

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

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishininewuk, 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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton). The title of the resolution is A Better Future for Health-Care in Manitoba.

The Speaker: It has been announced that pursuant to rule 34(7), that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Tuxedo. The title of the resolution is a bit of—better future for health care in Manitoba.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 210—The Homeowner Protection from Unsolicited Purchase Offers Act

The Speaker: Now as previously announced, the honourable member for Fort Garry has indicated that Bill 210, the homeowner protection and unsolicited purchase offers act, will be their selected bill for this session, and that the question will be put on second reading of this bill this morning at 10:55 a.m.

Accordingly, I will now recognize the honourable member for Fort Garry to move the second reading motion to begin his debate.

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I move that Bill 210, The Homeowner Protection from Unsolicited Purchase Offers Act; Loi sur la protection des propriétaires contre les offres d'achat sans sollicitées, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wasyliw: The impetus for this bill came from canvassing in my west Fort Garry neighbourhood. It's a neighbourhood that's very much in transition; these are 60-year-old homes, some of the first suburban homes in Winnipeg. They have some of the original owners from that neighbourhood that still occupy those homes. Many of them are widows living alone in a single-family home on a very large lot. The neighbourhood is transitioning, and a lot of young people are moving into it with young families.

And when the original homeowners bought these homes, they were a fraction of what they cost today. In fact, some of these homes are now 10 to 15 times what these homeowners originally had purchased the home for, and, of course, many of these homes are now mortgage-free.

Many of the homeowners are seniors, including many in their 80s; some are in poor health, some are facing some very significant financial difficulties or having hard times maintaining their home. The neighbourhood, highly desirable, it's next to a rapid transit station, it's gentrifying at a very rapid pace, and in south Winnipeg it's probably one of the last affordable areas for family homes where young families can actually purchase a family house.

So the lots are extremely valuable, and there's a business practice that's been going on in this area where the homes are getting torn down and two modern, tall homes are being built on the same lot, which is a huge economic windfall for the developers.

And what I saw in this neighbourhood, which was deeply concerning, and I saw for it myself, you would have these young, very aggressive salespeople who would be going door to door, knocking on the doors of these homes of these seniors and offering to buy their homes, unsolicited, for cash.

In fact, I remember, during the election, I was in the backyard talking to one of my constituents, and this young salesperson comes into the backyard, interrupts the conversation I'm having with the constituent, and makes an offer on the house in front of me. And I was talking to a senior, she was exasperated, and out of frustration, she said, you know what, you were here last week, the answer was no last week, it's still no. And she proceeded to tell me that this was a regular occurrence in the neighbourhood, where they were getting constantly bombarded, constantly solicited, and no didn't mean no and they would be back again.

I then went back out onto the street and I continued to knock on doors, and I could see these young guys were about half a dozen doors ahead of me and they were going door to door. And when I spoke to the neighbours in this neighbourhood, they said this happened all the time, and to the point where they felt harassed.

So this is not just happening in west Fort Garry, it's happening in other parts of my riding. It's in fact happening all over the city of Winnipeg, and I imagine it's all over Manitoba. If you ever see the signs on hydro poles that, we buy houses for cash, that's what this is, and essentially it's a practice called real estate wholesaling, or paper flipping, and it's a get-rich-quick scheme. It's one of those things that you'll have a Saturday afternoon seminar at a airport hotel where somebody comes in and teaches how, you know, to make a million dollars really quickly. Well, this is the method that they're teaching, and then after one of these seminars, you see an explosion in, at least in Fort Garry in Winnipeg, of these would-be entrepreneurs who go out there trying to hustle.

So, basically, the original homeowners are aging out, they may live alone, they may be widows and they may be quite vulnerable and unsophisticated. They don't know how much their property is worth. And

what happens in these transactions is a high degree of pressure sales being used, to the point of harassment.

* (10:10)

And they're being offered homes at well below market prices. And, of course, the person had paid off the house years ago, and so it seems like a big number, but they don't know that because they don't employ a realtor. In fact, part of the sales pitch for this is: Don't use a realtor; we will give you cash and you will save money by not using a realtor.

Well, the thing is with a realtor, realtors protect the seller, because they can tell you what your actual house is worth and whether you're being taken advantage of. So they provide valuable information to Manitobans and a valuable service that needs to be recognized.

So the homeowner may not be sophisticated, they may not understand the rights or the true value of their home, and essentially, they get taken advantage of. And then they sell the house to one of these resell wholesalers, and here's the troubling part about it: They don't even take possession of the house. They, in turn, sell it to a builder or another company before their original sale is done, flipping the house and taking the profit from offering a low-asking price and another company will then, in turn, go build on that lot.

So when I was researching this, this became such a significant issue in Manitoba that the Securities Commission had to issue a fraud alert several years ago, because they got so many complaints from Manitobans about this issue. And, looking into the matter further, it's kind of an odd situation, because our consumer protection laws protect buyers; they don't protect sellers. There is a gap in the law where you, potentially as a seller, can be taken advantage of, and this law would fill that gap.

So, what does this bill do? It provides protections for homeowners from receiving unsolicited purchase offers, and it gives them the tools to stop being harassed. So, no means no; if you don't want to have this unwanted attention, you can notify these people and they will be required by law to leave you alone.

It also requires, if you do enter into a sale with one of these companies, they have to provide you consumer protection information as a condition of sale, so that this vulnerable person can know what their rights are and how they can protect themselves.

It also requires the protection of the homeowner through the representation of an independent real estate agent who is bound by an ethical code of conduct, and any misconduct can be dealt with by the profession. They're—and of course the real estate agent will be there to provide market-value information and ensure that the seller is protected during the transaction. And this bill requires that the purchaser pay for the fees of the independent real estate broker in these circumstances.

And finally, it also allows for a cooling-off period, given that there's high-pressure sales tax in here. You can cancel any of these deals within 30 days.

If Manitoba pass this bill, it would be groundbreaking. It would be the first jurisdiction in Canada that protected vulnerable homeowners from these types of tactics. There have been laws put in place in Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Oklahoma, but this would be the very first one in Canada. So I look forward to the debate on this matter.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Speaker: So, a question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I thank the member for Fort Garry for bringing this piece of legislation forward and for representing his constituents.

I know he talked a little bit about, anecdotally, about seeing—witnessing these unsolicited offers being made and talked about his constituents feeling harassed, but I'm wondering if he could, perhaps, talk a little bit more about whether he has any empirical evidence or quantitative data, whether he can demonstrate that this is something that happens across Manitoba. If he could, perhaps, talk a little bit more about that.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): No, I thank you for that question.

Probably the greatest source of information for this is the Manitoba Securities Commission. I have

met with them and discussed this; I've actually requested that they conduct an investigation. But again, this predates me bringing this bill.

A number of years ago there was so many complaints to the Manitoba Securities Commission that they issued a public fraud alert in relation to this practice. So this is very much on the radar of the Manitoba government. The issue is, until now there hasn't been any sort of political will to actually find a legislative solution to this issue.

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): My question to the member opposite is: How will the provisions of this bill be enforced?

Mr. Wasyliv: Yes, so basically it's contract law, and this would require a number of obligations on the part of people who enter into this contract. And if you violate those obligations, you could be taken to court and the sale could be found to be null and void.

In addition, the requirement to have a real estate agent represent you at the buyer's expense also protects the seller. And that real estate agent is bound by an ethical code of conduct; if they do something that is not in the interest of the seller, they can be brought before their own professional body and disciplined. And so that can give the member opposite the comfort knowing—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): My question is for the member for Fort Garry. My question is: Were homeowners and homebuyers equally consulted in the drafting of this bill?

As we know, homebuyers—*independent* homebuyers have been around as part of the real estate landscape for many, many years, and I'm just wondering if they've also been consulted equally to the homeowners.

Mr. Wasyliv: Well, I wouldn't say equally, because when I'm knocking on doors in a neighborhood, I'm obviously talking to far more homeowners who are dealing with this problem.

But I have met with the Manitoba Real Estate Association. I have met with the Manitoba builders' association. I have met with a real estate wholesaling company, one of these that—we-buy-houses company, and heard their perspective from it. And, of course, I have met with the Manitoba Securities Commission who has been receiving these complaints. And, of

course, my own constituents, who tell me first-hand their experiences in relation to this.

Mr. Simard: Thank you again for those responses.

But my question for the member opposite is: How does this bill support homeowners with the potentially expensive proposition of the services of a realtor?

Mr. Wasyliv: Okay, so I'll answer that question again.

So the homeowner isn't paying for the real estate agent. It is an obligation that, if you enter into an unsolicited sale, that the purchaser will have to pay for an independent real estate agent at their expense in order to protect the seller of that property. So the seller of that property is not out any money at all for this service. That will be part of the cost associated with the unsolicited buyer who's engaging in this practice.

The Speaker: No further—the honourable member for Borderland.

Mr. Guenter: I wonder if the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) could talk about how he arrived at the decision to mandate realtor involvement.

Mr. Wasyliv: In researching this bill, I was looking at some of the examples in the United States. And what they were forcing people to do there is that if you engaged in this type of business model, you were forced to go get a real estate licence, even if you weren't normally in sort of a—that type of business, in order that you would be governed by an ethical professional code and a professional body that could discipline you.

I didn't think we needed to go that far in Canada. I thought that given that we already have real estate professionals that do this kind of work, who are subject to an ethical professional code of conduct, simply having them involved in the transaction is an extra layer of protection for home sellers.

*(10:20)

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I have a—my question is regarding the disclosure statement in the member's bill—proposed bill about the disclosure statement not being necessarily a proper form, similar to The Condominium Act that is used there, that would then be, like, a statutory declaration that would be signed by both parties.

Is the member opposite willing to talk a little bit about the disclosure statement in his proposed bill?

Mr. Wasyliv: Again, because oftentimes there is an information and power imbalance between the transacting parties, one of the abuses of this type of business model is to take advantage of somebody who doesn't have information about their legal rights or about, you know, what protections they have under law in relation to these type of commercial transactions.

So the whole point of forcing that disclosure gives that potential seller information that they wouldn't have otherwise, and it should give them notice about how serious this is, how many options that they have, and that they don't have to feel pressured and that they have some choices to make—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Thank you to the member for Fort Garry for bringing this bill forward to offer some protection to the vulnerable citizens of the province.

But did you rely on any research or precedent to determine that 30 days is the appropriate time frame for homeowners to reconsider their decision to sell, or did you consider longer or shorter windows?

Mr. Wasyliv: Again, I looked at some examples in the United States where they had these sort of cooling-off periods and I had extensive discussions with Legislative Counsel about what would be a fair time frame so that somebody who's feeling pressured to get into this, they have enough time to sort of realize an error and get out, but not so long that if it is a valid commercial transaction that it doesn't disrupt normal economic flow. So 30 days seemed like a good balance.

Certainly, you know, I would be open to discussion on the exact number of days, but that's how we landed at 30 days.

Mr. Simard: My question for the member opposite: We have a lot of Manitobans who want to get into the home ownership realm. How does this bill support Manitobans who want to become homeowners?

Mr. Wasyliv: One of the problems that we have with the affordable housing crisis is that our properties are not homes, they're assets and they're being financialized. And this type of speculative home-buying raises the price of homes for everyone, and it makes things more expensive for everyone and less affordable for everyone.

These homes are being flipped for profit and that profit is getting added to the value of the house, and

the next owner has to pay for it and the next owner and the next owner, and you're seeing these skyrocketing home prices.

By putting a law in place to prevent house flipping and speculation, it will ultimately make all homes more affordable.

Mr. Guenter: I wonder if the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) could talk about whether or not his bill differentiates between individuals who may be looking to make an unsolicited offer on a home or— and firms or these businesses that go about and make it their business to make unsolicited offers. Wondering if he could perhaps talk a little bit more about that.

Mr. Wasyliv: The issue here is the sort of predatory business practice, and it doesn't matter whether it's an individual or a corporation that's doing it. And the harm that this bill is trying to prevent is that, and it doesn't make a difference between whether it's a corporation doing it or whether it's an individual.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I rise today to maybe put—not maybe, but actually put words on the record on owning a home in Manitoba and what our government is doing to be able to support homeowners in Manitoba. And we know that investing in families and neighbourhoods, we are helping Manitobans raise a healthy family in safe communities.

For seven and a half years, the failed PC government raised costs for Manitoba families, limiting their economic freedom. With our new approach, we're building more housing and supporting Manitoba's freedom to afford a home.

Our NDP government is putting in the work to make life more affordable for Manitobans. One of the ways that we are doing that is by bringing in the \$1,500 homeowners affordably—affordability tax credit to help Manitoba homeowners save money.

Our new tax credit is removing the regressive tax scheme that the failed PC government put into place, which saw millions of dollars benefit out-of-province billionaires. By limiting this scheme, 84 per cent of Manitoba homeowners will have lower costs, providing more relief for them after years of rising costs under the Stefanson government.

This tax credit will help Manitobans save money on their mortgage payments. This tax credit will also—

The Speaker: Order, please. I'd ask the member to please make his comments relevant to the bill that's before us.

Mr. Simard: Thank you very much for that reminder, Honourable Speaker.

And when we talk about owning a home, of course, we're talking about new owners wanting to get into the market, and what does that mean in terms of their relationship with buyers, sellers and that, all of those different types of interactions. And, of course, buying a home and owning a home is relevant to the real estate market here.

And we made significant investments into social and affordable housing. By lessening the need for people to get into homes, we know that we are making a difference in our communities. And I think that's what the spirit of this bill is also touching upon.

And we were—we had a population in Manitoba left to their own devices and what it meant of their housing stock and allowed the speculativeness to get out of control. With our new approach, we're getting more Manitobans into housing so they can call it home.

One year into being the government Manitobans voted for, we've supported over 1,200 Manitobans with housing, including 77 individuals who needed safe and appropriate housing to be discharged from hospital so they can receive appropriate follow-up care to live in a space that met their health and accessibility needs.

More than 120 survivors of gender-based violence who needed a safe place to call home were connected to Manitoba Housing. And, of course, keeping the speculators out of the market could contribute to more stock being available.

We had 725 people experiencing homelessness or precarious housing connected to Manitoba Housing. More than 120 people receive support from Housing First teams, which help people access housing and supports to ensure they can maintain their housing over the long term.

More than 30 seniors had been residing in an emergency shelter and nearly 130 people who were connected with housing across Manitoba, in Dauphin, Brandon, Portage la Prairie and Winnipeg from new initiatives launched last winter.

We are supporting housing. We are supporting people who are looking to get into homes. We're launching housing projects in Dauphin and Winnipeg and will continue to support them. Our team is making investments to repair and upgrade existing housing stock rather than selling it like the PCs did.

So, when we continue to work, talking about the real estate market is very new—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would remind the minister to please keep his comments relevant to the bill and maybe not make so many political statements about things that his government is doing. *[interjection]*

Order, please.

Mr. Simard: Well, and obviously, when we're talking about any bill on real estate, we have to talk about what's happening in this province. And maybe they want us to continue to go off of our record and the investments that we have been making in real estate in this province. So we know that when we create an environment where people can actually own homes, these types of practices start to go away.

Alors, je vais continuer en français. Notre gouvernement néo-démocrate a effectué des investissements significatifs dans le logement social et abordable. En investissant dans les familles et quartiers, nous aidons le plus grand nombre de Manitobains à élever une famille en santé dans des communautés plus sûres.

Pendant sept ans et demi, les communautés ont été laissées à elles-mêmes tandis que le gouvernement PC défaillant a vendu le parc de logements sociaux.

* (10:30)

Avec notre nouvelle approche, nous aidons un plus grand nombre de Manitobains à accéder à des logements qu'ils peuvent appeler chez eux. Un an après être devenu le gouvernement pour lequel les Manitobains ont voté, nous avons soutenu plus de 1 200 Manitobains avec un logement.

Translation

I will continue in French. Our NDP government has made significant investments in social and affordable housing. By investing in families and neighbourhoods, we are helping more Manitobans raise healthy families in safer communities.

For seven and a half years, communities were left to fend for themselves while the failing PC government sold off the social housing stock.

With our new approach, we are helping more Manitobans access housing they can call home. One year after becoming the government Manitobans voted for, we have supported more than 1,200 Manitobans with housing.

English

Manitobans, no matter where they live how much they make, deserve a freedom to have a safe place to live. Fulfilling this commitment means we need to support affordable housing for women, children and 2SLGBTQIA+, and that means supporting homeowners to have the ability to sell their homes in a fair market.

We've invested in supports for Manitobans vulnerable to gender-based violence, including women, children and 2SLGBTQ+ people so they can have a safe place to call home.

I just wanted to conclude my remarks by thanking the member from Fort Garry for bringing bills forward so that we can have an active discussion on homeownership here in the province.

J'aimerais aussi remercier mes collègues pour être attentifs en français ainsi que l'anglais, et on devrait pas se sentir moins pour avoir parlé dans notre langue maternelle.

Translation

I would also like to thank my colleagues for paying just as much attention to the French spoken here as they do to English. We should not feel lesser for having spoken in our mother tongue.

English

And although it is a private member's bill, I think I would caution the members opposite for making me choose which language I use, because I—my understanding that in this Chamber, French and English are both accepted.

Merci.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): It's good to be here this morning and to have the opportunity to put a few words on Bill 210, The Homeowner Protection from Unsolicited Purchase Offers Act.

And I—as I said in the question and answer period, I thank the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) for bringing this piece of legislation forward, and I am

happy that he is continuing to be in this Chamber and be an active participant in the legislative process here.

And I think he's a member who has a lot to say, and so, I, again, thank him for his contribution for the— to the debate this morning, and, in particular, for his legislation on this issue, which, I have to be honest, I haven't heard a lot about in my area. But that doesn't mean that, perhaps, that it isn't taking place, and I think it's something worth talking about, so I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on Bill 210 this morning.

As the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) stated, the bill allows homeowners to issue written notice to anyone making unsolicited offers, requesting that such offers cease. I think that's perhaps a positive aspect of the bill. There's got to be some protection for homeowners who just simply want to be free of harassment, continual harassment, by firms or corporations or those making unsolicited offers.

I think perhaps a sticking point is the requirement of realtor representation that homeowners—the bill requires that homeowners must be represented by a realtor when selling their property in response to an unsolicited offer. I understand the intent, which seems—which is certainly valid, is that you don't want to overburden sellers, and so the purchaser is made responsible for reimbursing realtors fees, and, of course, realtors fees can be very substantial.

And so I think typically they're 3 and a half to 4 and a half per cent in Manitoba and on a—you can do the math on a \$200,000 home or \$250,000 home. Now, you know that's \$10,000 plus GST, so that is a substantial amount that the purchaser is responsible for.

And the bill also mandates that purchasers provide a disclosure statement to homeowners, detailing the assessed value of the home and the homeowners' rights, which, again, I think is a fair intention of the bill. And it includes the right to cancel the sale within 30 days after the agreement is signed.

And we, of course, know that this piece of legislation comes at a time when the real estate market in— across Canada, when housing is in short supply, and home values are quite inflated; I won't pretend I'm an expert on whether, you know, there is a housing bubble in Manitoba or in Canada, but we know that there's significant demand for homes.

And I know in my area, as well, there's been so much growth, and there are hundreds of people that are—have applied for permits in particular commu-

nities. I won't name them, but there is significant demand to build homes and significant demand for housing in this country and in this province.

And so, of course, you know, that has resulted in perhaps some less scrupulous folks taking advantage of the vulnerable, whether they're always approaching exclusively the vulnerable, I can't say, but it would be, you know, our seniors and those perhaps who are hard up for cash, in a—or in a tough moment, or maybe they're not in the right headspace, and, you know, a smooth-talking solicitor comes to them and makes an offer and tries to effectively swindle them out of their home. You know, that's a practice that is disturbing and should not be happening.

And so, as the member for Fort Garry said, there's a—the principle of buyer beware in Manitoba, but there historically haven't been many protections for sellers. So I just think, though, that there's a couple of—again, I touched on the what I termed, you know, the possibly—the sticking point in this bill which is the requirement for realtor representation.

And the reason I think that, you know, there may be some unintended—I did ask the member during question and answer whether the bill differentiates between individuals and, you know, firms or corporations, because I think there may be some unintended consequences and I can think of, you know, speaking from experience, that, you know, there are situations where someone within your family may make what I guess would be defined as an unsolicited offer. I think the term is fairly clear.

I didn't see a definition for it; it may be in the bill, but I didn't have an opportunity to ask the member to perhaps define that more clear and explicitly.

But there may be unintended consequences when you have a family member or someone within your friend circle or a neighbour or someone you know from work, and you get together, and I've, you know, heard of this happening and—where someone that you know, and they're not out to harass you necessarily, they're not part of a firm that is—they don't make a living off of exploiting seniors and vulnerable people, but they make an unsolicited offer, and this bill would require, then, that they have a—that they follow all the legal proceedings that this piece of legislation sets out, including realtor representation, which is, I pointed out earlier, can be very expensive, incredibly expensive.

So, you know, you pay that along with the land transfer tax and everything else. Homeownership is

very expensive, so I just think that that is perhaps an area that could be explored further and could be addressed.

Again, as with many things, and I said this last week in debate as well, and, you know, it's in our nature as legislators to bring forward legislation and to want to pass legislation. My own philosophy as a legislator is I take from the former US President Calvin Coolidge, who wrote to his father and said that it is better to kill a bad bill than to pass a good one.

And so, my philosophy is that, you know, rather than constantly passing legislation and enabling regulators to grow that body of regulations that bears down on Manitoba businesses and individuals and families, taxpayers, that I take a minimalist approach in, and I believe in rolling legislation back.

* (10:40)

So, when I read a bill like this—which, again, I think is well intended and speaks to a problem that I think the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) very clearly laid out that is happening in the province, I just—I'm concerned about the unintended consequences on private sales, on private trades between friends, between family members, between individuals that know each other from work or live in the same neighbourhood, and they want to make a trade or—and they both agree to it. And, whether it's fair, it's up to them to determine that.

So I think that that, again, as I said, the devil is in the details. I think that that's something—an area of concern for myself. And the minister across the way in question period asked, as well, about what does enforcement look like. You know, how—what mechanisms are in place. And I think that that is something, as well, that I think could be afforded further discussion.

So, with that, I just want to say I thank the member for Fort Garry. Homeownership is a dream that many Canadians, many Manitobans aspire to. I think it's something that we should, as government, do everything we can to create an environment where young families can own homes.

You know, and I think that that's important, that ownership of private property, owning your own home is so important and does so much to increase one's confidence.

So with that, thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to

the private member's Bill 210, brought forward by the member for Fort Garry this morning.

As a business owner, this is something that I feel passionate about speaking on this morning. With homeownership being harder and harder to achieve by young people specifically and by all Manitobans day after day, creating a stronger and stronger market by the trade and cost of inflation, the situation with the economy that we're in today, with steep rises in inflation has brought us to the point of such competition in the market, that we're seeing all sorts of different unique approaches to home trading.

And that's what I assume has spurred on this bill today by the member for Fort Garry, seeing that unsolicited deals and individuals approaching homeowners to purchase their properties, their homes, sometimes for less than market value, taking advantage of the vulnerability of many homeowners that we have in the market.

The concern is, from my standpoint, representing a constituent of—constituency of rapid growth, having those same challenges as the rest of populated Manitoba where homeownership is further and further out of reach, my concern is adding another level of government oversight into the free market is a slippery slope that I'm greatly concerned about.

This now forces the involvement of a realtor, a real estate agency in the purchase of property which is at a higher demand than there is supply. At what point do you allow the private market to dictate and control where the market lies?

In my opinion, there is very little opportunity for anyone to take advantage of a homeowner in today's market. If we were in a complete housing collapse and people were desperate of liquidating homes, I think that it would be a place where potentially, not that I would support it even at that point, but potentially then there being a place for government involvement. When people out of desperation to liquidate an asset are being taken advantage of their vulnerability, I could see some purpose.

In today's housing market, the demand is strong. It far 'outpace'—it far outpaces and exceeds the supply in the marketplace. Therefore, I think we need to give the onus onto the homeowner to allow for their own responsibility in the decisions that they make with their asset. And adding another level of government oversight and another expense onto whether it be the purchaser or the homeowner, you know, when you add an extra cost into a layer of the marketplace, it

gets passed on. So now, you know, exactly what we're trying to avoid in the intent of this bill.

And I appreciate the member bringing it forward with good intentions of protecting homeowners and those vulnerable in the marketplace. I think it may do the exact opposite. We're looking for housing affordability for all Manitobans, and this further adds to inflation.

So inflation is driven by external factors and external costs being brought onto the market. This would be no different. There are homeowners who may decide to build a relationship with someone who is willing to ease their transaction by making a cash offer.

I know that when we look in our backyards, when we look down our streets, many of the homes that we see are family homes that will go on to raise another family and provide the shelter and security for another generation and another family.

But the marketplace is complex, so there are houses in communities that are needing to be re-established and redeveloped. There are homes that currently are homes for individuals that are in a poor state of condition, and these homes are most suitable for an investor that's looking at revitalizing that neighbourhood. We have a number of neighbourhoods in the city of Winnipeg and other cities and communities, whether those are large cities or small towns, which need revitalization.

The owners—I've had first-hand experience where the owners of this—these homes are frustrated with a sale that could be dragged on for months because of the advice of a realtor who is looking at all the safeguards in place for the purchaser.

And some of these examples are things in rural communities like water sampling of a well and foundation inspections and general condition home inspection, ventilation system certificates. And these potentially are homes that will be repurposed. These are communities that need revitalizations, and potentially they are an investment for a change of purpose in those neighbourhoods.

* (10:50)

I'm looking at both sides of this scenario, that we may have homeowners that now will be limited in their ability of sale and that process can now become convoluted. They own the property, they want to make a quick, easy sale, get out of that property. They know that the property is in poor condition and a cash

offer for a potential repurpose is what they're looking at.

This type of easy flow in the marketplace allows for the free market to dictate what is done. Without setting up more roadblocks and barricades, it'll allow for the investor to purchase these properties, to make the investments quicker and simpler into rebuilding those communities.

Not saying that that is the intent of this bill. I'm fully convinced that the member brought this bill forward with good intention, seeing a developed, prosperous neighbourhood and community having members who are uncomfortable by the unsolicited offers from potential investors or people who are looking at this with ill intent.

But I would just like to say that, you know, we—myself, specifically, the communities that I represent—promote free enterprise and freedom within the marketplace to buy and sell assets how we see best fit for our personal positions.

Thank you.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Once again, I want to thank the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) for bringing this bill forward to protect the vulnerable, the uneducated, on what maybe land values and properties can be.

I know there certainly is stuff going on that the member had mentioned that may seem maybe a little bit unethical as far as soliciting goes, and we certainly don't want to see our seniors taken advantage of or—that are, you know, enjoying their last years of their home, maybe not aware of what it's worth, maybe don't have family or legal representation to give them the proper advice.

So I certainly understand the intent of the member's bill that he's brought forward here, and I can appreciate the reasons for it, for sure.

You know, I think back—out in the rural areas where we are, we quite often have the neighbour or the neighbouring farmer come by and offer to purchase a piece of property or some farmland. And, you know, most of those deals are made neighbour to neighbour with a lot of trust and, you know, knowing and being very well educated as rural people of what farmland may be worth or what farm acreages, small acreages in the country, worth—are worth.

And we see that growing in the last short number of years, the values of these properties and, you know, the growing and growing. And there's certainly people

that are out there wanting to take advantage of that. And most of us want to see the homeowner be the one that takes the advantage of that, or the landowner.

So, you know, we're a little—that would be my only concern with this bill is, you know, our neighbouring people working together to do these transactions on their own without the involvement of any real estate broker or, I'll speak from my own experience, you know, on the—

The Speaker: Order, please.

In accordance with rule 25 and as previously announced, I am interrupting debate to put the question on the honourable member for Fort Garry's selected bill.

The question before the House, then, is second reading of Bill 210, The Homeowner Protection from Unsolicited Purchase Offers Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Speaker: All those in favour, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Speaker: The Nays have it.

Therefore, the motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Can you canvass the House to see if we can call it 11.

The Speaker: Is there leave to call it 11 o'clock? [Agreed]

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 23—Calling on the Provincial Government to Cancel the Gas Tax Holiday Extension and Bring in Real Solutions for Cost-of-Living Crisis

The Speaker: The hour now being 11 o'clock, it's time for second reading of selected bill—my mistake. Got to turn the page over every now and again. Private member's resolution now is resolution 23, Calling on

the Provincial Government to Cancel the Gas Tax Holiday Extension and Bring in Real Solutions for Cost-of-Living Crisis, brought forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I move,

WHEREAS Manitobans are facing a cost-of-living crisis with record increases in grocery store prices and rental housing increases; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government cutting the gas tax has caused a loss of revenue of \$340 million dollars, being money that was borrowed and added to the provincial debt and deficit that will cost tens of millions of dollars in interest to repay; and

WHEREAS only 43% of the gas tax goes to families while the other 57% goes to corporations and businesses; and

WHEREAS those who need the help the least get the most benefit as many Manitobans cannot afford to drive and see no benefit from this gas tax holiday at all; and

WHEREAS the average driver will see a savings of \$15 a month from the gas tax holiday, an amount of money that could pull 30% of Manitoba residents out of poverty; and

WHEREAS the revenue from the gas tax could pay for free transit for everyone in Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson and Selkirk; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government cannot say if rising gas prices are the result of retailers boosting profits during the gas tax holiday as it has failed to monitor gas prices in any real way; and

WHEREAS grocery prices have remained at an all time high despite the Premier's claim that grocery prices would come down as a result of the gas tax holiday; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government should focus on real concerns such as Manitoba school children having classes in hallways because there are not enough schools in the province; and

WHEREAS 25,000 Manitoba civil servants have voted to go on strike because the Provincial Government will not bargain a fair deal with workers; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has done little to address the current climate crisis and transition away from a fossil fuel economy as its approach to the environment is no different than the previous government.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately cancel the gas tax holiday and redirect the money for real cost-of-living solutions for Manitoba.

The Speaker: So before I proceed, I just need to request the House for leave to enter the resolution as printed.

Is there leave? [*Agreed*]

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Provincial Government to immediately cancel the gas tax holiday and redirect that money for real cost-of-living solutions for Manitobans.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wasyliv: Manitoba's in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. The biggest drivers of the crisis with the biggest impacts on Manitobans is the cost of housing and the cost of groceries. Latest Canada food price report: the overall rate of food inflation in Manitoba year over year is 5.7 per cent. Manitobans didn't get a 5.7 per cent cost-of-living increase in the past year.

Food bank use has skyrocketed in Manitoba. People are spending less on groceries than years past and they're paying more. They can only afford to buy less food for their families. At the same time, grocery store chains are seeing record profits.

When we look at the government's response, it's been absence; missing in action. There is no policy in the past year to address affordability of groceries. In fact, the Premier (Mr. Kinew), the only policy he's pointed to was the gas tax holiday, who he promised would lower grocery prices and we know that certainly didn't happen.

Now in relation to rent, Manitoba has the second fastest growing rent in the country and, of course, that seems like a shocking statistic because we have rent control here in Manitoba, but we know that there's a very large loophole in our laws and that's, of course, the above guideline rent increases where a landlord can do some minor cosmetic renovations and apply for above guideline rent increases.

In opposition, it was discovered 100 per cent of these applications were being approved. The average rent increase was between about 9 per cent above guidelines, some as high as 126 per cent in a year. Large landlords are able to get around rent control guidelines by this loophole, and long-term tenants

have been forced to move out of their homes, a process known as 'renovictions.' Now, this isn't a small problem; 40 per cent of Manitobans rent, and in Fort Garry that number is high as 50 per cent.

So, again, has there been a response from this government? No, there hasn't. In fact, in opposition, they drafted a bill that would've closed that 'renoviction' loophole.

* (11:00)

Now, the government does have a house—a bill before the House. It was tabled on May 23. It's had first reading. It has not been a selected bill and it has not been called for second reading. It is most likely, given the six days or so that we have left, will die on the Order Paper. And I wonder out loud if that bill is going to come back.

So the government has a solution in place but is refusing to actually bring it forward. And the question, of course, is why. So we have a affordable housing crisis in Manitoba. We've seen a massive influx of newcomers in Manitoba, including 30,000 Ukrainians and over and above the 15 or 20 thousand newcomers that come to Manitoba each and every year.

We've seen large increases in temporary foreign workers, in international students, and I welcome them all—our province is a province built on immigration and we need more—but that being said, there needs to be a response from the government to establish housing so that those that come here have some place to live.

And, of course, it's an affordability housing crisis, meaning that even the housing that we do have costs Manitobans more than 30 per cent of their income in a month.

Speaking with constituents, I had a number of young couples that I met that were renting, that wanted to start families, that wanted to buy a home, and they just simply couldn't afford the down payment.

Block over, I would speak to a senior who is a widow living alone in a large single-family house. It's paid off and they don't need a house that big; they don't want a house that big. But they cannot afford a rental property in the area that would be less than the current cost of them living in a house.

So we have that house that that young couple could move into, but can't because we have nowhere for that senior to transition into affordable housing.

So, again, what's been this government's response? There hasn't been. So there's no co-op housing strategy for young families or seniors. There's no emphasis to build non-market housing, and, of course, the government cut Rent Assist program. And when it was shamed into putting more money into it, a meagre \$1.2 million were added in with no commitment to add more once that expires.

And, of course, we've seen this government privatize affordable housing with a real estate investment trust handed over to the corporate business community.

We're talking about a tax shelter and a investment vehicle for \$10 million which the Province will not recover any of that money, going to private for-profit businesses in order to make money, instead of going to Manitobans to actually provide, you know, affordable rents.

And, of course, that brings us to the gas tax holiday. This is the magic bullet that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) uses for all things affordable in Manitoba. It is going to cost Manitobans \$340 million of borrowed money, money that they don't have, money that's going to cost tens of millions of dollars in interest to repay.

And it doesn't help the majority of Manitobans; doesn't help Manitobans who don't drive. The vast majority of that money, \$109 million, will go to businesses and corporations, with very little going to Manitobans.

So we see that this is basically another form of corporate welfare. It's a tax cut that goes to wealthy Manitobans. And the average Manitoban who will benefit from it will receive \$15 per month in savings, which, you know, isn't nothing, but considering what that money could do and how many affordable units or how we could make life more affordable through subsidized child-care spaces and other alternatives, we can see that it's a lost opportunity.

The other issue with the gas tax holiday is it's not being monitored. So we don't actually know if savings are being passed on to Manitobans. Over the past year, the price of gas has skyrocketed; it's bounced around. We don't know if all 14 cents is actually getting to Manitobans or if they're only getting two or three cents of tax savings and the rest are being fed into gas company profits.

This government didn't do anything to monitor it, and we don't know whether or not Manitobans are

actually reaping any kind of benefit. So what could we pay for this money?

Well, we have a shortage of child-care spaces, and we've seen communities crowd-fund to open up new spots which means that only wealthy communities that have the resources to fundraise will actually get child care. Low-income communities can't do that and they simply go without, and this is money that could create thousands of new spots.

Honourable Speaker, \$340 million could build eight new public schools. We wouldn't have to have children going to school in a hallway; \$340 million could pay for free transit for everyone in Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson and Selkirk for multiple years. That helps everyone in those cities, not a handful of large SUV drivers.

And, of course, bus passes in Winnipeg cost about \$1,200 a year. That would make a real difference in people's lives. You know, instead of saving \$150 on gas, you'd actually save \$1,200 in transit fees. That is a huge difference to Manitoba.

And, of course, despite the gas tax holiday, transit has been going up and up every single year, including this year as well. And so we can help a few people who are already very wealthy with the tax gas holiday or we can help everybody by using that money and making real investments in Manitobans.

The other side of a cost-of-living crisis, of course, that the Premier doesn't want to talk about and will not mention it, is a living wage. You can combat the cost-of-living crisis if wages are on the rise.

And, of course, this Premier doesn't support a living wage. He's adopted many of the policies of the previous government, and no Manitoban—I think he used to say, I don't think he says it anymore—no Manitoban should work a full-time job and live in poverty.

Now, so things have changed very much over there—171,000 Manitobans earn less than a living wage, and they're disproportionately women and disproportionately newcomers; about 40 per cent of them have young children at home, many who can't work full-time because we don't have the child-care spaces for them to go.

Paying a living wage to 171,000 Manitobans would do more to eliminate child poverty than any and all of the gas tax holiday strategies combined.

So, Manitobans voted for change. They're done with austerity, they're done with government picking

fighters with Manitoba workers, they want public services that will be there for their families, they want an economy that works for all Manitobans and it's fair to all Manitobans, not just the very wealthy.

And they want one Manitoba. Instead they got this, they got the third term of the Pallister government. But it's not too late. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) can drop the empty, performative politics, he can roll up his sleeves and start to work for all Manitobans, you know, like one Manitoba.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before I start the question period, I'll just remind all members that we will recess at 11:56 due to moving up the 11 o'clock hour.

Questions

The Speaker: So, a question period now of up to 10 minutes will be held, and questions may be addressed in the following sequence: first question may be asked by a member from another party; any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): I want to thank the member for bringing this resolution forward.

What permanent measures should be implemented to assure affordability for all Manitobans?

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Well, there's a number of things we can do. We need to invest in non-market housing. We have to stop treating housing as a financial asset and treat it as a human right, and that means building homes for people where less than 30 per cent of their income actually goes to either rent or a mortgage. And other countries are able to do that. That would be a huge benefit to Manitobans.

And, of course, the other big benefit would be to do what we do with milk prices in Manitoba, by regulating other staples in this cost-of-living crisis. Milk has remained affordable where everything else hasn't.

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): My question for the member is: Can he explain how Manitoba's low inflation, thanks to the fuel tax holiday, is something he doesn't support?

Mr. Wasyliw: The question's disingenuous, because, of course, when you measure inflation, it is a list of

basket of goods, and if you change one of the items on the list, it'll affect that.

* (11:10)

But if you go outside of this bubble into the streets of Winnipeg and you ask people, since the gas tax holiday come in, are you feeling flush, are you feeling like you're doing well? They're going to tell you no, and they'd be insulted by that question from the member opposite because it just shows a lack of being aware and out of touch. And this government's only been in power for a year, and to be that unaware of what Manitobans is facing is truly troubling.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, thank you for the opportunity. Thank you very much to the member from Fort Garry.

One of the questions I have for you—or one of the questions I have is, how much infrastructure do you believe has been affected by this lack of gas tax money that we've had here? I know in my municipality, we've been affected tremendously by roads not being repaired. Could you help me with that, please?

Mr. Wasyliw: Yes, that's a really excellent question because there's actually a direct relationship between the cuts for infrastructure and the gas tax holiday. It's over \$250 million that have been cut from the Infrastructure budget, while the gas tax holiday is \$340 million. So you could not only cover off all that infrastructure, you could even add more. And the whole point of a gas tax is a user pay; if you use the roads, you're going to wear down the roads, you got to pay to fix the roads, so you got to pay your fair share.

MLA Loiselle: My question for the member is: When was the last time he paid nearly \$2 per litre for gas?

Mr. Wasyliw: The issue for Manitobans is being able to afford groceries. The issue for Manitobans is being able to pay their rent.

And, you know, sure, \$15 a month can help some Manitobans, but for the vast majority of Manitobans, it does nothing.

And government is about choices, budgets are about choices, and it says, what does this government value? Well, what this government values is 57 per cent, \$190 million, of the gas tax holiday going to businesses and corporations. That's what it's telling Manitobans.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Can the member tell us more about how this tax break has cost other services across our province?

Mr. Wasyliw: Again, another excellent question.

Of course, if we are giving up \$340 million of revenue, it means that we don't have money for other services. And we talked a little bit about it. We're not spending on infrastructure. We're talking about child-care sector: we're not opening up new spaces because we don't have the money to do so. And, of course, when it comes to housing, we're not investing in social housing.

And by the lack of investing in these items, it ends up costing us more. Oftentimes, people who are in vulnerable living situations will use the justice system, the child-welfare system, the health-care system more, so there's a knock-on effect by not investing in Manitobans that ends up costing us more—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

MLA Loiselle: My question for the member is: Does he think having gas prices close to \$2 per litre, like they were under the PCs, sustainable for an average Manitoba family budget?

Mr. Wasyliw: So \$340 million is a shockingly big budget amount, and you wouldn't even need to use all of it. You could have free transit for every Winnipegger, every Brandonite, every person who lives in Selkirk or in Thompson for multiple years for that kind of money.

So transportation is a right. People have a right to be able to move within our society. It is efficient and it helps the economy, but giving them a coupon on gas doesn't do any of those things.

So, it's about choices, it's about putting the money where it would actually help Manitobans, not buying press releases for a one-off news story.

Mr. Perchotte: Once again to the member bringing this forward, thank you very much.

Now, we've just seen in the BITSA bill that in there was legislation hidden in that bill to allow the government to raise fuel tax without any debate or any discussion from public. Why is that?

Mr. Wasyliw: I don't think he's going to like the answer. It's because the opposition was playing procedural games. If they hadn't done that, everybody knows, if they hadn't done that, it would have gone to a hearing and there would have been representations and like that.

And in fairness, both sides have been doing that for years, and that's just the culture of this place.

But we're missing the point here and the point is, are we giving Manitobans the help that they need and are we helping all Manitobans? And the answer, unfortunately, is a resounding no.

MLA Loiselle: My question for the member is, what, in his opinion, has been more effective in lowering Manitoba's costs than saving 14 cents a litre at the pump?

Mr. Wasyliw: So I think the substance of my debate is that this government has been very ineffective in lowering the costs of Manitoba, and it's probably been one of the biggest failures of this government in the past year.

The one policy that's been in place, which we could expand, which they have—can't even take credit for is the cap on milk prices. While other groceries have been skyrocketing, because we regulate the price of milk in Manitoba, that has not been affected by inflation, and Manitoba families have been able to get inexpensive milk here.

That can be expanded to a whole host of staples, and we're just not doing that here, and there's no urgency from this government.

MLA Bereza: Again, question to the member from Fort Garry.

Crime seems to have risen dramatically since we've seen this increase—or the gas tax here. How much money do you feel—or have you looked at what kind of money has been affected by people that are robbing grocery stores, us having to pay for more officers on the street and that, since the gas tax bill has been introduced?

Thank you.

Mr. Wasyliw: Well, you know, I am critical of this government of its cost-of-living policies. I wouldn't link the gas tax to the crime rate. I think that would be unfair.

But the larger issue I think is this, and it just shows that if we don't make the cost of living a priority for Manitoba, there are knock-on events, where people are having trouble affording groceries and that leads to these petty crimes and nuisances. And then it affects small businesses and they shut down, and that the larger effect on our community and it's—obviously nobody wants to see it go that way.

So the gas tax holiday was never a solution. It was never designed to fix any of these things and it hasn't fixed any thing. Has it made things worse? Well—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

MLA Loiselle: My question for the member is, does he think small businesses should pay more in fuel taxes like they did under the PCs' watch, when the gas prices were close to \$2 per litre?

Mr. Wasyliw: So one of the principles of taxation—fair taxation is the user-pay principle. If you're going to use a polluting item, then you should pay for the costs of it. If you're using the roads, if you're going to pay for the wear and tear, you need to pay for it.

Well, how we do that is through a gas tax, so you're responsible for repairs to that roadway, and it also provides an economic incentive to cut down and become more efficient in your business operation so you're not paying that tax. So the reverse is true: if you—gas is cheaper, then you're going to drive more, which the only person I know who would be happy about that is our Environment Minister.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): So yes, we know life has been getting more and more expensive for Manitobans, and we know the pressures that that puts on families. And so I want to thank the member for bringing this forward because it gives us an opportunity to talk about some of the affordability measures that we've brought forward, including the gas tax holiday.

So, you know, when we showed up at people's doors in the last election, we really made a promise to ease that burden that was felt under this former PC government for seven and a half years, and we followed through.

And this is an important point to be made here because this was an election promise, and something I heard over and over again at the door is that folks just wanted a government that they could trust: they'd say they were going to do something, and then they'd do it. And that's what we did with this gas tax holiday.

* (11:20)

So, today, as I said, I'm here to talk a little bit more about how this has been a good affordability measure for Manitobans and why we did it. And we did it because we know how tough it's been for families here in the province, and we want to take some concrete action.

And, you know, I also—I do have to say that it's been borderline, sort of, entertaining to see the opposition as the member from Fort Garry answers these questions.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

They can't decide whether they want us to cut taxes, raise taxes; we're back and forth. I don't know really what they believe in anymore as a party; we don't know where they're at.

There have been a lot of people in this province who've said how great this affordability measure has been and how much they appreciate the tax being cut. And so, when we hear back from the PCs who have talked a big game over the years about how they like to get rid of taxes for people, saying that they want a tax brought back on people, I'm a little bit confused, but I digress and I'll move on from the point.

But it was just—it felt a little bit strange getting heckled about having a tax reduced from the PCs here. So, listen, I'm not going to suggest either that this one affordability measure, though it's been a real success here in the province, is going to solve everything, right? So it is one step that we've taken to make a real difference in day-to-day life for Manitobans, for the average Manitoban driving their children to school or to the rink, get groceries, whatever the case may be.

And, you know, for seven and a half years, as I mentioned, we saw prices rise and we saw no affordability measures that were really substantive brought forward by the PCs, you know, and ultimately, what I would say is, you know, every dollar that we save as Manitobans makes such a big difference. And that's especially for those that rely on their vehicles even more, like folks who live in rural Manitoba, for example.

It's really important to a lot of them, and they've actually voiced that to us. Over and over again, we have heard that with the amount of driving that people do, you know, either in Steinbach or Winkler, all over this great province, they're really saving that money and they're feeling it.

You know, and it wasn't just a short-term fix. We brought this in; we just extended it as well and people have been giving us a lot of great feedback in that regard. And we know, also, as this holiday season comes up, people are going to be driving around the province. They're going to be going to visit folks all over the place and they're going to be saving money every time that they do that.

And, you know, it kind of reminds me of a story. So, from last summer, when I was canvassing before the election, I met this guy. I'll call him—we'll call him Steve for this story. Real salt-of-the-earth sort of guy, has a little boy at home about the same age as my middle guy, and we were talking about a whole range of issues, and actually, he was—he sort of identified more as a past PC voter; he supported the PCs.

And so we chatted about health care and education. We talked about the Vic ER, which is really important to a lot of people in our constituency in Waverley, and how it was closed under the PCs, and how disappointed he was that he had voted for somebody who went in and closed the ER that he was used to going to. He lived there in that neighbourhood his whole life.

And, you know, we talked a little bit more about education and how all these cuts had been made. And they said—he's got a few friends who are teachers, and they actually told him, you know, the inability to sort of plan budgets for the administration made things so difficult because they'd be cut one year, then they would get a little bit extra funding, they'd be cut again. And it just made teaching our kids that much more difficult.

And he'd sort of told me the story of the sort of work that he was doing and how he was working so hard to try to get ahead and give his son a good life. And, you know, this guy lived in an apartment, but he did a lot of driving, actually, for work.

So we ended up—we had this conversation. He was talking about how he was trying to save up for a vacation for him and his son, even something small. And this past summer, I was back around canvassing again, getting out, listening to people in the community, and I bumped into Steve again, and we had a great conversation.

And, I mean (a) he talked about how much he appreciated everything our Premier's (Mr. Kinew) been doing and how excited he was; (b) he told me, for the first time in his life, he voted for the NDP; he gave me a vote. So I was really proud of that, and I think that it came back to the conversation that we had, the personal one-on-one conversation that was really meaningful. But then also what we promised to do in government.

And guess what? We delivered on the things that we promised to do, and he said that to me, said, you know, you talked about that gas tax, and the holiday you were going to give. I drive a ton for work, he

reiterated, and I've been saving a ton of money. And guess what, David? Sorry—member for Waverley. He would've used my name, but for the sake of this story in this Chamber, I'll say he said member for Waverley. I've been able to save enough for me and my son to get out to a hotel, and although it's not much, he's going to get to a hotel for two nights with his son with a waterslide, and he was so excited about that.

And he pointed directly to some of the cost-saving initiatives we've been taking, specifically the gas tax holiday. And that was honestly, it was one of those really great moments where I saw that government can make big decisions, follow through on promises and make meaningful changes for Manitobans. And, you know, those Manitobans, they are from all across this province, and, particularly, we've heard from people up north, too, who do that extra driving, who need that extra help and they've been very much appreciative.

So, as I said, I—you know, and I want to be totally upfront. We've been talking a lot about all of the great things that our government has been trying to get done, that followed through on, and we know that there's more to do. You know, we've hired 873 new health-care workers, net new, which is incredible, but there's more work to be done and we're doing that hard work. You know, we've stabilized funding for the education system, created the universal nutrition program for kids. Very exciting work, but there's more to do.

And so when we talk about a gas tax holiday—incredibly exciting. It's worked really well, people are really appreciative, it's brought down inflation in our province; we actually have some of the lowest inflation numbers across Canada. But we also know that there's more to do, and we are doing that work. But we're also incredibly proud of what we've done so far, and we're proud of that because we've heard from Manitobans who are appreciating the work that we're doing.

So we're not going to stop here, as I'm saying. We're going to keep on working to make life more affordable, to lower costs, to ensure that, you know, every single Manitoban, from Waverley to Wolseley to Russell, is going to be saving money and feeling like their government is speaking for them.

So I do want to say just thank you to Manitobans for standing with us over this last year and for believing in the work we're doing, and for continuing to collaborate and work with us in such a productive way. You know, we'll keep on moving forward one step of a—at a time, and we are going to build a

stronger Manitoban—Manitoba. And this really again goes back to that constituent I was talking to, and I am genuinely just so proud to be able to represent the wonderful people of Waverley, and I promise to you all that I will continue to listen to what you have to say, to take in your suggestions and to bring them to the table in caucus and government. And we're going to keep on building a Manitoba that is stronger and has an even brighter future for everybody.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Very happy to rise today and speak on this information that's been brought forward.

This should really be just called the 'affordability'—affordability for Manitobans. Under the PC government, I watched over and over again as the previous Selinger government made things more difficult, and with changes by the PC government, I've seen paycheques go up for employees that work for me, paycheques rise without an increase in their wages.

* (11:30)

And those paycheques went up because the PC government took true affordability for all Manitobans very seriously. They looked at long-term, permanent changes—changes that happened to the basic deductions. They increased them from just under \$9,000—pardon me—just under \$10,000 to \$15,000, and that indexed with inflation.

So, if a person is at an organization that can't afford to give a raise, they would have got one automatically by the PC government, recognizing that their take-home pay matters, to make sure that when it comes to supporting their own families and enjoying life, that it matters how much money they take home.

But they didn't stop there. They made sure it indexed with inflation. So, as people were working their way through the pandemic and recovering as an organization and started bringing employees back to work, that they might not have had the funds to truly recognize the employees who deserved it. But the tax rates were indexing, so there was some more money there. And that allowed companies, such as the companies that I represented, the ability to bring more people to work, to invest in better equipment for the employees to have better training programs. So all affordability, long term, matters to everybody in Manitoba.

Now, the member from Waverley gave this really cute story on how somebody saved a few pennies per

litre and then they went out and they gave—they were able to go out and go on a holiday. That reminds me of the story where somebody traded a paper clip for a bicycle. I mean these stories are wonderful, but I've never met anybody who's actually done that.

I take a look at, when it comes to affordability, on what people can actually afford moving forward, permanently—something they can count on. It's not, oh, here's a few pennies today but we might take it away tomorrow, but no, no, you get to keep it a little longer and no, no, we might take it away; well, we'll talk about it again.

I mean give people something they can hold on to, something tangible, something they can expect. Something that we haven't seen from this government. We haven't seen real affordability. When I started getting involved in politics it was because the NDP government of the time was taking from the people of Manitoba. I watched as there was a mass exodus of trained people in the trades leaving our province, going for greener pastures, some of them in Alberta, some of them into the US. It made it difficult to hire people of skilled trades.

When you take a look at what's going to make our province strong, is making sure that people can afford to live here. That was an attraction at one time. People left Ontario, people left BC, heading for Manitoba because it was affordable.

And the seven and a half years of the PC government, I've seen sweeping changes in the amount of people that were applying in my organization. And I believe in the employees. It's the employees of the company that truly make the company. It's the recommendations I get afterwards from those customers that say, well, you had a great team.

Without affordability, those employees would not be at my organization. They would not be representing the company on a daily basis going forward and putting their best foot forward and representing the company with the utmost respect and best skills that they could show.

We've seen cuts to justice, child care, health, transportation. We've seen roads crumbling. In Selkirk, the bridge has waves on it. People drive across this narrow, skinny bridge and they strike mirrors almost daily. It's a running joke that this hasn't been addressed sooner.

So affordability, investing in peoples, investing in all those things. If you want to give 'affordability' measures at the pump, that's great, but you can't do it at the

sacrifice of the things that matter in our province. You can't take away child-care spaces. You can't take away nine new schools because you want to dangle a carrot out there for somebody. You want to show somebody that you can fulfill a promise while neglecting the importance of everything else for the province.

You take a look at what is the actual savings that people are getting. Well, that's very dependent on who you are. It depends on the number of miles you drive, the type of vehicle that you fuel up, it depends on your commuting ability, if you're picking people up, or if you're carpooling. It depends on if you have a licence or not, but also does nothing for people who use transit.

We have to look at affordability for every single person, but not just a short-term reward but a long-term goal. You have to let people know that Manitoba is a province to establish roots, to grow, that the government understands the importance of you staying here, the importance of you being educated here, the importance of you buying a home here, to make sure that things are affordable, that the roads and infrastructure are taken care of, that the schools you attend are profitable and not looking at huge deficits in their budget.

That private enterprise can thrive. That families have opportunities. And as the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) said, housing affordability is a tremendous issue. It's an issue in the area of Selkirk that I represent, it's an issue in Winnipeg; it's an issue all across this province.

Rent is quickly surpassing the amount that you would pay on a mortgage, which prevents people from saving for the down payment on a mortgage. The extenuating costs of once you get a home is incredible. I was very fortunate that my children grasped the value of hard work at a very young age, and they were able to save money. They worked very, very hard at a—in their teens, and as they approached adulthood, they had dreams and ambitions.

My daughter at 21 years old bought her first house. She's currently in it. It was a house that I was able to purchase, renovate and I put up for sale, and she said, I would like to buy that house. So we took it off the market and we sold it to her. I'm very proud of the work that I did in that house and I'm very proud of my daughter for having the foresight to see the importance of purchasing a home at a young age.

At 19 years old, my son bought his first house, but it wasn't for him to live in; it was for a rental

property. And we held the rent low; we want it to be affordable for people to come there.

When you have people in your community and they stay in your community, they do well. A couple years later, my son sold that house to me and he bought his first residence at 21 years old.

He has since sold that one and bought his second residence, a four-acre piece of property in the country, and he did that because of hard work, and he continually does that. So we really need to direct ourselves to focus on affordability for the long term. Not short-term gains, but long-term needs.

Thank you.

MLA Mike Moyes (Riel): Thank you to the member opposite for providing opportunity to speak about our gas tax holiday. The gas tax holiday was a very important measure, an affordability measure, a commitment that we campaigned on. A commitment, that I might add, that that member for Fort Garry was happy to campaign on, that that member was happy to benefit from.

* (11:40)

The gas tax holiday commitment of eliminating 14 cents per litre for all Manitobans was a concrete action that we could take to ensure Manitobans across our province have a little bit more money in their pocket.

It was during a time of high inflation, a time that, I remind the House, where inflation was hovering not very long ago at 6, 7, 8 per cent. So thank goodness Manitobans elected a government that's on their side.

The members on this side of the House recognize that governments can't do everything. Governments can't control every cost, they can't take on every burden.

However, governments can do some things. And when inflation is high and interest rates are spiking and costs are going up, these are the things that governments should be taking on, where governments can make a difference. Individuals are not able to control inflation. Individuals are not able to control the—all the costs impacting their families, and it is government that can do that.

And so our government responded. We responded by pulling one of the few levers that we had at our disposal to make life directly more affordable for Manitobans. We responded by addressing a cost that affects people trying to get to work. We responded by

addressing a cost that has a sizeable impact on people in rural areas and people in the North.

So what was the result of the gas tax holiday? Manitoba has had some of the lowest inflation, month after month after month, across the country. In fact, our inflation this past month, in September, is half of what the inflation is nationwide.

This lower inflation helps all Manitobans. This is especially after seven and a half years of PC inaction, seven and a half years where the PCs did not make an impact on helping everyday Manitobans.

Our approach is making it easier for Manitoba families. Our approach is helping them catch up, Honourable Deputy Speaker, and that's why Manitobans continue to save 14 cents a litre each time that they fill up at the pump 'til December 31. This is helping Manitoba families thrive and it's helping keep Manitoba an affordable place to live.

So given that, what are Manitobans saying about the gas tax holiday? Overwhelmingly, they support the gas tax holiday. In fact, a recent survey said 71 per cent support it. It's pretty rare to hear that level of support, and so I appreciate that Manitobans are on board with what we're doing, with making life more affordable.

Our approach is ensuring that every Manitoban can afford the things that they need for their families while costs are high. While interest rates are starting to come down, they're not quite at the level where everyday Manitobans can feel relief. And we're going to continue working for Manitobans and working for an affordable Manitoba each and every day.

Some of the other things that we've done: we brought in 21 different ways—new ways—for families to save in Budget 2024, and that includes a rebate on electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids. Owning an electric vehicle can help Manitobans budget.

It saves them on gas and on the maintenance costs. This is part of our multi-pronged approach that we're taking to lower costs for Manitobans. We're also working with Manitoba Hydro to increase the availability and reliability of public electric vehicle chargers.

And this is just a few of the ways that we're making it easier for Manitobans to make climate-friendly choices, and these initiatives help them do just that. The best way that we're going to get people to pick the climate-friendly option is by ensuring it's affordable.

I do find this resolution to be a little peculiar. Now, to be clear, all Manitobans can invest in whatever companies that they would like. We live in a free market; folks can purchase shares in any company that they would like.

But I—what I find incongruent is the fact that the member opposite proposing this resolution is against the gas tax holiday that provides a direct affordability measure for everyday Manitobans, is at the same time owning shares in multiple oil and gas companies. This seems strange to me, but I'll leave it to the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) to do the mental gymnastics to make it make sense.

Regardless, Manitobans should know that they have a government on their side. Manitobans should know that they have a team that is working each and every day to make life more affordable for them and their families.

We're proud of the 21 different ways we're making life more affordable in Budget 2024. And we are going to continue to ensure Manitoba is an affordable place to live.

Thank you very much.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I thought that I needed to get up and address this information as being the Agriculture critic, and seeing what people in the agriculture industry are going through as well as people that rely on our agriculture industry are going through as well, too.

Again, we hear from the other side about this being for all Manitobans, but gas tax saving is not for all Manitobans. I think about the people that are standing outside the grocery stores early on Monday mornings, and it's not with their cars.

It's by themselves, it's with their kids in tow, because it's when they discount the price of stuff that's out of date and meat that's out of date, so that the people that do not have vehicles, do not have a means to get there, are able to afford things like groceries.

So this is not for all Manitobans out there, let's be clear. And when it comes to taxpayers in Manitoba, I say this over and over again: there's only one, and that's all of us. So we have to remember on things like that too.

When we talk about it, and I asked the member from Fort Garry about this, is what the rate of crime is costing us right now with the amount of extra police service that have to be put into place because of the

theft that's going on because people aren't able to eat. They can't afford to eat out there.

Again, this is a short-term plan and it's going to cause a lot of long-term pain. And we're seeing that in the infrastructure, or lack thereof, of work that's being done in infrastructure.

As I talk again about the farmers in my area, a lot of them have to use a road north of Portage la Prairie, 227, that not only affects my constituents but also the member from Lakeside, but it's also affecting the transportation routes for all of Canada when it's coming through. Because this is—227 Highway is a shorter route to get to No. 16 Highway when they're leaving places like Winnipeg or CentrePort.

Because of the amount of carbon tax that these trucking companies and that are having to pay that this government across the way decides to back up every day.

When we talk about the farmers again, too, in Manitoba, how they're affected by this. And again, when I say not all Manitobans, that's terrific if they're saving, you know, a small amount of money per month. But if we want to look for some real long-term gain, again we have to ask, how did these farmers feel about paying seven and eight thousand dollars per month in carbon tax?

* (11:50)

How do these farmers feel that are paying, on a loaf of bread, up to 11 times on carbon tax? How can they afford to live? How can they afford to make money?

How about the gentleman in Portage la Prairie that called for a pizza to be delivered and he robbed the driver not of his vehicle, but of the food because he can't afford to feed himself. He has no vehicle, so how does he make it to the grocery store?

So, please, I want to ask this question on the record: How are all Manitobans being affected in a positive way on this gas tax? They're not. They're not even a little bit being looked after on that.

This weekend in Portage la Prairie, we'd a free giveaway of potatoes and there was tens of thousands of pounds of potatoes. The only question that was asked about it is, how do we get there?

Is it fair that somebody with a vehicle or a truck can load his truck up with those free potatoes or can load his trunk up with free potatoes, but the people that really need the savings can't afford it? So this is

not a program for all Manitobans; it's a short-term gain.

We here on this side of the aisle like to look to the future. We want to know and we want to work with people so that they're—so that they can look at tax savings over a yearly basis, or for years, not to be looking at what a short-term gain is so that we can talk about, all the time, about the inflation level.

Well, one thing about inflation that we need to know is, are we spending any money, or is that why our inflation level has been driven to this low period that we have right now?

This is not real affordability for all. When we see the people that are lining up at the grocery stores to buy that cheap meat or who are walking with their kids out to get the free potatoes—they've got their kids with them because there's not enough daycare space out there for them.

When we as this Conservative government looked at things, the—you know, we look at real savings like lowering the PST back to 7 per cent from when the NDP had raised it to 8 per cent.

We indexed and increased the basic personal amount from \$9,100 in 2015 to \$15,000 in 2023 so that all Manitobans pay less, not just certain Manitobans.

We opposed the Trudeau Liberal carbon tax increase on small-business owners. Again, why are they having to pay this? Again, this government across the way said, this is for all Manitobans. No, it's for a select few Manitobans.

An Honourable Member: That's right, winners and losers.

MLA Bereza: They just continue to pick winners and losers. If we want to be a real prosperous province, we need to be looking at everyone to have that opportunity.

We've increased the minimum wage from \$11 in 2015 to where it is now at \$15.80 in 2024, ensuring indexing would happen every year to keep up with inflation; \$94-million investment in new child-care spaces with a focus on rural and northern Manitobans.

This government across decides what's good and what's bad. When the government across the way is offered a \$5-million gift, they say no; no, we don't

want that; no, we'd rather put that on the back of Manitobans.

How is that ever fair? We have to continue to think about everybody out there.

When we talk about the personal exemptions, fuel tax in Manitoba is 14 cents a litre and generates \$350 million annually in revenue for provincial governments.

If we're having to drive on these roads—these roads where the people that have been able to save 14 cents have done—we have to look at repairing those roads.

If we're adding way more traffic onto the roads in order to save gas price, what's it costing us realistically for the people that need it most?

This is not a Manitoba for all. This is a Manitoba only for a single few.

Thank you so much, Honourable Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, debate will be open.

The hour being 12 p.m., the House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

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