The board chair said, oh, no, there is no formal review process started. We just had a conversation and we decided to let her go.

That's how we let go of one of the longest serving CEOs in Manitoba Hydro history? That's how we let go of the first CEO who made a ERP, and I bet you that members opposite don't know what ERP—energy resource plan—on how this province would go forward. That's the first CEO that had a strategic—came up with strategic plan 2040.

And this minister came in and fired her. Why? Because there was a disagreement in the media on how this province would go forward, how this province would go fiscally responsible forward.

That is the issue at hand. When this previous NDP government left us with \$846 million audited reports.

Now, this member wants to refer to an MNP report, and they say well, MNP says this. Well, yes. MNP review is just the rehashed NDP talking points and the accounting firm had a disclaimer right in the middle of the report that said they do not have access to any Cabinet or any departmental briefing information, minutes or anything beyond what the NDP minister's words and what he has provided.

I mean, to me that sounds like a pretty one-sided report, if you want the report to go your way. Anybody would know that, everyone would see that, but we—and I'm not slighting the work of MNP at all. MNP's a great firm in this province. Their credibility is not in question.

What is at credibility is this NDP's government—what is at question here is the overspending that this government likes to do. What is at question here is that \$700 million in a special warrant that this NDP government had to ask for—\$700 million. And then they want to say well, \$700 million's to cover all the overspend by the previous government, it's to cover all the promises that were made that wasn't counted for—\$700 million.

Previous governments had it at \$43 million, at \$87 million over two years for special warrants to cover the odds and ends expenses that might need to be covered. I apologize—a little dry still. When you—and I know, you know, it's hard to wrap your head around a number like \$700 million.

It's hard to wrap your head around a number like \$8.7 billion and tripling the debt of Hydro to \$25 billion—\$25 billion is what Hydro is out right now, in debt. Honourable Speaker, 33 cents on every dollar you spend on your hydro bill goes to pay the interest on the debt alone—the interest on the debt alone.

And we are going to run into an energy crisis in this province. The CEO—the interim CEO, not the one that they fired—the interim CEO and the chair both agreed that we're probably going to run up capacity here, energy production by 2029. That's five years. This government has a plan that they want to put in geothermal pumps.

And the minister's on the record talking about what, geothermal air, ground, it's kind of all the same thing. Yes. It's all the same thing. *[interjection]* I'm glad the members opposite are clapping. I'm glad the members opposite are clapping when their minister says that air and geothermal pumps are the same thing. That is how delusional this NDP government is, that they actually think those are the same in this province.

It's comical that you're in committee and the minister thinks that. It's comical that the minister now, as she's trying to heckle me, wants to debate that, but it's in Hansard; anybody can read it.

When you look at the costs of these projects, you know, this government announced—so we're in an energy crisis and we need to get off fossil fuels. There's no question about that. We need to go cleaner. There's no question about that. Clean, renewable, re-useable energy sources. This is the direction we have to go.

When I asked the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) how much it's going to cost for this transition, he had said you need to ask the minister of Efficiency Manitoba, the member for Assiniboia (MLA Kennedy)—no, sorry. Not member for Assiniboia; member for Rossmere (MLA Schmidt).

So I asked that minister at Efficiency Manitoba, and there's no answer given. No answer given. I said, well, the Minister of Finance told me to ask you how much it's going to cost to transition Manitobans off fossil fuels, and the minister of Efficiency Manitoba did not want to answer the question.

Why not? If they're running on a platform and a promise to convert all 260,000 houses in this province, how are they going to do it?

The cost of one of those, Honourable Speaker, conservatively, \$30,000, up to \$50,000. Let's take the middle mark, let's go \$40,000. They had talked about creating hubs and creating communities around that, the cost would be even more gross—even higher.

The issue is the time, the ability, the capacity, the workforce to get this done. This government is living in a magical world where they're going to pull out a

wand and just wave it and that geothermal pump is going to get installed.

If we do the math quickly, \$40,000 per house times 260,000 houses is going to cost the province a lot of money. Astronomical. Astronomical. And then this government committed, during their campaign, with one of their promises, that they're going to convert 5,000 homes. They're going to convert 5,000 homes to geothermal.

Those 5,000 homes, how much is that going to cost, \$10.5 billion for the entire province? Ten point five billion for the entire province; \$10.5 billion—I mean, they can just take out a special warranty like they did already and probably pay for it that way, and then saddle taxpayers, Manitobans, with paying for that. Just like they did with the Keeyask dam: 33 cents.

But you look at the 5,000—and Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) wants me to throw around credible numbers, let me throw around credible numbers for the Minister of Justice. A credible number for the Minister of Justice, since you feel so obliged to chirp up in this conversation here, is 100 days; 100 days when he said that they would get bail reform back on track, and he hasn't.

So if we want to talk about 'credical'—we want to talk about credible numbers, I would advise the Minister of Justice to maybe wait until he gets his opportunity to speak to this. We're here to talk about the finances of this province.

And when we talk about that, we look at 5,000 heat pumps that this government had promised. So, 5,000 heat pumps at \$40,000 each is a lot of money. It's a lot of money. It's a lot of hot air. It's geothermal pumps, not an air pump, so it's different.

This are—these are real decisions this province, this government has to make, how they're going to go forward. This minister was clear that they—going to keep Manitoba Hydro public. Okay, great. Love it. Love it. How are you going to build more capacity in the next five years? You fired the CEO. The one that designed the ERP and the strategic plan for 2040, she's fired. When asked in committee how they're going to do it, this interim CEO and the board chair said we're going to meet about it.

They haven't even met about it? They haven't even talked about it and we're four years away—or five years away from running out of capacity in this province, and they want to build heat pumps? Geothermal homes? Great idea. Who's going to pay for it?

This—these are important conversations that Manitobans need to know. How are they going to pay for all of these promises? How are they going to do that on top of—Honourable Speaker, here's the real kicker: on top it—of it all, what does this minister want to do? This minister wants to go right to the Public Utilities Board and say, hey, freeze Hydro. Freeze the rates.

If I have ever heard of influence and interfering, I don't know if there's any other way than saying you have to freeze the rates. I mean, I would assume that's interfering. If you tell somebody they have to do something and then they go do it, that is interfering.

The minister, over and over again as I listened to him over the years—again, I have a lot of respect for this minister. I think he's a really smart guy. Hear, hear. He is. He is. I'll go on the record and say that. Yes. I'll go on the record and say that.

But this minister here sat here over and over again and said interfering with Public Utilities Board, interfering with Public Utilities Board, interfering, interfering, interfering, and he went out time and time again—and with this Premier (Mr. Kinew)—and said we are going to freeze Hydro rates. Who sets the Hydro rates? The Public Utilities Board.

So if they're going to—if they set the rate, how are they going to freeze it? Because the minister tells them to. That is interference at its fundamental, basic level. I don't understand that. We've asked in the House for clarity on that, he hasn't provided it, I don't imagine he's going to provide. But they promised they were going to do that to Manitobans. Where is it?

They promised they were going to freeze the Hydro rates. Where is that? Another flip-flop. This NDP government has a spending problem, period.

* (16:10)

They—spenDP is what they've been dubbed. They have \$3 billion in new promises on their platform and they have no idea how to pay for it other than borrowing money against Manitobans that Manitobans are going to pay for—\$700 million in a special warrant.

We tabled today \$9.25 billion in orders-in-council alone—\$9.25 billion. This is close to half of the funds budgeted for the past fiscal year. It is far greater than any previous government has ever borrowed for—from an order-in-council, even during pandemic and flood years.

This NDP government—we left them with a \$250-million surplus. Now I know they're going to say

that \$250 million—it actually ended up getting a lot less because of weather.

We were at committee. We can't control the weather. The minister agrees he can't control it. We agree we can't control it. Sorry. Weather in this province is a large driver for revenue for Hydro.

We understand that it's been a little bit drier, it's been not as much snow as forecasted. That has affected it. But a \$9.25-billion orders-in-council? Does the minister even have any idea what the interest rate and the debt-servicing costs on that are going to be?

Hey, there's simple math: 33 cents on \$25 billion at Hydro? This is about \$10 billion, so you're probably looking at about 15 cents. That's another 15 cents of every Manitoban's dollar going to service the debt of this irresponsible spending by this NDP government that's going to be coming forward in this budget.

Previous governments: \$4 billion. I laid the math out earlier. They want to talk about a deficit that the previous government left. You know what I'm talking about, this fake deficit. This \$1.6-billion fake deficit from reports that only they can provide the information to.

Okay. Let's just say for argument's sake, for imaginary land with our imaginary wand that we borrowed from the NDP, we have that \$1.6-billion deficit.

Previously, when the PC government took over in 2017, they had borrowed 850—there was an 850-million—\$846-million deficit. They had to borrow \$2 billion—the PC government—to get their way out of the hole the NDP left them, and get the province back on track.

So by that math, double that, 846 double, 1.6 billion—they should borrow four billion, not 10 billion; not 10. Where does that come from?

You know, the members opposite want to talk about that we left—the previous government left them in terrible shape. Sorry.

They want to talk about how the previous government left them in these dire straits: \$250-million surplus. Mr. Speaker, 2019 and 2022, the PC government led—left a surplus in reserves. First time—what was that?—since 2019.

When was the last time it was done before that, Mr. Speaker? I don't think—Honourable Speaker, I don't think you answer questions. Sorry, I got carried away.

Honourable Speaker, 2019 was the first time there was a surplus at the end of the year, and before that, 2017. Rewind—17 years was all NDP—2008. That's embarrassing. That's an embarrassing track record that this NDP party is known for. It's ingrained in them.

Spend, spend, spend. Tax, tax, tax. Let the next guy clean it up. Well, you know what? We're going to hold them accountable right now. It starts now. It started a long time ago. It started the first day, I guess, we were on this side.

That's what our job is, to hold them accountable. They have to be held accountable for these irresponsible borrowing: \$9.25 billion, \$700 million, when previously it was \$43 million in special permits.

The interest cost on that alone; the debt-servicing costs on that. How does this government plan to pay for that along with their \$3 billion in promises, along with their promises that everyone knows they can't uphold.

But what they can do is they can cut and make you pay more taxes. We've seen it in the education file, upwards of 17 per cent tax increases.

Now, NDP, very crafty with their words. We're not going to raise the taxes, we're just going to make the school boards and trustees do it. Because they cut the funding.

That's how it works for these guys. They raise the taxes: 17 per cent at school boards. When you look at previous government—I've mentioned the special warrants, I've mentioned the increase in taxes, and now we'll talk about some cuts that this government's going to be proposing. And this directly affects Manitobans.

BSC—we heard on the record two days in a row—BSC's going to be cut. A foundation of building stronger communities, building sustainable communities, gone. By these guys. ACSC fund—art, sports, culture in community fund, \$100 million. And they say it was not accounted for, and yet there's an ISA that their leader tabled, quite embarrassingly, actually. An ISA means it's accounted for in the budget. *[interjection]*

I know the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) is confused by that. He should probably look at that and understand what an ISA really is. That money was accounted for. These are lifelines for communities that this government is now going to cut. Building community centres, hockey rinks, arts centres, performing centres, cultural events, heritage events, cricket fields—Assiniboine Park just announced yesterday that they're

starting construction on their upgrade to the cricket fields there.

These are important programs that this government is going to be cutting come April 2. They're going to be raising your taxes on April 1. Well, sorry; it's going to be the NDP-Liberal coalition that will be increasing your taxes on April 1. And that's not a joke. That's going up to 18 cents, carbon tax, where seven other premiers in this country, coast to coast, have called on Justin Trudeau, our Premier's (Mr. Kinew) best friend, to say, hey, Justin, maybe you should get rid of the carbon tax. Hey, Justin, I know you're giving us the largest-in-history transfer—the largest-in-history transfer, because—[interjection]

And the members opposite want to say, you're welcome. Well, they should say you're welcome to the Manitobans. They should say that to Manitobans because of this Premier's (Mr. Kinew) backing of Justin Trudeau. They think they're getting the money because they're so nice? This is a political play done by this Premier and this government. They're getting this money so they support the carbon tax.

Seven premiers across Canada, whether they be Liberal, NDP or Progressive Conservative or Conservative, have said, axe the tax. It's got to go. It's making life more unaffordable for Canadians. Seven premiers. And for some reason this Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and this Premier think they know better than all of them? When everyone has said that this is not a good tax. Everyone says this tax has to go.

And they want to clap for keeping the tax right now, on the record, you can probably hear it, they're clapping for keeping the tax. They want to keep the tax. You probably heard that. It's despicable that they think paying 18 cents more on April 1, when this Premier won't even send a letter to the Prime Minister. Send a letter to the Prime Minister.

He said he would do it; he said he won't do it. Minister of Finance says we should probably get rid of the tax; Premier says, no, we want to keep it. Then Premier goes to Toronto and meets with Premier Ford and says, yes, yes, we'll get rid of it. Comes back to Winnipeg, says, no, we're going to keep it.

What is he going to do? When is he going to make up his mind? This Premier and this government promises they cannot cash. We are seeing it come through now, and it's only been six months. Given another year or two, all of the promises they made will be broken. They're not going to be able to open the three ERs. They're not going to do the things they said they're

going to do, because they can't afford it. They plain and simple cannot afford it.

The magical wand will not make unlimited resources money; they cannot keep going back and borrowing \$700 million or \$9.25 billion, \$5.25 billion more than anyone's ever borrowed for that, \$700 million when the previous largest was \$80 million. This is astronomical amounts of borrowing this government is doing, and they're only six months in. They haven't even done anything they said they wanted to do.

This is going to cause a massive problem for Manitobans. We need to take a pause, think about this irresponsible spending that's going—and we're going to—and if not, we're going to end up in the same spot we did when they left office in 2017.

* (16:20)

And in 2027, when they get kicked out of office again, the PCs will come in and we will clean up their mess. That's the history of this province. That is the history of this province, okay?

Now, how do we get out this? How do we get out of this? How do we get out of this? We say that, hopefully, the budget they're going to table is going to have some sort of fiscal restraint, what they're borrowing; I won't—I doubt that's going to happen.

We look at responsible decisions being made. Well, they promised—he promised in '26, 260,000 Manitobans at a price of \$10.5 billion. I don't know how this could happen. They promised to freeze the hydro tax. Not going to happen. They promised to build three new ERs, not going to happen. We heard today that they're actually picking and choosing which immigrants come to Canada and denying other ones that want to come here and work.

We hear over and over again that this government is not financially ready to do what they have to do. Premier today had opportunity to answer six questions on finances. Did not answer one of them.

Now, member opposite distracted me a little bit when I mentioned equalization payments. We have \$843 million coming in from the federal government, 24 per cent increase. That's great. Where's that money going to go? Manitobans have a right to know: where is that money going to go? How are they going to spend it?

We have a right to know that that money will be spent responsibly, it will be spent on making this province better, and that's what we're going to hold them accountable to. We can't have the same cycle

repeat itself over and over and over again. The—there's too much at stake here.

The province—and I know the minister will agree with me on this, and I don't think the minister wants to make any mistakes going forward. He agrees that this province, there's too much at stake here. We have to go forward properly. I hope that the minister will use financial 'literastry' and restraint to make the right decisions on how to go forward.

But, based on what we've seen and what we've heard from this NDP government in the past, I don't know how that's going to happen. We hope, for Manitoba's sake, that it will. We'll see what happens when the budget is tabled, and then we will proceed from there.

The biggest issue we have right now in this province—well, I mean, I'd say there's a lot of problems in this province—specifically to the finances. We are in a time of high inflationary costs. And the minister is going to say that they got inflation down. That's one of many things, one of many factors.

It's—you know, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) is—wants to jump on these things right away, but the Minister of Justice is, you know, doesn't understand that there's many factors that play into that, and it is what it is. Interest rates, inflation, food costs, carbon tax, hydro, these are all important issues that have to be addressed fiscally responsible in this province. And if we don't do it the right way, we are going to be setting up for failure for generations to come. *[interjection]*

And in those seven years—the member says, you had seven years—and in those seven years, we left this government \$250 million in surplus. So in those seven years, \$250 million.

Honourable Speaker, I guess there's no better point to end on that than we left this NDP government \$250 million. As of right now, they have borrowed over \$10 billion, and they're only six months into their job. May God help us for the next three and a half years.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there—the honourable member for Borderland.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): It's a pleasure to rise today to put a few words on the record and speak to the debate today. And I appreciated hearing from the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) on several of

the points that he outlined and look forward to, obviously, more debate on these important issues.

And I appreciate that, finally, we are debating something that is important, that is well within the realm of this government, this Legislature, which is talking about finances; the finances of government and taxes and the impact on Manitoba families and Manitoba taxpayers.

And this comes after many days of divisive debate on the part of the NDP government and, frankly, in their nearly six months now in government, where they have focused almost exclusively on symbolism and prioritized a tinkering around on divisive social issues, whether it's the prayer here in the Chamber, whether it's the—any number of things that they've brought forward.

I think it's interesting the two days that they wasted on their very exclusive and narrow motion focused on the Middle East, and incredibly divisive and highly exclusive.

And it's just—it's exhibit A; this government is exhibit A for that socialist liberal tendency of saying that somehow, the—somehow, Conservatives and people who are pro-family, pro-faith, pro-love their country, love this country, are somehow hateful and divisive people, and in their motion, just totally exclude that in their debate—so exclusive in that debate. And frankly, it's unbecoming of a government. But it's just coming out of two days of that and having seen, over the last six months, the symbolism over substance, time and time again.

And I think, you know, a new holiday, a new—declaring a new premier, a—all of these things that they come out with at a time when—and I know the members opposite are upset, but guess what, Honourable Speaker? Manitobans will soon realize what this government is all about, because they are struggling at this time. They are struggling to pay their mortgages. They are struggling to feed their families.

They are struggling, Honourable Speaker, and they're going to realize in June, when the gas tax goes up another 14 cents, that they've been had by this government, and that's what we should be talking about, is issues—those bread-and-butter issues that—those day-to-day issues—that affect moms and dads and families all across this province. And those are the issues that we should be focused on.

And yet this government has absolutely no interest—no interest, in the last six months; have demonstrated no interest at all in focusing in on those issues.

And so I appreciate that here we are. And finally they've tipped their hand, and they've said, well, you can't avoid a budget debate. We're going to have to come out with a budget. And so what we're going to do is raise that deficit to \$1.6 billion, and that allows us to squirrel away a lot of that special interest funding that we want to do that go to their friends, the unions, all the special interest groups that helped get them here—the media, all the—all this typical socialist liberal behaviour that we're going to see from these folks at a time when Manitobans are driving on potholes and health-care wait times have never been longer.

Honourable Speaker, these folks are flip-flopping when it comes to education. They have no plan. Over \$3 billion in election promises. Six months in government, no results. We haven't heard a single thing from these folks.

Honourable Speaker, my advice to this government is start acting like a government. Start listening to Manitobans.

Honourable Speaker, they have left—they have put nothing on the table when it comes to health care. They have—they ran a campaign almost entirely on health care, and yet, they—*[interjection]*

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Guenter: —after six months of government, no plan to recruit, retain or train staff. No plan. No new beds, Honourable Speaker. No new beds. They have cut capacity with no plan in the short term.

* (16:30)

In fact, Honourable Speaker, I believe there is a strike going on right now that is impacting our most vulnerable people in the health-care sector. There are people in their wheelchairs, that are in their wheelchairs for up to 20 hours or longer, that are not being looked after.

This government is in charge, they talked big while they were in opposition. They said, when we were in government, you can go over there, fix it, get 'er done today. I implore this government, if you think it can be done, if you have any heart at all, make it right and look after these folks that are—that frankly, it's a non-partisan issue. I think we can all agree that government must look after those who cannot look after themselves, and frankly, this government is doing an awful job of doing that.

But they have—there's a lack of transparency on wait times. They cut the diagnostic and surgical task

force with no plan on programming, and they have put their ideology over patient care.

Honourable Speaker, I have heard from many constituents who were so close to getting that hip or knee replacement, who were so close to getting care in the United States. And yet this government cut out-of-province, or in other provinces. And this government cut out of care—out-of-province surgeries, and so now these folks are left not even on the wait list. They have no idea when they'll be looked after. And so they're left in pain.

Honourable Speaker, I find this absolutely deplorable. Six months in government and absolutely no plan. Symbolism over results. Symbolism over substance.

And frankly—*[interjection]* frankly, frankly, Honourable Speaker—*[interjection]*

Frankly, Honourable Speaker, we are going to see more of this, and we've seen this from the NDP-Liberal government. *[interjection]*

They are excited over there, Honourable Speaker. They are—it's so typical. Shout down—they don't like to hear the truth, I'll tell you that.

But there are many Manitobans out there who are starting to realize that for a six-month, 14-cent cut of the gas tax, that they've been had. That gas tax is going back in June, and Manitobans will realize very quickly this government does not have their back.

And they're realizing that now with the lack of any plan on health care, and it's astounding, Honourable Speaker, that not only is there not a plan, but they seem to be cutting the \$1.5 billion, \$1.6-billion expansion at HSC is—has been shelved. They have cut—they have cancelled plans for new personal-care homes, and my heart goes out to those folks who were looking forward to that.

And you look at the nine new schools that our government was going to build, our Conservative government. They have put those plans on ice, as well. Honourable Speaker, at a time, as I mentioned, potholes; our roads and infrastructure. Our government spent record amounts on infrastructure and got done all that we possibly could and this government has put forward no plan on infrastructure.

And I'm curious what their plan is on the Lake St. Martin outlet channel. I'm curious what their plan is for Kenaston, for the expansion there. I'm

curious what their plan is for Highway 75, for infrastructure across the province. But they have no plan. There is absolutely no plan.

And Honourable Speaker, what we have seen, though, is that they are going back to their old—the old socialist ways that we saw in the 17 years that they were in power, how that they raised taxes 15 times in 14 years. They tripled Manitoba Hydro's debt. So, today, 33 cents of every dollar that every Manitoban has to pay in Hydro: senior or parent or young person, renter; 33 cents of every dollar goes to servicing—servicing Manitoba Hydro's debt.

So you think about that. Think about that impact on Manitobans. The impact of higher debt and higher debt costs. And that's the path that we're on under this government. After six months, no plan on education, no plan on health care, no plan on any of these—and no plan on infrastructure; and yet, they're going to plunge us into more debt, higher taxes and higher debt-servicing charges—higher debt-servicing fees, and we've seen where that has got us. And it's going to—it's not going to be pretty.

We see where that gets us in Canada with the federal NDP and Liberal coalition, where after eight years of them writing our budgets and spending Canadian taxpayer dollars, that last week, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report warning that the NDP-Liberal government spending plans remain out of control, that the amount the taxpayers spend just to service the national debt is expected to go up by 33.4 per cent this year and 11.6 per cent in the coming year.

So what does that mean in absolute terms? That means that the amount we pay to cover the interest on the national debt will rise from \$35 billion last year to 40—almost \$47 billion this year and \$52 billion next year. What does that mean? Well, the federal government transfers \$49.2 billion in health care. Debt-servicing charges of—debt payments of \$52 billion is more than what they pay in health care.

Provincially, we can expect the same: a repeat of those results. We can expect the same results. We're going to see this government grow the debt-servicing department—if it were a department—rapidly, as they did before we came into—before the Conservatives formed government in 2016 and sorted out the financial mess that they left us with. And they're going to grow the debt-servicing charges, and that's going to have an impact at a time of high interest rates and high inflation. And, frankly, it creates a, in economic terms, a vicious cycle that's very, very hard to pull out of.

And I think this government has not thought out the path forward. They've pledged—they've put forward that they're going to be balancing the budget so they're running three—in four years, but in the meantime, they're running three artificial deficits. And I think it's so interesting that we're supposed to take that at face value when Canadians and Manitobans have seen this movie before. We've seen how the federal Trudeau Liberals, supported by their NDP friends, pledged to run three deficits and how that, in the last eight years, we haven't run a single balanced budget. The deficits have progressively grown. They've gotten bigger. Debt-servicing charges are higher. Inflation is higher. Folks are finding it hard to make ends meet.

And that's where this government is sending us, is sending Manitobans: into a future, a dark future, of high debt, high tax. And, frankly, what's going to happen is Manitobans are—it's already happening, but Manitobans are leaving. They're leaving. They're going elsewhere. They're pursuing opportunities elsewhere in jurisdictions where the cost of living is better, where the taxes are lower, where the opportunities are more plentiful.

What we're going to see under this government again is what we saw in the last 17 years that they were in power, from 1999 to 2016, is this pervasive problem of capital flight of businesses and investors and entrepreneurs taking their money and taking their business elsewhere and choosing not to invest in this province, all because of a government that has decided to put symbolism over substance, that has decided to focus on divisive wedge issues rather than issues that Manitobans are primarily seized with.

And so, Honourable Speaker, I am deeply concerned about the direction that we're headed. You would think that after eight years of the federal Liberal-NDP tax-and-spend policies, you would think that this NDP government would understand that Manitobans are not in the mood for high-tax, high-spend governance. They're not in the mood for higher taxes and more government spending. But here we are, six months in. This government, again, symbolism over substance. No plan on health care. No plan on education. And here we are, looking at a \$1.6-billion deficit, endless tax, endless tax hikes—*[interjection]*

* (16:40)

The Speaker: Order, please. I don't think hollering back and forth across the Chamber is going to be very helpful. I can't hear the member who's speaking; you're

now drowning out your own member, so let the member have the floor, please.

Mr. Guenter: It's interesting that members opposite take umbrage with—I think it's—I think it resonates. It's the truth, and I think that's why it resonates with them because I think they realize that they've been caught, that their—that really, is all that they've got, is put forward, is focus on those divisive wedge issues.

Frankly, Manitobans are not interested in that. Manitobans have had enough of that. Manitobans want a government that is focused on their priorities, and their priorities are paying that mortgage, feeding their children. Frankly, they're not interested in big government telling them how to live their lives. They just want government to get out of the way and let them live their lives and do the things that make them happy and build that brighter, happier future for their families.

But this government's not going to allow that to happen. This government is jacking up the deficit, hiking spending and raising taxes. And what's—again, what I find so perplexing is there's absolutely no plan. I don't know why this Legislature should endorse this spending plan at the same time that they don't have any substance. And where is the plan on health care? In fact, I mean, like I said, they're—they've axed the \$1.6-billion HSC expansion; they've axed those—the personal-care homes that we were going to build. They've put the nine new schools on ice.

So, frankly, if they've cancelled all these programs—the Building Sustainable Communities program—wonderful program—because it gave a pat on the back to those small town and big city here in Winnipeg, as well as Brandon, and all across the province—rural folks, urban folks—all those volunteers who got together around a community priority and a community project and sold it to the community, raised the funds. And this program, Building Sustainable Communities program, came along and said, you know what, we'll—for every dollar you've raised, we'll throw in a dollar of our own. You've done great work. We'll support—we'll get behind your vision.

And so, many projects—hundreds of projects across this province—were supported through that program. This government, the NDP—the socialist NDP government—has cut that program. And it's amazing to me, they're—it's amazing to me—it's amazing. You talk about education. It was our government that was on track to building 22 new schools; we had 14 of them done, in the pipeline another nine to go. Of course, as I indicated, this government—the NDP government—

have now put those nine on ice, so those aren't going ahead.

But it's interesting that they accused us of cutting the Education budget, when we actually hiked it by over \$100 million last year: a 6.1 per cent increase. Their first opportunity in power to touch the Education budget, and what do they do? A below-inflation increase to the Education budget, and then they allow school divisions to tax, and so now we're looking at 17, 18 per cent tax hikes—property tax hikes.

So as I said, Honourable Speaker, we're not even six months into this government, and Manitobans are realizing, it's symbolism over substance. Manitobans are getting the bill in the mail. They're seeing their property taxes jacked up. They're looking at that June deadline on that gas-tax cut where they're looking at a 14-cent hike. And they're, at the same time, seeing this NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) waffling in the wind on the carbon tax. He's one of three premiers—he's in the minority on this, actually, across the country, in defending Justin Trudeau and his carbon tax. He apparently wants to perpetuate the carbon tax here in the province.

So, no—absolutely no results. Manitobans are looking at these dismal results. They're looking at the bill. They elected this government, and they get these bills—these tax bills—coming from this NDP government.

And I wonder what's going on, what conversations are being had around the kitchen tables across this province as moms and dads are talking about that trip that they wanted to take, perhaps. That trip that they wanted to take; maybe take their family down to SeaWorld, maybe take their family to Banff, maybe they wanted to finish that bathroom reno, maybe they wanted to put some money aside, fix the deck, maybe they wanted to buy some new tires for the car.

The fact of the matter is, Honourable Speaker, they're looking at these tax bills coming due, and they're saying, you know what, we're going to have to take this money, and we're going to have to set some aside so we can afford to pay for this NDP government. We're going to have to make sure that we have enough money in the bank account to pay the bill that these socialists are sending us.

Again, Honourable Speaker, eight years of Justin Trudeau's Liberal-NDP tax-and-spend policies, and this government, not six months in, plows right in.

They ran—this Premier, this NDP Premier, ran as if he was Pierre Poilievre in the election campaign,

and now he's switched. He's flipped, and he's governing like he's Justin Trudeau. Well, we know where that's going to end. We know where that's going to end. We can talk about the polls. We can talk about the polls, Honourable Speaker, and we know this isn't going to work out well, because, let me tell this NDP government, there is no—on behalf of Manitobans and Manitoba families across this province, there is no appetite for their tax hikes. There is no appetite for their tax-and-spend policies. There is no appetite. There is no appetite for their—there is no appetite for their tax-and-spend policies for higher debt, higher debt-servicing costs.

Honourable Speaker, the very least this government could do is put forward a plan. If they're going to say that they're running a \$1.6-billion deficit, the very least they could do is reveal where that money is going. There is no plan: no plan for health care, no plan for infrastructure, no plan for education.

So, as I say, Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are sitting at the kitchen table, they're at—they're going to the coffee shops, and they're wondering—perhaps as they're on their way home from work in their car, they're on their commute and they're thinking these things through. And they're wondering how they're going to make ends meet with a government, a provincial NDP government, that does not—clearly does not have their back and is not interested in their priorities, not interested in putting forward a plan on health care and ensuring that those folks that were told that they can no longer have a surgery—their hip or knee or other surgeries done out of province within a matter of weeks; they can no longer have those done. They must now wait for months, if not years, languish on a wait-list somewhere and wait in pain.

And I think of all those Manitobans out there who are now—those Manitobans, perhaps, who were looking forward to sending their children to one of those new schools that our government had put forward and had a plan to build and now those schools are on ice.

And I think of those Manitobans who are traveling our roads as it's spring again and wondering where this government is at when it comes to the potholes that we're seeing opening up in our roads.

So, Honourable Speaker, there are very real issues at play, and this government clearly has no intention of focusing on any of those issues. And so we're going to be heading into this dark night for the next three and a half years, three years, whenever the next election is, of higher taxes, higher spending, poorer services—poorer services.

I think it's unfortunate, because our government in the last seven years, our Conservative government, had showed that it's possible to cut the overall tax burden on Manitoba taxpayers, to put more money into services, more money into health care, more money into education to get better results. And we proved that that was possible.

* (16:50)

And yet, this government has gone back to the same old failed socialist policies of the '60s and '70s, and they're going to plunge us back into that same vicious cycle of higher debt, higher taxes, higher inflation, higher interest rates, and Manitoba families are going to be looking for the exits.

It's sad. We've got a beautiful province, a lot of potential—a lot of potential in this province. But Manitobans are going to be looking for the exits.

In fact, it's interesting that you have school board trustees who—they'll cast their vote in favour of 17 per cent tax hikes and then announce that they're taking off and ending up—they're going to be taking their family down to Tennessee. Tennessee, United States.

So that's the future. That's the future for Manitobans, is look for opportunities elsewhere, because this place, unfortunately, is in trouble if we—if the—if this socialist NDP government doesn't change its ways.

So, Honourable Speaker, with those thoughts, I look forward to continuing debate on this and look forward to further comments from my colleagues. But let me just say that, again, that—emphasize and bring it all back home the—*[interjection]*— yes, let's tie it all back together. For the colleagues across the way, let me just say that after eight years—for the colleagues, for my socialist friends, for my socialist friends across the way—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guenter: —for my socialist friends, and maybe some communists in there, too. Maybe—*[interjection]*

You know it's interesting, symbolism over substance. I think of a quote from former US President Ronald Reagan, who said the problem—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Guenter: The problem with our social—the problem with our liberal friends is that they know so much about things that just aren't true. And I like that. They

can talk; they're masters at this. They can wax eloquent about things that just aren't true. And that's why they prefer to focus on these divisive social, you know, symbolic-type issues that are so far removed from where Manitoba families are at.

An Honourable Member: Like health care.

Mr. Guenter: Well, no plan for health care. No plan. They want to talk health care, give us a plan. Show Manitobans a plan. No plan.

After eight years of Liberal NDP tax-and-spend policies, here we are, and this NDP-provincial NDP government—is going to embark on exactly that.

And, in closing, again another great quote from the great US President Ronald Reagan, let me just say, he said, the liberal view of the economy, the socialist view of the economy can be summed up in this way: if it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. If it stops moving, subsidize it.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): We all know what this bill is about. Today is the NDP government's preparation for the big show, setting the stage for tax hikes and cutting services. We've seen it before, Honourable Speaker, and we will certainly see it again.

And let me remind the opposite members about the \$846-million deficit that Selinger left us. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) was there. He voted for it. They depleted the rainy day fund. And that was during good economic conditions. Maybe the NDP believe that we are in good economic conditions right now. Manitobans certainly don't think so, and Canadians certainly don't think so.

The honourable member from Fort Whyte spoke about financial literacy. I come from the business sector; it's no secret. The members opposite know that I've come from the business sector. Yet the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has refused to answer questions about the province's finances.

This bill is an indication of what is to come. They've promised to freeze hydro rates, but we don't know how that's going to happen. They promised three new hospitals. How? They're sending workers back overseas and not 'welking' them with open arms.

Honourable Speaker, \$3 billion in campaign spending commitments, yet we—they don't know how they're going to pay for them. They NDP are quickly closing in on \$10 billion in borrowing since being elected just a few short months ago.

This is not normal, Honourable Speaker. It suggests a plan to run large deficits for many years to come, despite inflation and despite federal transfers growing significantly, and recently since 2021. In addition, the NDP have added \$710 million in new spending on top of the 2023 budget that already had record increases from 2022.

So, as I mentioned, coming from the business sector, let me provide some financial literacy. Fiscal and monetary policy are related. The government cannot borrow more without causing more inflation. We need the private sector to drive Manitoba's economy and reduce red tape. We need to focus on growing the economy, Honourable Speaker, bring in that revenue. Constant borrowing is not the answer. Growth-oriented policies are the answer.

Over 31 economic-development projects were in process under this previous PC government. And what did the NDP government do? They fired the individual who was running and advancing those programs. So, shame on that government.

This is what keeps the economy running. This is what draws money into the pockets of Manitoba-Manitobans. This is what draws money into government revenue. Higher income produces more government revenue; it is very simple fiscal and monetary policy, Honourable Speaker.

Higher income produces more government revenue for the same tax rate. Also very simple monetary policy, Honourable Speaker. This reduces the need to spend. By contrast, tackling fiscal problems with higher taxes is further adding to the affordability challenges that we are already seeing today. It will continue to drive up costs, it will continue to drive up inflation and people's overall ability to spend into the economy. We've already heard it numerous times; this side of the House, we're—focus on the affordability crisis of Manitobans.

This is why we put \$5,500 back into the pockets of Manitobans in last year's budget. But what's the NDP's affordability plan? Two and a half weeks of a temporary fuel-tax holiday? That's not going to help Manitobans into the future. What's going to happen June 1? We saw the gas taxes rise. I drive to work every single day, Honourable Speaker; I'm putting that fuel into my vehicle.

This is something our previous PC government understood. After the NDP depleted the rainy-day fund in 2016 under strong economic conditions, the PC government rebuilt our access to cash flow,

because this is what you do in good economic conditions. You don't continue to borrow money, Honourable Speaker, you start to pay down the debt. If I have limited funds in my bank account, do I keep spending? No. I start to pay down that debt.

This is what Manitobans do; this is what Manitobans expect of our government. And all we've seen today with this bill is the NDP's proof that they plan to raise taxes, continue borrowing money, cut services and putting it on the backs and shoulders of hard-working Manitobans, Honourable Speaker. Asking Manitobans to provide even more money while they dig deeper into their pockets; not much more money that they can dig for. But this isn't providing the citizens of this province with any sense of security on how this government manages money.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) refused to answer questions about the Province's finances, Honourable Speaker. You know why? It's because he knows, and this government knows, about what's to come. Maybe Manitobans don't know yet, but we know on this side of the House that Manitobans will soon find out. They'll see those taxes. They'll see those hidden taxes.

What did the NDP government do previously? They increased the PST. What did they do? They put taxes onto haircuts, manicures, pedicures, services, house insurance.

What else are they going to do? What other taxes are we going to find in, maybe this year's budget, maybe next year's budget, maybe the budget after that, but certainly not the budget after that, because the PCs will be back in power. Honourable Speaker, today they have authorized \$10 billion in new borrowing and debt since being elected in October, and the government is coming forward, and the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) is coming forward and requiring once again to spend more money on the backs of Manitobans; on the back—

The Speaker: Honour, please.

When this matter is next before the House, the member will have 30 minutes remaining. My mistake—the member will have 24 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Provincial Taxes	
Bill 18–The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act		Khan	705
Altomare	699	Kinew	705
Bill 19–The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act		STARS Air Ambulance	
Wiebe	699	Guenter	705
Bill 20–The Highway Traffic Amendment Act		Naylor	705
Wiebe	699	Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program	
Bill 21–The Public Schools Amendment Act		Byram	706
Altomare	700	Marcelino	706
Members' Statements		Internationally Educated Health-Care Workers	
Nepali Cultural Society of Manitoba		Cook	707
Chen	700	Asagwara	707
Kate Cameron		STARS Air Ambulance Services	
Narth	701	Johnson	708
Burma Bushie–Rocky Mountain Woman		Naylor	708
Bushie	701	Asagwara	708
Canadian Border Services Agency		Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program	
Piwniuk	702	Lamoureux	709
Hoffman's Fine Foods		Marcelino	709
Lamoureux	702	Health Care and Applied Sciences	
Oral Questions		Lamoureux	709
Provincial Finances		Marcelino	709
Ewasko	703	Skilled Immigrant Workers	
Kinew	703	Lamoureux	710
Provincial Taxes		Marcelino	710
Khan	704	Violent and Repeat Offenders	
Kinew	704	Oxenham	710
Upcoming Carbon Tax Increase		Wiebe	710
Khan	704	Federal International Student Cap	
Kinew	704	Perchotte	710
		Cable	711
		Petitions	
		Hearing Aids	
		Lamoureux	711

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Messages

Sala 712

Committee of Supply

Interim Supply
Khan 713
Sala 713

Committee Report

Blashko 719

Interim Supply Motion

Sala 719

Introduction of Bills

Bill 25–The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024
Sala 720

Second Readings

Bill 25–The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024
Sala 720

Questions

Khan 721
Sala 721
Piwniuk 722
Guenter 722

Interim Supply Motion

(Continued)

Sala 725

Second Readings

(Continued)

Bill 25–The Interim Appropriation Act, 2024
(Continued)

Debate

Khan 725
Guenter 731
Stone 736

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