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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 8, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everybody.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Holocaust Memorial Day

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with the statement.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Madam Speaker, Yom Hashoah, also known as Holocaust Memorial Day, is a day of commemoration for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Yom Hashoah is a national memorial day and a public holiday in Israel, and a day of observance for Jewish communities and individuals around the world.

Holocaust Memorial Day is dedicated to the memory of the lives of lost—of the lives lost and the suffering of 6 million Jewish people and the millions of other victims during World War II.

Though the events and locations of the Holocaust may seem distant, there are reminders throughout our province, including the names that appear on the monument at the Manitoba Legislative grounds. We are reminded of the victims who tragically perished, many of whom have Canadian ties.

Truly, the scale of loss experienced during the Holocaust is unimaginable. We must be cognizant of the thousands of relatives of Holocaust survivors who bear the loss of their family every single day.

It is only by listening to the stories of individuals that we can start to comprehend the magnitude of the suffering from a dark time in our world's history. I've had the honour to hear some of the survivors' stories first-hand.

Today and every day, we remember the lives lost and renew our commitment to remain alert and aware of speech and actions that go against the principles of human rights.

In remembering the Holocaust and paying tribute to its victims, we renew our commitment to fight against all forms of hatred and recognize the value of creating a compassionate, diverse and respectful society, and—where increasing connections between all cultures, faiths and ethnicities becomes a benchmark of an equitable Manitoba.

We will not forget, Madam Speaker, and I ask that all members observe a moment of silence in 'remember' of those who suffered and died in the Holocaust.

Thank you.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Every year we remember the approximately 6 million Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust. Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust remembrance day, is marked on the 27th day in the month of Nisan, a week after the seventh day of Passover.

It is important to remember the horrors of the past so that we ensure we avoid repeating them. The world has recently seen a wave of increased hate crimes against minority groups such as Jews, with the FBI counting a 14 per cent increase in the US alone. Jewish leaders have said that these attacks have come in part due to a frightening normalization of anti-Semitism. It's clear that action needs to be taken now, in order to ensure the safety of Jewish communities worldwide.

In the past 28 years, The League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Midwest Region has presented *Unto Every Person There Is A Name*, a program that has been held at the Manitoba Legislative Building in

previous years. At this commemoration, the names of Holocaust victims are—that are inscribed on the monument at the Manitoba Legislature are read.

At 8 a.m. this morning, B'nai Brith hosted a virtual reading—due to COVID-19—of the names of individuals and families who perished in the Holocaust and of survivors who came to Manitoba. These people, their children and grandchildren, have made substantial contributions to every aspect of life in our province. The Jewish Federation of Winnipeg is also hosting a Holocaust remembrance event this afternoon and an online reading this evening of the Megillat Hashoah, or Holocaust Scroll. There will be also memorial events available online both tomorrow and Sunday, and I encourage Manitobans to attend.

We must never forget—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Brar: We must never forget the devastating horrors of the Holocaust and the lifelong impact on survivors and their families. I hope all Manitobans will take the opportunity to commemorate this important day and to recommit to standing up against anti-Semitism wherever it occurs.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Today on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, we spend time to remember the Holocaust and to build the awareness needed for all Manitobans to understand what happened.

Fifteen years ago—I remember as if it was yesterday—Naomi and I visited the Yad Vashem—The World Holocaust Remembrance Center—on the western slope of Mount Hertzl, the Mount of Remembrance in the western part of Jerusalem in Israel. It was raining when we entered and raining when we left. The drops of rain were like tears falling all around us, tears in sorrow for those, including many children, who died in the Holocaust.

It was a deeply moving experience to visit Yad Vashem, to walk through the hall of names and to learn of so many stories: awful, tragic stories, but also stories of incredible fortitude and endurance from

survivors, and also stories of courageous people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who risked their lives to help Jews to survive and to escape the Holocaust.

* (13:40)

Today, closer to home, we have the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in our community. It is dedicated to better understanding and awareness of human rights and abuses of human rights, as the Holocaust was. It is dedicated to preserving memories and to creating a future where we can do everything possible to prevent future genocides. The global effort to respect human rights and to eliminate genocides around the world must continue.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for a moment's silence? *[Agreed]*

Please rise. Leave has been granted.

A moment of silence was observed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Howard Barker

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): On March 29, the community and district of Portage la Prairie lost one of its most recognizable voices with the passing of CFRY news director and broadcasting host Howard Barker.

Howard passed away peacefully in the Portage and district hospital at the age of 82 after a 14-year battle with cancer.

Howard was born in Glenboro, Manitoba, and spent his early years on the family farm, and in '63 decided to go into broadcasting and took a course at Brown Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Upon graduating, he obtained employment at CFRY Portage and remained there for 40 years.

Howard spent most of his time at CFRY as the farm news director, attending many meetings and providing live coverage at fairs from June to August each year from the 1960s into the early 2000s.

Howard was also the voice of farm markets that every farmer turned to on a daily basis.

A colleague, broadcaster John Aune vividly remembers Howard taking his show on the road with the CFRY trailer, attending local events, annual summer fairs. His was the voice we listened to for updates on all farm issues.

Howard was also a remarkably talented musician with a passion for country music. He played the guitar in several bands and performed at local care homes until last March.

Howard belonged to many other organizations, including Toastmasters, the square dance club, the Portage fair board, and the 10-pin bowling league.

The long-time CFRY broadcaster will be lovingly remembered by his wife, Cheryl, his sons and—Trevor and Jeff, and his grandchildren and many other family members and friends.

The passing of Howard Barker is a great loss of a voice which put—which had—which holds a place in history in many rural homes in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Educators

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): In times of crisis, protecting the ones we love is our top priority, particularly the children in our lives who rely on adults for their safety and well-being.

Manitoba educators and all school staff have diligently protected our children throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They've pivoted between in-person and remote learning, sometimes doing twice as much work to help our kids succeed.

They've bought PPE out of pocket, and they've put themselves and their own families at risk. We all owe our province's educators and school staff a huge debt of gratitude for their passion and perseverance in the face of unprecedented adversity.

But how does this government repay these hard-working Manitobans, Madam Speaker? They introduced a massive bill that discredits educators and seeks to overhaul the public school system and introduced a budget that counts on teachers to pay for supplies with their own money.

The ministers of Education and Finance also wrote a mandate letter forcing a two-year wage freeze on all school staff. In their letter, the ministers blamed COVID-19 for the freeze, but we know that the Pallister government has forced wage freezes on public workers—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Naylor: —ever since they took office, and they were always planning this one. This wage freeze was

previously laid out in Pallister government's bill 28, which was ruled unconstitutional by the courts.

This wage freeze is unconstitutional, unfair and punitive. It was educators, custodians, education assistants, school secretaries and administrators, bus drivers and all school staff who pulled many families through this pandemic, not the Premier (Mr. Pallister). But now he plans to freeze their wages.

I call on the Premier to reverse this wage freeze immediately so that our Manitoba education heroes can be paid fairly for their unwavering dedication to helping our children learn and navigate this global crisis.

Jean Gunter

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, everyone would like to know how to be a centurion while still being an active member of their family and community.

I have the distinct pleasure today to celebrate the life of a centurion, Mrs. Jean Gunter, a long-time Selkirk resident who recently celebrated her 100th birthday in February.

At the age of four, Jean moved to Cypress River with her family from Scotland. In order to flourish, Jean had to accept and recover from things she couldn't change. Like most centurions, Jean has lived through the Great Depression, lost friends and lost loved ones.

Jean's own wedding had to be postponed when her fiancé enlisted to serve Canada during World War II. Upon her fiancé's return from the war in 1946, they were married in Cypress River and moved to Selkirk to begin their lives together.

Jean has witnessed the tremendous growth in Selkirk during her 75 years as a resident.

Jean is resilient. She possesses a strong support for her family and community and 'displays' confidence within herself. She continues to live on her own home with the loving support from her family of four children, nine grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren.

Jean loves the game of hockey and is a long-time supporter of our Selkirk Steelers. She has given to her community over the years by giving many athletes a helping start with their careers through the billeting programs.

Everyone wants to know the secret to being a highly functioning centurion. Jean attributes her longevity to keeping busy and by-keeping moving.

Madam Speaker, few of us are lucky enough today to become centurions. I offer Jean our congratulations and best wishes on such a special occasion.

Mrs. Jean Gunter is a shining example of a life well lived and fulfilled by simply keeping busy and supporting your 'compunity'-community.

Happy birthday, Jean.

Thank you.

Kraft Hockeyville Contest

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I rise in the Chamber today to congratulate the community of St. Adolphe on becoming one of four communities in Canada to be named Kraft Hockeyville 2021 finalists. If they win, St. Adolphe will be the first town in Manitoba to become a Kraft Hockeyville winner.

The arena in St. Adolphe was built by community members years ago, and it is used for both sport and for community gatherings.

The ice plant at the arena broke down earlier this year, and it now requires major updates before it can reopen. The community responded to this by rallying together to nominate-*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Brar: -St. Adolphe for the Kraft Hockeyville grand prize.

If the St. Adolphe community club and arena win the final prize, \$250,000, they could repair the ice plant, fix a wall with significant mould damage and expand dressing rooms for the growing female hockey program, among other projects. The community would also be gifted the opportunity to host a pre-season NHL game.

I want to thank local St. Adolphe residents for bringing this opportunity to my attention, and I would like to specifically thank Kori Plesiuk and Gurjaspal Singh Bala for letting me know about this endeavour that the community has taken on.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues here in the Legislature today to support the community of St. Adolphe by visiting krafthockeyville.ca and cast unlimited votes on April 9th from 8 a.m. until April 10th, 4 p.m.

Let's make this happen, Manitoba. Go, Hawks, go.

Lead Exposure Screening

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker-*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, very recently, the President of the United States, Joe Biden, announced funding of \$45 million. This would go toward the funding of replacing all the lead water lines in the United States.

* (13:50)

The United States has been ahead of the curve, recognizing that lead is a very serious neurotoxin and is especially harmful to young children, causing developmental delays, learning disability and behavioural problems. And particularly important to our discussion of education, it results in poor performance of students in schools.

In Manitoba, we are behind on lead screening. Lead screening of children in the United States has been routine. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Continue.

Mr. Gerrard: Indeed, up to 30 per cent of children in the United States have been screened every year within their first few years of life. In Rhode Island, the number is up to 70 per cent. In Winnipeg and Manitoba, we have serious problems with lead pollution, and yet we don't have any lead screening of children early in life.

Indeed, in this budget there was a complete lack of any attention to this, as has been the case under NDP and Conservative governments for many years. It is time that we start screening children for blood lead levels so that we can pay attention to where the lead is coming from and we can then proceed with abatement programs effectively.

It's time we act here in Manitoba. I call on the government to act on lead screening of children in our province. Let us help and protect our children.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health-Care Funding Budget 2021

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, yesterday's budget showed that the Premier hasn't learned the lessons of the pandemic.

Now, I don't know why he hasn't learned the lessons. Maybe his teachers don't have the school supplies around to teach him. But whatever it is, he's clearly failed to absorb one of the key lessons we learned last fall, which is that our health-care system needs investment in order for it to be able to succeed in protecting us from COVID-19.

And yet what does the budget accomplish, Madam Speaker? It cuts funding, in real dollars, for care at the bedside in Manitoba. We need more health care, not more of these Conservative cuts.

When will the Premier reverse these funding cuts, in real dollar terms, to our health-care system and announce funding increases in real dollars?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, the mendacity monitor hums as the member speaks. The reality is we're \$1.42 billion ahead of where the NDP ever were investing in health care.

But, Madam Speaker, the other reality is that money's going to the bedside, and it's achieving better results for Manitobans. So Manitobans have better care and they have it sooner. They have lower ambulance fees than they did under the NDP, too, and that's an added benefit to Manitobans.

In their homes—when they are fighting against this pandemic, they're also looking for support in their home and they're looking for support with lower taxes and lower fees. And, Madam Speaker, the budget gave them that and better health care sooner, as well.

Madam Speaker: Just a caution to the member that the word mendacity is not a word that is recognized as—*[interjection]* It is not recognized as parliamentary in the House. *[interjection]*

So a caution to members—*[interjection]* And the Speaker is standing. A caution to members about language in the House, please.

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

COVID-19 Vaccine Program Distribution Rate Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, Madam Speaker, it's clear what there is less of in this budget. There's less funding for health care at the bedside. There's less funding for personal-care homes. There continues to be an underfunding of our education system. These are among the clearest lessons that every Manitoban learned during the pandemic.

We learned that there needs to be more investment, more direct care at the bedside for seniors living in personal-care homes. And yet, that was completely absent from the budget.

We also know that the No. 1 priority—and they say budgets are about priorities, Madam Speaker—the No. 1 priority right now is the vaccine rollout, and yet the government is failing to accelerate the pace of delivering those valuable doses to Manitobans. No details on how to improve the plan. And if it was simply a question of spending more money, why was that not already being invested in the vaccinations in the first place?

Will the Premier stand in his place today and tell Manitobans how he plans to accelerate the vaccine rollout that's failing.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, the untruth gauge is humming along as the member speaks. With every occasion that rises, he adds to that.

And I can only say to the member that we have invested significantly more in health care—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —than the previous NDP ever did, that our focus has been on improving services to patients, that we will continue to do that.

And we will also continue to remember that Manitobans have struggled through this pandemic mightily and that we will make sure that we put more money on the kitchen table, not less, because they deserve to get that support. They deserve a break and, Madam Speaker, yesterday's budget gave them that break.

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

Long-Term-Care Funding Request for Increase

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, well, sure, the budget had taxpayer dollars for the Premier to go and rent his kitchen table from the furniture store, but what it did not have was adequate investments in seniors care in Manitoba.

Again, we saw throughout the second wave that Manitoba had among the worst outcomes, when it came to seniors, anywhere in Canada. We saw the very tragic situations at Maples, at Parkview Place, at Charleswood personal-care homes. We saw loss of life that was very tragic indeed.

I thought, at least until the budget was tabled yesterday, that we had all resolved to fix this problem, to make the necessary investments to help seniors, to ensure that they got more care at the bedside. And yet, the budget freezes and cuts support for seniors in personal-care homes.

Will the Premier at least acknowledge that his failure to invest in long-term care is wrong and commit to an increase now?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, the fact index is suffering as we speak. It's going down, while the untruth index rises.

Again, I can only say to the member that the reality of our investment—rate of investment in PCHs, and it's protecting seniors, is that it's significantly higher, in our five years in government, than the NDP ever invested. Significantly higher investments in PCHs to protect our seniors, Madam Speaker, is what we're about as a government, what we'll continue to be about.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, I was not talking about the shipping containers. If you would have asked me, I could have told you last year that putting seniors in shipping containers was a bad idea. However, that side of the House disagreed and they decided to invest more than \$80 million towards a mistaken idea of putting seniors into shipping containers.

We know what it—that—is actually needed in personal-care homes is investments in one-to-one care at the bedside: more time for the nurse, more time for the health-care aide to spend with the senior. And yet, there is not one more real dollar for seniors care in this budget.

It is completely wrong. It ignores perhaps one of the greatest lessons of the pandemic and it does a disservice to seniors—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —right across Manitoba.

Will anyone in the Conservative caucus stand up against this madness and do the right thing for seniors by asking for an increase to personal-care-home funding?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, Madam Speaker, I do appreciate the member and his 20/20 hindsight in respect of opposing seniors having visitors. I do appreciate the fact that we disagree with him on this. And I appreciate him coming out against visitation shelters for seniors, because it puts clearly in view his lack of concern for the mental well-being and mental health of seniors in our province.

I think that the ability, that seniors needed, to have more contact with family and friends was impeded mightily by the pandemic. We all understand that. And the member's theory is that we should have just let it go.

Madam Speaker, we chose not to. We chose to invest in a manner that would allow seniors to see their family and to see their friends safely—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —and I will defend that, Madam Speaker.

And while the member may choose to oppose it, he is also in favour, Madam Speaker, of keeping taxes on seniors residences higher, and we are in favour of taking those taxes down to allow seniors to stay in their own homes.

* (14:00)

We think that seniors should have more contact with family and friends safely, not less.

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

Education System Funding Request

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): We want more care for seniors when they need it every day, more time with nurses, more time with health-care aides, Madam Speaker. There is not one more real dollar.

The true barrier to visitation in personal-care homes is the lack of investment in keeping seniors safe by this government, and it only continues with this budget.

We know that the Premier is also doing a disservice to teachers. It was a remarkable display of being out of touch when he suggested yesterday that, after freezing the wages of teachers for years, after making sure that they have less disposable income, that with those fewer dollars, the Premier suggested that they should spend what remaining money they have on school supplies that this government has denied children because of their cuts to education.

Will the Premier apologize to the teachers of Manitoba and commit to properly funding education at least for once?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member raised two issues: the personal-care homes—we spent last year more than double what the NDP did in improving seniors homes in the province.

On the second issue, Madam Speaker, the member disrespects teachers again, because teachers like my mother, my sister, have been investing their own money for years—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —in inspiring their students, and they've been doing it without any compensation at all.

Here's a quote: I think it's fantastic when the political parties talk about such a tax grant for teachers. That was Norm Gould from the Manitoba Teachers' Society. Madam Speaker, that was in '15, when the federal government added this credit. The NDP didn't do anything about it because they'd rather give money to trustees for junkets than they'd put it in the classroom with a teacher.

We're for the teachers in the classroom—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it is clear that the Premier has not spoken to a teacher in decades.

It's very clear that the entire government is out of touch with every member of the teaching profession in Manitoba, because, if they would put their ear to the ground and listen to the voices of teachers, and if they would share that message that they think that after implementing a wage freeze for years on these

teachers that, with those few remaining dollars, those teachers should buy the school supplies that the government should rightly be investing in, they would hear a resounding no from teachers across Manitoba.

We know that the Premier's approach and his commentary yesterday was offensive. The teachers rightly deserve an apology, but, more importantly in the long run, they also deserve to have a properly funded education system.

Can the Premier deliver on either count?

Mr. Pallister: I can. We are and we will, Madam Speaker: \$441 million more in education this year than the NDP ever put in. Members opposite would rather fund junkets for trustees to Milan and New York and Whistler and, as far as I know, Disney World.

Madam Speaker, we're going to put the money into the classroom where it belongs so it can help the children and support the teachers in this province to reach their potential and have a better education than the NDP ever provided them with.

Long-Term-Care Funding Budget 2021

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

We were all deeply saddened by the events that occurred at these facilities last fall, and unfortunately, the previous minister believed that these deaths were unavoidable, and he questioned the motivations of health staff who were fighting for their patients.

With yesterday's budget, it's clear it's going to be more of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —the same, without significant investment in long-term care.

Why is the minister failing to invest in the care for our seniors at the bedside? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Of course, our heartfelt condolences go out to those who lost their loved ones.

And, certainly, Manitobans know that we did build the visitation shelters so that Manitoba families,

those that live in personal-care homes, could have the opportunity to visit with those loved ones. And that's what the Leader of the Opposition just said is a waste of money, Madam Speaker.

We don't think that's a waste of money. You can't put a cost on what it means to be able to visit with your loved ones.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, increased staff levels, proper relief coverage when staff are away and physical separation between residents: these are the things that need to happen to address the crisis in long-term care that took the lives of far too many Manitobans.

We expected, as Manitobans expected, that yesterday's budget would undo some of the damage that the Pallister government has made and make real and substantial investment in these areas. Unfortunately, the budget doesn't do that. Funding for long-term care is below the rate of inflation, and that's not going to get it done.

Why is the minister, like her predecessor, ignoring the real needs in long-term care?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, following the COVID-19 tragedy at Maples Personal Care Home, our government commissioned an independent review, conducted by Dr. Lynn Stevenson, and we take the findings within that report very, very seriously.

There were 17 recommendations within that report, Madam Speaker, and we have committed to implementing all 17 of those recommendations. We want to ensure that our seniors can live comfortably, can live in these homes. They are their homes, and we want to ensure that they can have access to their loved ones in visitation sites so that they can have that access to their loved ones, what we feel is very important.

I'm sorry the Leader of the Opposition doesn't feel the same way.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, instead of deflecting and deflecting and deflecting, the minister and that side of the House have an opportunity, actually, to support Bill 202, a bill that would address the staffing shortages in personal-care homes. And

unfortunately, to this point, they've chosen not to support it.

Instead they spent tens of millions of dollars on units that would facilitate and have been facilitating only three visits per day.

Now, obviously, we all want to see our loved ones during this challenging time, but we also want to see them well. And that means we need to increase staffing, proper physical distancing between residents and a plan to move away from for-profit—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —models of seniors care in Manitoba. This budget doesn't deliver any of that.

After Maples, after Parkview, after Charleswood, why is the minister—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: If members opposite cared so much about seniors being able to visit with their loved ones, Madam Speaker, why did they just say that it's a waste of money to have these visitation sites? They can't have it both ways.

But what I will say—*[interjection]*—what I will say, Madam Speaker, is that since we took office—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, since we took office, we built 257 personal-care-home beds, with another 253 in facilities currently under construction. That's 510 beds in total.

Seniors and their families are a priority for this government, Madam Speaker, and our government is taking action to provide better care for seniors in Manitoba.

Renters and Small Business Rent Freeze and Tax Changes

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Madam Speaker, in 2019, the Pallister government greatly increased property taxes on those living with very modest homes. This approach continues with changes yesterday that hurt some of the least able to pay. Yesterday's budget left renters and small businesses behind.

* (14:10)

Here's page 61 of the budget: Landlords of buildings, and not renters, will benefit from the changes government has made.

Why is the Pallister government focused on landlords over the needs of many working Manitobans during the worst financial crisis in our lifetime?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): This budget is about protecting Manitobans and advancing Manitobans in so many different ways. For average residents in the city of Winnipeg, with an average tax, that's going to save—they're going to get a tax 'rechurd' of \$481 for residents of Manitoba. That's going to be double the next year, Madam Speaker. We're going to do it again.

What this budget did, it increases the Rent Assist budget by more than 11 per cent for individuals, \$20 million, and it also froze rents for a two-year period. We think that's going to address the poverty issue, and we think that's going to put some more money in Manitobans' pockets.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: Well, I want to welcome the minister back. I see he's back from hiding.

Now, renters are losing \$175, and as we know, the minister's so-called rent freeze—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —is porous: 100 per cent of applications over guideline have been approved by this minister. This is—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —an unfair burden placed on renters, many of whom are our front-line service workers in this pandemic. The same is true for many small businesses that lease their space.

And, again, the benefits in many cases flow to the landlords, not those holding the lease. This is obviously unfair and tone-deaf response to those suffering through the worst financial crisis in modern Manitoba history.

Why is this minister leaving so many behind?

Mr. Fielding: I thank the member from Texas for his return to Manitoba. If you're looking for an expert of someone that's raised taxes, jacked up taxes more than anyone else, you can look at the member that was in—part of the Winnipeg School Division that jacked up taxes more than anyone can anticipate.

What our budget does, it provides more money for people, lower income individuals, on the Rent Assist program. More than 3,300 more people are supported on the Rent Assist program, and that's why our poverty rate has gone down by over 18 per cent, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

I would just remind the member that, when referring to other members, it is to be by their constituency names and not other names. And both sides of the House have been, you know, party to this over—

An Honourable Member: What?

An Honourable Member: Really?

Madam Speaker: It's true, both sides have—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Hey, I'm standing.

You know, there's enough of this lack of respect for the Chair, and it's time for that to end.

When the Speaker is standing, I'm representing something far bigger than all of this, and big sighs from people aren't going to change my responsibility here. And I have a responsibility that is to be more worried about maintaining a democratic environment than worrying about, you know, some of this heckling that is going on in the House. And part of what I have to do as the Speaker is to maintain some level of decorum in here or we move into chaos, and we've come pretty darn close to that already a few times.

So I'm going to ask everybody's co-operation, please. I'm asking for civility, respect—respect for each other so that you can hear questions and hear answers—and also to just remind members that when you're referring to another member, it is by their ministerial name or by their constituency name.

Mr. Wasyliw: Well, Madam Speaker, we can't be too hard on the member from Kirkfield Park. I mean, he's as confused about geography as he is about public finances, so I think we have to just let that go.

But, once again, the Pallister government isn't focused on the real needs of Manitobans. We just have to look at the programs from last year. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: Back to Work This Summer and Summer Student Recovery Jobs Program: underspent

by \$27.3 million, or 59 per cent; pandemic stuffing–staffing support benefit–*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: –underspent by \$9.5 million, or 95 per cent; and Hometown Green Team: underspent by \$2.7 million, or 64 per cent. And there's much, much more.

Millions of dollars announced but not put to work for Manitobans is a classic bait and switch–

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

Mr. Fielding: The member's obviously lost. He still thinks he's on the river walk trail in San Antonio. He's in Manitoba. He should be walking down the Assiniboine, Madam Speaker.

What this government has done to support businesses: we've provided over 50,000 individual payments to Manitoba businesses, 125,000 businesses; over \$400 million of support to support businesses and over \$400 million of support for individual Manitobans; 360,000 Manitobans are better off than they were prior to the pandemic.

Post-Secondary Education Funding Request for Government Investment

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, one of the hallmarks of this government is their dogged determination to make life more difficult and more expensive for Manitoban students. In the past year, during the pandemic, many Manitoban students have already seen two tuition increases because of this government's failure to invest.

It's so disheartening but it's not surprising that, in yesterday's provincial budget, the government chose once again to reduce funding for post-secondary education, this time by \$8.7 million. The continued underfunding of universities and colleges will result in reduced programming, more layoffs and higher tuition. This makes it harder for life for students in Manitoba and their families.

Will the minister change course today and increase funding for post-secondary institutions, yes or no?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I'm glad the member brings up a question in regards to our great budget yesterday.

Madam Speaker, protecting Manitobans and advancing Manitoba. We on this side of the House are making sure that we've got the right people with the right skills at the right time here to move Manitoba forward.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, this government has cut tuition rebates, cut valuable bursary programs and, year after year, they continue to reduce funding for colleges and universities.

On top of that, we see this government continually fail to follow through with the little funding promises that they make. Last summer, they promised to invest \$120 million in Summer Student Recovery Plan, but only spent 15 per cent of that. This is simply irresponsible.

Will the minister get up today and explain to Manitoban students and their families why he refuses to invest in colleges and in universities?

Mr. Ewasko: Madam Speaker, I can talk to this member and talk to this member and write letters to various different organizations in the province, but I cannot comprehend it for this member. So I'm not going to start today trying to do that.

We on this side of the House have been working with our post-secondary partners, including students, making sure that going into the future, Madam Speaker, we've got strong programs for students. Our key goal on this side of the House is student success, and that includes tuition fees.

We—as I will remind the member—we're the third lowest tuitions in Canada. So I'll take no lessons from the member from St. Vital.

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

* (14:20)

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, Manitoban universities and colleges are seeing increased enrolment rates; faculty have higher workloads and now the added uncertainty of the COVID-19 and remote learning.

We want more affordable education for students. And it's shameful that this government continues to push their austerity agenda during the pandemic and—further moving post-secondary education out of reach for many Manitobans. This will only further disadvantage marginalized groups.

Every Manitoban benefits when post-secondary education is accessible and affordable.

So why doesn't this government continue—why do they continue to shift the financial burden of education onto Manitoban students and their families?

Mr. Ewasko: It's interesting that the member will not pivot from his NDP talking points, Madam Speaker.

We on this side of the House, again, as I've said before, we work very closely with our post-secondary partners, which includes, of course, the students. And our No. 1 objective on this side, Madam Speaker, is to make sure that students receive some success—that are going to take us, Manitoba, into the future.

We spent over \$1 billion, Madam Speaker, on post-secondary here in the province, through direct and indirect funding, and if the member wants, he can continue on with the line of questioning, and we can go on for all afternoon with all the good news that I have for Manitoba students.

Education System Funding Concerns

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was asked if he was bothered that teachers are having to spend hundreds, even thousands, out of pocket to get children what they need. The Premier responded that it doesn't bother me at all. This didn't reassure teachers that education is a priority for this Premier or his government.

They know he is not putting the necessary resources into the classroom to meet the needs of our children. Their education funding was underspent last year. Classroom funding for the coming year doesn't keep up with inflation or enrolment.

Why is this government underfunding the real needs in our schools?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Well, Madam Speaker, here we go again from the party of the status quo, the party of last place when it comes to education in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that many teachers go above and beyond in their classroom and in teaching kids, and we're here to support Manitoba teachers. We think this is a great tax rebate for Manitoba teachers, and quite frankly, we stand beside Norm Gould, who said this is a fantastic tax credit.

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

Mr. Altomare: Well, Madam Speaker, Norm Gould was around six years ago, so talk about going into the past: there it is right there.

But the Premier said yesterday it doesn't bother him at all that teachers have to pay out of pocket for the needs of students. In fact, he said he encouraged others to do the same.

Madam Speaker, teachers can give as they see fit, but we must first be meeting the needs of our classrooms, not relying on charity for the essential school needs. That approach is going to make schools less equal and less able to meet the needs of students from a diversity of backgrounds. Underfunding education will guarantee that, which is what this government has planned.

Why is this government not addressing the real needs in our schools?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, this budget puts over \$3 billion into K-to-12 education in Manitoba.

If the member opposite wants to talk about past history, I will challenge him to go back and find a place in history where the NDP, in 17 years, ever invested \$3 billion in K-to-12 education.

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

Mr. Altomare: I'd like to point the minister to page 139 of the budget document.

Manitoba's rankings amongst provinces on poverty and child poverty are worse than they were in 2015. That's despite billions in federal benefits that we've reaped.

The budget this government tabled is not meeting the real needs of our communities or our schools. Instead, the Premier looks to charity. That's not a plan, it's a recipe for uneven outcomes in our schools.

Why won't the Pallister government put real programs forward, like a universal nutrition program, to address the needs of all of our students?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, when we came into government, we inherited some of the highest child poverty rates in the country.

Madam Speaker, we've reduced child poverty rates by 25 per cent to date. We have more work to do. We recognize that.

We have invested, this year, over \$3 billion in public education, K to 12, and we've also committed

to an additional \$1.6 billion, K to 12, over the next four years.

COVID-19 Vaccine Sites Accommodations for Seniors

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, Liberals were contacted today by a Manitoban who tried to book a vaccine appointment for her mother, who has Alzheimer's.

When she called to book the appointment, she was told she couldn't accompany her mother, that a health-care aide would do it if—if—one was available, but that the aide might not be able to stay with her and return her mother, who has Alzheimer's, back to her outside. So the appointment wasn't booked.

When she asked assistance for people with disabilities like Alzheimer's, she was told there's a wheelchair ramp.

I ask the Premier: Why do the operators booking vaccine appointments expect seniors with dementia or Alzheimer's to navigate the supersite alone?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this issue to the floor of the Legislature, I guess. I would prefer that he would bring it to my office so we can actually find a solution for this to ensure that this individual gets the vaccine that they need.

Madam Speaker, I think it's very important when these issues come forward that we can work together. This is not a time to play politics with this on the floor of the Legislature. This is a very important issue. I suggest the member bring it to my office and we will work with this individual to ensure that this doesn't happen further, that—or, that they get their appointment and that this doesn't happen to anyone else out there.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, Madam Speaker, but these are not just individual cases for constituents, these are systemic issues.

Liberals had another upsetting call from a constituent, an 80-year-old senior who faced severe difficulties when going to the Winnipeg Convention Centre supersite. She went to the centre with her 87-year-old husband. They were told their daughter couldn't accompany them. They stood in line for three hours.

She has bad knees, but the chairs inside had no armrests, so she couldn't lift herself to standing. She doesn't want anybody to go through this sort of thing again.

Can the Premier make sure by the end of today—today—by the end of today, that it won't happen again?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm sorry for this individual and the experience that they've had. Again, if the member brings it to my office, we would be happy to deal with this.

The member mentions just a couple of cases here, Madam Speaker. This is—and then he says that this is a systemic issue. This is—these are individual cases that should be dealt with. Very important to ensure that these individuals get the vaccines that they need, and we'll continue to work with all Manitobans towards ensuring that those who are eligible get the vaccine as soon as possible.

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

Request for Military Assistance

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, Madam Speaker, how did anyone involved in the Premier's supersite facility ever think it was acceptable to force people in their 80s to stand for three hours in line?

There are hiring shortages, while half-trained, half-time workers are staffing critical roles, while people with real expertise are sitting at home waiting to be called. For more than a year, it has never been clear who's been in charge of the pandemic response as fiasco after tragic fiasco rolls out. It's been 390 days of amateur hour.

The former head of emergency measures says it's time to bring in the army. Manitoba Liberals agree.

Does the Premier agree as well? Will he bring in the army?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, we're going to bring in the army, and I think we should have done it to get vaccines in this country a lot sooner than has been the case.

I would have to say to the member that what is clear here is that the service that was offered to the two individuals he cited was not properly delivered, and what's clear here is that what is at least as improper is his attempt, through histrionic projections onto the floor of the Legislature, to score cheap political points on the backs of people who need better health care.

* (14:30)

So we'll focus on helping the people get better health care, and I hope in future he focuses on the same thing.

Affordable Housing Government Investments

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, we know that many Manitobans rely on affordable housing. We know our government is making record investment to ensure that all Manitobans who need a home have a home.

Could the Minister of Families update the House on our government's latest investments in this area?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'd like to thank my friend from Rossmere for that question.

Our government was pleased last week to provide \$12 million to our municipal partners to address their affordable housing needs. These municipal leaders in Dauphin, Brandon, Flin Flon, Morden, Portage la Prairie, Selkirk, Steinbach, The Pas, Thompson and Winkler are going to help our government ensure that everyone in the province has a safe, affordable place to call home.

Very pleased to be working with these municipal leaders to address housing needs so that all Manitobans can have a safe place to call home.

Rural and Northern Manitoba Broadband Services

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Manitoba Hydro Telecom, a subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro, has played an important role in helping to expand broadband connectivity across rural and northern Manitoba since its inception.

We know that Manitoba has the worst Internet connectivity south of the Territories, and we are in desperate need of broadband investments from this provincial government. But instead of investing in Manitoba Hydro Telecom and rural broadband, this government has instead chosen to freeze MHT's operations for the last seven months while they wait for private companies to tell them how to get it done.

As a result, MHT's future now hangs in limbo while broadband projects have been unnecessarily delayed in communities across the province.

Will the minister tell us today whether or not they will be making investments in expanding broadband infrastructure in rural and northern Manitoba?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): Thank you for the question on broadband.

We've had a number of civil servants working from home for the last year, and we expanded services to them to make sure that they could do so. We do recognize that it is a challenge in certain areas of Manitoba to access that broadband, and that's why we went out for an RFQ and an RFP to make sure that we could expand services throughout Manitoba where it's needed.

Just stay tuned. There'll be an announcement coming soon, and I'm sure you'll all be thrilled to hear what's going to happen.

Madam Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, on a petition.

Public Child-Care Grants

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable, accessible child care and demonstrates that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoban families.

(2) Ninety per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in early-childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with the loss of parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE while open, to keep kids safe, and the provincial government provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18 million on temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to the nursery school grants, doubling parent fees for

hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax status amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse the changes to the nursery grant program and to end the freeze on child-care operating grants while committing to keep public child care affordable and accessible to all Manitoban families.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

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

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

The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment

act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the freeze on child-care's operating grants while committing to keeping public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoba families.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government has spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the freeze on child care's operating grants while committing to keeping public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoban families.

Madam Speaker, this petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

* (14:40)

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses). The honourable member for St. Vital, on a petition?

Okay, the honourable member for St. James.

Public Child-Care Grants

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoban families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the freeze on child-care operating grants while committing to keeping public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoban families.

This has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Any further petitions?

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May '20.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader—or the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered, if the House is sitting, in private members' business on Thursday morning, April 15th, 2021, will be one previously put forward by the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara). The title of the resolution is increase staffing and support for personal-care homes and seniors.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered, if the House is sitting, in private members' business on Thursday morning, April 15th, 2021, will be the one previously put forward by the honourable member for Union Station. The title of the resolution is Increase Staffing and Support for Personal-Care Homes and for Seniors.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I have a series of committee announcements to make. I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Monday, April 12th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 8, The Pension Benefits Amendment Act; Bill 11, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; and Bill 18, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Monday, April 12th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 8, The Pension Benefits Amendment Act; Bill 11, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; and Bill 18, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act.

Mr. Goertzen: I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, April 12th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 10, The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Health System Governance and Accountability); Bill 56, The Smoking and Vapour Products Control Amendment Act; and Bill 67, The Public Health Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, April 12th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 10, The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Health System Governance and Accountability); Bill 56, The Smoking and Vapour Products Control Amendment Act; and Bill 67, The Public Health Amendment Act.

Mr. Goertzen: I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Tuesday, April 13th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 33, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act; and Bill 34, The University College of the North Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Tuesday, April 13th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 33, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act; and Bill 34, The University College of the North Amendment Act.

Mr. Goertzen: Finally, Madam Speaker, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, April 13th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 26, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act; Bill 58, The Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act; and Bill 63, The Petty Trespasses Amendment and Occupiers' Liability Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, April 13th, 2021 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 26, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act; Bill 58, The Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act; and Bill 63, The Petty Trespasses Amendment and Occupiers' Liability Amendment Act.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, could you please call for a resumption of debate this afternoon on the budget?

* (14:50)

BUDGET DEBATE (Second Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): It is certainly an honour to stand in the House and to speak against the government's budget, which fails to learn the lessons of the pandemic.

You know, if you were to ask anybody, if we were to ask ourselves what lessons have we learned throughout COVID-19 this past year, I think a few common themes would come to the surface. We'd probably hear about the importance of health care, particularly here in Manitoba. We saw last fall that as a result of successive years of cuts to our health-care system, that it was only the heroic efforts of nurses and doctors who kept our emergency rooms and hospitals functioning.

We saw, at the same time, that even though many of us know the importance of the health-care system and recognize how valuable it is to have health care close to home when you need it, that it's also an economic and a social issue. When our health-care system is on the verge of being overrun, then the economy came screeching to a halt and there were tremendous impacts on social and mental health dimensions of our society as well.

And yet, what was the government's response? The government's response after a year of the pandemic was to cut funding in terms of real dollars delivered in health care at the bedside. That means less resources in the coming year than there were last year to care for patients at the bedside.

So after cutting health care for many years, after having to bring our economy to a screeching halt because of the pandemic, the government resolved, you know what, we should have less people working in the health-care system delivering direct patient care to Manitobans.

Clearly, they did not learn the lesson of the importance of health care, not just to the health and well-being of Manitobans, but also to our economy, society and to our collective mental health.

One of the big issues that we saw throughout the pandemic was also—not just in Manitoba, but

everywhere—the impacts on seniors living in long-term-care homes. We saw in the first wave, in provinces like Ontario and Quebec, that long-term-care homes were very vulnerable, and we had very tragic loss of life. Many seniors perished.

Unfortunately, even though we knew that that was coming, the government failed to put in place proactive measures to protect seniors in long-term care, and we saw a disastrous outcome, unfortunately, in care homes like Maples, Parkview Place, Charleswood and, sadly, many others.

And yet, after seeing that impact, what was the government's response? The government's response was to freeze funding for personal-care homes.

The government, through its actions in this year's budget, is saying that the same amount of care in personal-care homes as was there last year, according to them, is the right amount. And we say that's wrong.

We saw what happened with that amount of investment last year, and I had thought that we as a society all banded together in November and December to say, we're going to fix this thing, we're going to improve personal-care homes as one of the lasting legacies of the pandemic.

But, apparently, those were just empty words for the members opposite, because what they are doing in this budget is guaranteeing that there will be less staff time, less time with a nurse, less time with a health-care aide for every senior living in a personal-care home in Manitoba because they've frozen the funding and then they're forcing that money to go further and cover more patients in more beds.

So simple math would tell you that the situation is going to, at the very least, not improve, and probably is going to get a lot worse. The solution, of course, would be to invest to ensure that there's more health-care aides and nurses who can deliver that direct care to patients.

We also see that there's many issues with the education system. The government has—well, being honest here, already being pretty unpopular at the moment—decided to devote a significant amount of their remaining political capital towards trying to implement a plan with Bill 64 to cut the education system. Then we saw in the budget that despite all the fanfare and rhetoric that Bill 64 was announced with, that their real plan is to continue underfunding the K-to-12 system here in Manitoba.

If that weren't bad enough, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) decided to go out and insult teachers by asking that they pay to cover the school supplies to teach children in their classrooms as a result of the underfunding that his government has perpetrated on the system.

We were in question period when the members opposite were clapping for their leader as he doubled down on that misguided approach, but at the same time, CBC published the story whose headline said that teachers are insulted and disgusted by the First Minister's suggestions. And rightfully so.

It is truly bizarre that a government would try and ask teachers—whose wages they have froze for some five years now—to dip into the shrinking pool of disposable income that they have to buy school supplies that the public system should be furnishing for those children.

Of course, when we look at the post-secondary system, there is a cut in terms of even nominal dollars—not just real dollars, but there's a nominal dollar cut—of more than \$8 million, almost \$9 million. That's less investment in young Manitobans who are seeking to expand their horizons and lay the foundation for a good career.

And so, certainly there are many challenges in this budget. And we also note the failure to rectify the ongoing fiasco of this government's mismanagement of Manitoba Hydro. Simple request from IBEW workers was to get out of the way and let them negotiate a fair deal.

The Premier, the ministers, had an opportunity to do so in yesterday's budget and they failed to avail themselves of that opportunity. And so a strike continues.

At the same time, we know that this costs Manitobans millions of dollars a day. And so, one of the failures of the government in this budget is for them to fail to disclose to Manitobans just how much they plan to raise their electricity rates by, in the coming year.

They did it in December—in the middle of the pandemic, they made life more expensive—and now they will choose to do so again, perhaps in this year's BITSA bill, perhaps in a stand-alone piece of legislation, or perhaps they will just wait until November, after their Bill 35 passes, and then decide to raise rates by a order-in-council.

But whatever approach they take to bypass the Public Utilities Board, one thing we can conclude is that it is wrong. Manitobans deserve to have a fair and open public hearing to determine the impact of the billions of dollars of export contracts that the Premier has concealed from the light of day.

Manitobans deserve to have a fair and partial hearing that would shed light onto the true nature of the financial health of the corporation so that the workers—among many other stakeholders—could understand what a fair deal might look like and what a fair rate to be set could, in fact, be.

So there are many issues with the Province's budget, and I am going to move an amendment that highlights our displeasure and begins to list some of the many failures that this government has.

And, again, there are so many failures, I would encourage any page or anybody who has to table the document—you know, don't stand up just yet, necessarily, because this is going to take some time. It's out of sheer consideration that I give you that advance warning and do, of course, appreciate your role very sincerely.

So, I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe),

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "House" and substituting:

therefore regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by:

- (a) refusing to learn the lessons of the pandemic by further reducing health-care funding and holding it to below the inflation rate, compromising bedside care and failing to prepare for a potential third wave; and
 - (b) cutting emergency acute-care funding while spending millions on the health transformation office to cut nurses and other front-line health-care workers and close rural ERs; and
 - (c) failing to invest in rural and northern health care to ensure all Manitobans have access to the care they need close to home by freezing doctor and nurse recruitment efforts; and
 - (d) cutting the Health capital budget, which means less investments in services such as a seizure clinic and new technology and refusing to invest in training for front-line health professionals, such as nurses, to help Manitobans get quality care; and
- * (15:00)
- (e) failing to improve long-term care and home care for seniors after the Maples and Parkview Place tragedies by cutting long-term-care funding; and
 - (f) failing to provide any funding or details on addressing the failing vaccine rollout, while freezing funding for the emergency measures office which assists with logistics and planning; and
 - (g) compromising the Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro, by trying to influence Manitoba Hydro operations and continuing their unconstitutional wage freezes, by refusing to repeal bill 28, which has caused a strike for members of IBEW; and
 - (h) failing to be transparent with Manitobans with its plans to increase hydro rates this year after raising their rates in last year's budget; and
 - (i) failing to be transparent with its plan to privatize Manitoba Hydro; and
 - (j) providing millions in funds for insurance brokers but refusing to pay a fair wage to employees of Manitoba Public Insurance; and
 - (k) jeopardizing access to rural broadband by pursuing privatization and failing to provide investments to ensure rural and northern communities can get connected to high-speed Internet; and
 - (l) continuing to reduce education funding, cutting literacy and learning supports and supports for children with exceptional needs, compromising children's success and their ability to catch up after the pandemic; and
 - (m) requiring educators to pay out of pocket to meet the educational needs of children because of inadequate educational funding; and
 - (n) failing to implement a universal school breakfast program and cutting supports for food security in the North to ensure every child succeeds in the classroom; and

- (o) refusing to provide menstrual products in schools to make sure no student is subjected to period poverty; and
- (p) continuing to cut funding for post-secondary institutions which will raise tuition, making education less affordable and accessible, cutting supports for apprentices and adult literacy, hindering Manitoba's economic recovery; and
- (q) failing to provide any additional aid for small businesses or communities suffering job losses to ensure their success and economic recovery during and after the pandemic; and
- (r) failing to adequately fund public child care after five years of funding freezes and opening up public dollars to for-profit centres, all while cutting subsidies for families; and
- (s) refusing to invest in local mental health supports and ignoring the addictions and homelessness crisis while refusing to invest in supports such as a safe consumption site or building new social and affordable housing units; and
- (t) failing to address climate change by continuing a court challenge on carbon pricing while cutting its own Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office; and
- (u) charging people more fees for government services, such as park passes, during a pandemic when more Manitobans are trying to get outside; and
- (v) refusing to fund improvements for the North End Sewage Treatment Plant to help save Lake Winnipeg; and
- (w) cutting funding to municipalities compromising their ability to fund services and priorities such as transit; and
- (x) failing to support agricultural producers during what is anticipated to be a year of drought by cutting risk management and support programs and cutting funding for Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation; and
- (y) failing to provide support for women, BIPOC, newcomers and low-income Manitobans to fully assist in a social and economic recovery from the pandemic, including training and credential recognition; and
- (z) failing to provide targeted supports with racialized, workplace and geographic data in mind while refusing to implement the living wage for Manitobans; and
- (aa) cutting Indigenous and Northern Relations budget by millions, compromising consultation and reconciliation efforts and freezing supports from Communities Economic Development Fund and refusing to include representatives of the Métis nation in its pandemic response; and
- (bb) cutting the Sport, Culture and Heritage budget by millions, including the Status of Women, which further jeopardizes economic recovery for women and recreation opportunities for children; and
- (cc) failing to match the commitment of Manitobans who have worked together heroically and sacrificed collectively to fight COVID-19; and
- (dd) failing to have any members of the provincial government caucus stand up against this budget.

As a consequence, the provincial government has thereby lost the confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), seconded by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe),

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after "House" and substituting:

therefore regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by:

- (a) refusing to learn the lessons of the pandemic by further reducing health-care funding and holding it to below the inflation rate, compromising bedside care and failing to prepare for a potential third wave; and
- (b) cutting emergency acute-care funding while spending millions on the health transformation office to cut nurses and other front-line health-care workers and close rural ERs; and

- (c) failing to invest in rural and northern health care to ensure all Manitobans have access to the care they need close to home by freezing doctor and nurse recruitment efforts; and
- (d) cutting the Health capital budget, which means less investments in services such as a seizure clinic and new technology and refusing to invest in training for front-line health professionals, such as nurses, to help Manitobans get quality care; and
- (e) failing to improve long-term care and home care for seniors after the Maples and Parkview Place tragedies by cutting long-term-care funding; and
- (f) failing to provide any funding or details on addressing the failing vaccine rollout, while freezing funding for the emergency measures office which assists with logistics and planning; and
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- (h) failing to be transparent with Manitobans with its plans to increase hydro rates this year after raising their rates in last year's budget; and
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- (l) continuing to reduce education funding, cutting literacy and learning supports and supports for children with exceptional needs, compromising children's success and their ability to catch up after the pandemic; and
- (m) requiring educators to pay out of pocket to meet the educational needs of children because of inadequate educational funding; and
- (n) failing to implement a universal school breakfast program and cutting supports for food security in the North to ensure every child succeeds in the classroom; and
- (o) refusing to provide menstrual products in schools to make sure no student is subjected to period poverty; and
- (p) continuing to fund—pardon me—(p) continuing to cut funding for post-secondary institutions which will raise tuition, making education less affordable and accessible, cutting supports for apprentices and adult literacy, hindering Manitoba's economic recovery; and
- (q) failing to provide any additional aid for small businesses or communities suffering job losses to ensure their success and economic recovery during and after the pandemic; and
- (r) failing to adequately fund public child care after five years of funding freezes and opening up public dollars to for-profit centres, all while cutting subsidies for families; and
- (s) refusing to invest in local mental health supports and ignoring the addictions and homelessness crisis while refusing to invest in supports such as a safe consumption site or building new social and affordable housing units; and
- (t) failing to address climate change by continuing a court challenge on carbon pricing while cutting its own Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office; and
- (u) charging people more fees for government services, such as park passes, during a pandemic when more Manitobans are trying to get outside; and
- (v) refusing to fund improvements for the North End Sewage Treatment Plant to help save Lake Winnipeg; and
- (w) cutting funding to municipalities compromising their ability to fund services and priorities such as transit; and
- (x) failing to support agricultural producers during what is anticipated to be a year of

drought by cutting risk management and support programs and cutting funding for Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation; and

* (15:10)

- (y) failing to support—pardon me—(y) failing to provide support for women, BIPOC, newcomers and low-income Manitobans to fully assist in a social and economic recovery from the pandemic, including training and credential recognition; and
- (z) failing to provide targeted supports with racialized, workplace and geographic data in mind while refusing to implement a living wage for Manitobans; and
- (aa) cutting Indigenous and Northern Relations budget by millions, compromising consultation and reconciliation efforts and freezing supports from Communities Economic Development Fund and refusing to include representatives of the Métis nation in its pandemic response; and
- (bb) cutting the Sport, Culture and Heritage budget by millions, including the Status of Women, which further jeopardizes economic recovery for women and recreation opportunities for children; and
- (cc) failing to match the commitment of Manitobans who have worked together heroically and sacrificed collectively to fight COVID-19; and
- (dd) failing to have any members of the provincial government caucus stand up against this budget.

As a consequence, the provincial government has thereby lost the confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The amendment is in order. The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): It's my pleasure to put a few words on the record in support of this budget and against the amendments that have been brought forward. The rather extensive list—laundry list—of amendments that have been brought forward reminds me a little bit of some of the budgets that I sat through in the opposition position, where they would list endlessly little bits of programs that they thought would deal with problems but simply, in

most cases, papered over those problems and never really dealt with the issues.

Our government has shown a lot more leadership than that and we are willing to deal with the tough issues. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to the budget in favour of the budget. I believe this is a good-news budget in time of adversity, because there's no doubt that this is—with COVID-19 still in place in the province, this is going to be a time that most Manitobans remember and most Canadians remember for a long, long time.

Most of us know of at least a number of families or some families that have been impacted negatively by COVID-19. They have lost family members and our heart certainly goes out to those people and their families for the suffering that they have endured. And many other people have had impacts in terms of the way that their life was, whether it's through their job or through their community, the isolation that they've had to work through and continue to work through.

But our government has taken a number of steps to shield Manitobans from these impacts, and I think that's important that we recognize these and continue to support these.

COVID's going to be with us for a while yet. We certainly don't know what the long-term impacts will be, how this is going to roll out into the future.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank some of the people that were involved in putting the budget together—the Department of Finance staff and the minister, of course. It is an awful lot of work to put together a budget and I know that they were very dedicated in this whole process, and I would like to thank them for that, and also for those that sat on Treasury Board and made some of the tough decisions that had to be made.

But our first priority of Budget 2021 is to continue to protect Manitobans through the ongoing pandemic. And our second focus is to advance jobs and economic recovery across the province. We, as a government, have continued to invest more per person on health care, education and social services combined than any other province on a per capita basis, and we will continue to do that.

Budget 2021 funding in these priority areas is nearly \$1.5 billion, and this includes \$156 million more for health care, 91 more for K-to-12 education and post-secondary education, and \$34 million more for social services. And as was announced

yesterday, there is \$1.18 billion in the 2021 budget for COVID-19 costs in particular.

Economic growth and job creation remains at the centre of our plan for a stronger and more prosperous Manitoba. A record \$2.1-billion investment in strategic infrastructure will help drive construction jobs and stimulate the economy.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Manitobans deserve a break, and that's why we'll reduce the taxes they pay and protect their income at the same time. We're delivering in full on our 2020 tax rollback guarantee one year earlier than was planned, and keeping our province-promise to phase out education property taxes, a long-standing issue for most Manitobans.

Budget 2021 protects our environment for future generations through more action on our climate change and protects our clean energy advantage with a secure Manitoba Hydro.

The pandemic has significant impacts on this year's finances, but thankfully, COVID-19 won't be with us forever; and over the next eight years, we have indicated that we will get back in a balance situation. We can grow our way out of this deficit and back to balance. And we will, by-doing so by investing in jobs, in tax relief and economic growth.

Manitobans are stronger and more resilient than anything this pandemic has thrown at us. And we have seen it time and time again as people in Manitoba have stepped forward and done what was necessary to deal with the COVID problem as it arose, and we trust that they will continue to do so.

I'll just touch on a few of the issues in some areas. In terms of health measures, the health-care funding in Manitoba is its highest level in history at \$6.98 billion.

A key investment includes \$812 million in capital commitments for rural and northern health care under a five-year clinical and preventative services plan—that's triple our original commitment of \$2.7 million.

Fifty million to speed up wait times for surgeries and services so that people don't have to suffer in silence while waiting, move that as quickly as possibly can.

This is something that has certainly occurred as a by-product of COVID and has occurred in many other provinces as well, and we certainly hope that we can move quickly in regard to that.

Also, an extra two—23, sorry, million for cancer treatment coverage and \$9 million more for 120 personal-care-home beds. And, certainly, that will be well appreciated.

Creating a program to cover the cost of the continuous glucose monitors for the eligible youth under 25 and increasing insulin pump coverage to the age 25. And I know that that will be very well received by many people who are impacted by diabetes.

I also like to take a moment to recognize the Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery situation, and thank Minister Gordon for the great work that she is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. I just want to remind the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), if he can refer to the minister by their title, not by their last name.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much for the reminder.

The minister of mental health and wellness, to thank her for the great work that she has done, including an initial \$3.42 million for programming and services within the new Department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery. And, certainly, that's very much needed at this particular point in time. We certainly have had a number of people reach out to us because mental health is suffering a bit because of the isolation that we're seeing that is generated in the process of dealing with COVID.

We've committed an additional \$5 million to engage with communities and stakeholders on a whole-of-government approach, and an additional \$1.7 million for Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, and \$1.8 million more for 24-7 housing supports for mental health.

I also like take a moment to recognize the success of the RAAM clinics that have been put in place across Manitoba. Just last December, one was opened in Portage la Prairie, and I have been following what's been going on there very closely. It has certainly been a busy time for them, and it has helped a number of people in the community. And we're very pleased to have it in place.

Now, in the area of Families, we're freezing rent control guidelines through 2023, and I know that this will help a number of families that are renters recover from the crisis, or the economic situation—economic stress that they felt during COVID, and certainly pleased to be part of that.

An additional \$22 million for Rent Assist is committed to help Manitobans who play-pay rent.

Renters who see this—their benefits increase by up to 11 per cent to make housing more affordable to help lift Manitobans out of poverty.

*(15:20)

Twelve-and-a-half-million increase for community living and disability services, and more than \$2.5 million for the wraparound supports for Manitobans that are experiencing homelessness, and that is very important.

Nearly \$4 million more for early learning and child care and operating grants of \$1.6 million to child-care centres will support nearly 400 spaces that have opened over the past year; approximately 150 new spaces in capital projects opening over the coming year, plus 50 new home-based licensed child-care spaces.

And just want to take a moment here. When I was in opposition, I did a fair bit of work as critic of Family Services, looking at child care in other provinces.

And I—repeatedly, we've heard from a number of people that the situation in Quebec is the one that they are most like—would most like to emulate because, of course, they have closest to the number of spots for the need of child care.

When you look in Quebec, it's actually very interesting. The biggest portion, of course, are not-for-profits, as we see here. But in Quebec, fully 32 per cent of their capacity is licensed in-home child-care facilities, private ones. And if we had anything approaching that situation here in Manitoba we, in fact, probably would have a very limited waiting list, if any.

To help families cope financially in a difficult time, we are freezing child-care fees for the next three years, and I hope that that helps a number of people get back into the workplace and get their—get the child-care facilities that they need.

In the area of Education, we're making record investments, over \$3 billion in our public school system: more than \$78 million for COVID-related costs through the safe schools program, and they're specific to the COVID pandemic situation, and investments to implement our Better Education Starts Today strategy. That includes 5 and a half million for special needs funding and nearly \$4 million to support online distance and remote learning, which has become much more—the need for which has become more evident during the COVID crisis.

We're also introducing a new refundable teaching expense credit so educators in child care and kindergarten and grade 1 can claim up to 15 per cent. And I know the opposition seems very offended by this.

This is actually—aligns very nicely with the federal tax credit in this area, and it also is a recognition of what's existed for many years because many teachers have been doing this. If they choose not to, that is their choice, but for those that have been doing it, this is a recognition of the special nature of this, and helping them with a little bit of a tax credit along the way.

In terms of tax relief, I would like to take a few moments here to talk about the education property tax and our 50 per cent over the next two years reduction commitment for residential and farm properties; that's 25 per cent per year. This is a very important one. Before I got into in—provincial politics, I was in—president of Keystone Agricultural Producers for six years, I guess it was.

And during that time we lobbied extensively NDP government of the day to help producers deal with this situation and the stress that was caused by education property tax and the fact that it's not an even distribution. Certain sectors of society are paying quite a disproportionately higher portion of the education tax, and we lobbied extensively in regards to that.

Got very little satisfaction, as I said, they came up with a small program that papered over the current situation but didn't really deal with the problem. And our government has shown the nerve and the backbone to deal with the problem. We're really the only province left that is funding education in this way.

And it's historically kind of interesting in that, really, the basis for the funding of this goes back to the Homestead Act of 1872. And I can tell you an awful lot of things have changed, not only in education but in rural Canada since that time.

And, really, since 1930 when it was turned over to the provinces, this has been an increasing burden really based on the theory that we used to have one family on every quarter section of the farm, and, of course, those days are long gone, not only in the farm but also in urban centres.

And there is no equity in the perception that property generates a certain value and if you have a lot of property that you must be financially well off.

There is simply not any real connection or ability-to-pay connection. So, certainly I am glad to see that this is—has finally started to be recognized and moved on, and I applaud our government especially for having moved on this—and in a difficult time—but in recognition of the unfairness of the situation.

And I can tell all members that I know that the money saved will be put to good use; many cases it'll likely be applied against mortgages because in the process of making—dealing with those mortgages, taxes are often part of that calculation.

And so money left over that didn't go to taxes will very often be available to help deal with either monthly payments or as lump-sum payments on mortgages, if that's an option for the individual, and that will help a lot of families out in a major way. So I am certainly pleased to see movement on that. Homeowners, actually, in Manitoba will probably get an average of about \$800 by year 2 on this situation.

We're also removing the retail sales tax on personal services and reducing vehicle registration fees by another 10 per cent. And all of these things will help put more money on the kitchen table.

Did want to mention a little bit about investments in strategic infrastructure; I think those are very important ones. We all know that you need good, solid infrastructure, and in particular I'm looking forward to something at the junction of 1 and 16, an area in our constituency that has historically been a real problem in terms of accidents; it can be very challenging.

It has actually gotten so that many people in the city of Portage flinch when they see the fire truck headed west because they know something has gone wrong at that intersection. And so we're certainly looking for better solutions and greater safety for all Manitobans. So we're very happy to see movement come on that.

And, of course, there are other infrastructure projects that many of us across the province are looking for, based on need, including construction on South Perimeter at St. Mary's, which I know is another bad intersection that people are very concerned about.

Budget 2021 also commits to a three-year horizon or a minimum of \$500 million per year in terms of infrastructure investments. And that—certainly the predictability makes it very valuable, not only to us as the people of Manitoba, but also the industry likes that in terms of the ability to plan their projects.

And I know that one of the other projects that we have committed the funding this year is \$101 million set aside for the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet, and I know how much damage that did, not only to people in the community and the communities themselves because it virtually destroyed some smaller communities around the lake, but also environmentally.

There are areas around the lake that do not look like they did prior to the flood in 2011, and it may be a long time before they ever get back to that situation, and we certainly don't want a repetition of that type of situation. So we need to put in place the infrastructure to prevent that.

Now, I see my time is getting short and I haven't even begun to get through quite a few of the projects and parts of the budget that I do strongly support. But I would like to take this moment to emphasize that we should all be supporting this budget. I do not support the amendments that have been put forward.

I'd also like to take this moment to thank the staff at the Legislature who have been working so hard during the rather difficult sessions that we put forward. Things are working relatively well in terms of remoteness and that is certainly very positive, because we do need to have ongoing democracy during a situation like this. So I'd like to thank you as well.

* (15:30)

With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will give the floor back to whoever wishes to speak. Thank you.

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): The impact of COVID hasn't fallen equally on all Manitobans. We know that low-wage workers have borne the brunt of job losses. We know that women, non-unionized workers, renters, small business owners, have disproportionately lost their livelihoods. We also know that low-wage and racialized workers are over-represented in front-line jobs deemed essential.

As of January 2021, female unemployment rate is 9.4 per cent in Manitoba. Youth unemployment rate sits at a shocking 18.9 per cent. And these are under estimates; these are the ones that are looking for jobs. Many have stopped looking, and that number is much higher.

We also know that there's many female workers out there who can't get adequate child care in Manitoba—it's neither accessible nor affordable, and as a result, they've been forced out of the labour force.

So those numbers, as shocking as they are, are actually much, much worse.

Now, let's look at the pre-pandemic economic approach of this government, because it's weakened us. It prevented Manitoba from responding in a strong and confident position and it has resulted in the loss of life and the economic devastation of our province.

And, of course, it starts with this government's policies of austerity and cuts and the tens of thousands of good, middle-class, family-supporting jobs that they eliminated. They made us poor; they engaged in unfair labour bargaining that resulted in good family-paying jobs, having them frozen, which essentially is a unilateral cut in pay.

They've engaged in battles with teachers and bus drivers and caretakers and civil servants, and all these things result in legal action and work stoppages and costs. It's very expensive to be a toxic employer, which I hope that this government is starting to understand.

They failed to fill vacancies. Just in the ministry that I'm monitoring, 27 per cent of our tax collectors—that's crazy. And it's throughout the civil service. And of course, when they've had these disastrous economic policies, there is an impact on our economy.

When they took office, we had the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada—we're now, I think, down to seventh; we had the second fastest growing economy in Canada—we've now fallen down to seven.

Austerity reduces economic growth and increases inequality, and that was before we went into a pandemic. So, let's talk about their pandemic spending.

The Pallister government is reluctant to spend any money at the start of the pandemic, and we know this. They pursued an aggressive austerity approaches. When other provinces were supporting their populations, we were firing ours.

The Pallister government fired close to 12,000 Manitoba workers—again, in good-paying, often unionized employment—stuff that could actually—your could support a family with.

The only other government that thought this was a good strategy was Alberta. There is no surprise that the two most-hated premiers in this country are Manitoba and Alberta—two most out-of-touch, economically illiterate premiers in this country, right.

The initial cuts exacerbated the crisis. One economist estimates that we lost 1.3 to 1.5 billion dollars in economic revenue because of these 12,000 job cuts, and an estimated loss of 157 to 189 million dollars in tax revenue. That's money that could be used to fight the pandemic, which went out the window because you thought that was a good time to throw Manitobans out of work.

So, thankfully, the federal government stepped in and there was very minimal supports and then of course what happened? The official opposition did its job, and we had to shame this government and shame them, and finally they would give a little bit more reluctantly and give a little bit more reluctantly.

They would announce these eye-popping numbers of hundreds of millions of dollars for supports and then they would make it impossible to apply for these programs.

They were all undersubscribed, and the reality being they had absolutely no intention of actually helping Manitobans. They designed programs to fail, and it was only through a public backlash that they actually moved on these programs and, of course, we started with loans for small business and finally we ended up with grants.

And then, of course, we look at all the millions of dollars that they wasted. Talk about PPE contracts that they couldn't simply fill out an order form properly and get the right specifications. Tens of millions of dollars was wasted on that. They were sending expired PPE to our front-line workers.

Then we have the \$7.2 million Providence Therapeutics boondoggle. That's a non-refundable deposit, and basically, the government's investing in magic beans. This vaccine is unproven, it hasn't received any sort of regulatory approval and even if it does come about, it'll be a year from now when Canada will be absolutely swimming in vaccines by this summer. We already have four official vaccines that are approved, two on the cusp of being approved and all six of them will be in a position to be in Manitoba by the summer.

Yet, why are we throwing \$7.2 million out the window? Well, because there are connections with this Calgary-based company and the Pallister government, and there's a political element to it. It's no different—*[interjection]*—it's no different than selling polar bear licences to the top donor of the Conservative Party of Manitoba. That's not a

mistake, right? There's a pay-for-play that's unseemly over there in that side of the House.

At the same time, you know, Pembina Trails—one of the school divisions in my area—they have a \$7-million deficit because of a education funding cuts. Nineteen teachers are needed to keep up with the 350 new students that they have in the fastest growing division in the province, and they don't have that money and kids are going to be crammed into classes.

And this government doesn't care, and they would rather throw \$7.2 million out the window than make sure that we have appropriate class sizes, that every child has a reasonable sized class to learn in.

So we could go on and there's more, but I want to get to this budget and its failings.

This government hasn't learned anything from the pandemic. It didn't learn anything from their failure during the second wave and the lives lost. They didn't learn anything through the second lockdown, and they've learned nothing from their failed vaccine rollout. So, the government is prioritizing their political needs over the needs of Manitobans.

So, how did we get here? Well, we have a record high deficit from last year and a second, near-record-high deficit this year, and the government is borrowing money like never before and the two main scapegoats for this government is the federal government. They blame everything on the federal government. They also blame Manitoba Hydro. That's their other scapegoat.

But the federal government has gave them almost a half a billion dollars more in federal transfers this year. Manitoba Hydro, with the new dams and transmission lines that they hate, gave them a half a billion dollars extra this year that they didn't have. Those two boogeymen of the Pallister government provided a billion dollars of revenue this year for this government.

* (15:40)

But it doesn't stop there. The other boogeyman is Crown Services. So they want to privatize everything, and of course the next on the hit list is Manitoba's Liquor & Lotteries. Well, guess what? Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries is going to be projected to have \$189 million more profit this year that directly will go to assist this government. So, of course, they got to privatize it and of course they've got to sell it at fire-sale prices to some campaign donor of theirs.

So—and we've seen how else they've raised money this year on the backs of students. They're making life less affordable for Manitobans. They're raising \$41 million off of increases in post-secondary education at the same time that they're cutting almost \$9 million in direct operational funding, leaving aside inflationary costs. And despite borrowing record amounts of money, they're actually paying less interest this year because the interest rates are so much cheaper.

So, between Hydro, the federal government, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, they've seen a huge increase in revenue this year. In fact, this government has more revenue this year than they had pre-pandemic, and that's an amazing thing.

Now—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —what hasn't increased, of course, is income and personal tax rate. Those have gone down. Why? Because when you fire 12,000 people, they don't pay taxes. When you fire 12,000 people, they don't use stores and businesses and put money into the local economy. So you're going to see a drop in income and corporate tax rates.

And so what does this government do with an historic amount of revenue? They have had more revenue sitting in their bank accounts than any other previous government in Manitoba. What is it they're going to do?

Are they going to help female workers with their 9 per cent unemployment rate? No. Are they going to help the 19 per cent youth unemployment rate? No. Are they going to do anything 'toor' the environment? No, they actually cut funding for environmental programs.

So, what do they use it for? Tax cuts. And they have cut our taxes so much that our tax-to-GDP ratio has fallen from 25 per cent all the way down to 23 per cent. And the public—sorry, the Parliamentary Budget Office had—did an analysis in Manitoba's finances and said that the current Pallister government process is unsustainable—it's unsustainable. You cannot fund government the way that they're doing.

And it's reckless. This is a government that's had two credit downgrades—two. No government in the history of Manitoba has ever had two back-to-back credit downgrades. You've been in power for

five years and no credit upgrades in that period of time. Why? Because you have been cutting taxes.

So, when we look at some of the taxes here, we have first the education property tax—25 per cent flat rate tax reduction. So we certainly agree that income tax should pay a larger percentage of education funding, but this was cynical and dishonest from the start. It was originally said that it would be phased out over 10 years. All of a sudden I'm looking over there and there's at least three members that are going to lose their seat next election, given the polling numbers, and they're panicking—they're panicking. They know that this is their—you know, the time's short for them—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —and they're in some big trouble—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order. When I get up here, it's order.

Mr. Wasyliw: And, well, obviously, with displays like that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can see why this government is so hated by Manitobans and why their days are very much numbered.

So, they're doing this with borrowed money—borrowed money. They're borrowing money to give a tax cut, and by giving a 25 per cent flat-across-the-board tax cut, we're basically giving a huge handout to the wealthiest Manitobans, right? There was a way to do this that could have been progressive; there was a way of doing this to get money into the hands of lower and middle-income Manitobans. But, it's a missed opportunity.

So, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) pays \$16,000 a year in education property taxes—going to get a \$4,000 rebate check. Average Winnipegger who pays \$1,500 in education property tax will get a \$375 rebate. In what world is that fair? In what world does that make any economic sense?

So, the second big, you know, tax credit is of course with teachers. Because, you know, this government has now recognized yes, we're underfunding education; yes, we don't value it; we're going to do, like, so much damage to your schools that, teachers, it's up to you to supply, you know, materials to your students.

But, you know what? We'll give you a coupon. You'll be able to go to the store and you're going to get a 15-per-cent-off coupon on valuable teaching

materials that we will no longer give you money for to do your school.

So, leaving aside how disrespectful and out-of-touch and bizarre that is, but that is basically the entire education response from this government.

So then we're looking at the indexing of basic personal exemption. It's a loss of tax of \$16 million that disproportionately goes to the wealthiest Manitoban. The more you make, the more you're going to save from this. And again, it's one of another sort of death-by-a-thousand-cuts that makes our income tax system that more unfair, unequal. And we're seeing child poverty rates go up; we see social inequality go up; we see all kinds of social determinants of health related to poverty go up.

And of course, then this is the great one: you are going to borrow money to remove PST on expensive spa and fancy haircuts. Because that's what will get Manitoba back on track right now. So, you know, for all those people who, you know, are struggling to spend a hundred dollars on a haircut—they need a coupon from this government in order to do it.

Now, there's a little bizarre part about this: the government says in their speech that they'll—they're going to waste \$8 million in another budget material—I think it's \$7 million they're wasting—when you flip to the back of the budget documents, the actual Finance Department predicts it'll be about \$2.7 million.

Whatever the point is, whenever I talk to a mother about this, she goes: you know what? I'm prepared to pay PST on my haircut; what I'm not prepared is to have my kid in a classroom with 40 other kids. You know? I'm prepared to pay those few extra dollars when I go to a salon for something I choose to do, but I want to make sure that when my kid goes to school, there's a teacher librarian there for them; there's an English as an additional language instructor, that they have actual number of teachers to help the actual number of kids.

And of course, you know, this government is just out to lunch, and it's all about supporting—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —wealthy Manitobans over regular Manitobans. And that's everything that this government does.

Now, there is no plan for recovery in this budget. They do nothing to target supports for women,

newcomers and youth, who were the hardest hit; there's no plan to transform the Manitoba economy into a green economy; the infrastructure spending that they've planned was basically the same as before COVID happened. There's nothing new here; they've just slapped a new name on it.

But there's no vision here, other than, you know, shipping good jobs and money out of the province like they've been doing with so much of the COVID relief. So, instead of making good jobs in Manitoba, they're going to hire, what? Some kind of call centre in Quebec, or they're going to hire some fly-by-night company in Calgary.

And Manitoba money, instead of staying in Manitoba and helping Manitobans, is going out-of-province, because why? Because this government thinks that helping the economies of those provinces is somehow their business.

And we certainly couldn't disagree more. We believe that a government has to be there for Manitobans; it needs to support the most vulnerable and we don't see that here. There's no sector-specific support for the retail, hospitality, tourism, arts, culture and sports sectors; they've just done nothing.

* (15:50)

There's nothing here to bring back consumer confidence. This is a government that's trapped in their own alternative reality, where they think they're doing great and on no objective measure. And they don't have to believe me; just please look at a poll and pack up your office, because time is running out.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): It is an honour to be able to speak to the Budget 2021. Deputy Speaker, I am happy to represent the constituency of Seine River. The diverse nature of the residents, businesses, rural and urban areas enhance the southern part of Winnipeg.

I have had the opportunity to learn about the vast history and the rich culture that makes up the community of St. Norbert and the surrounding areas. The beautiful scenery of the monastery grounds, the vibrant art community that has a home in the St. Norbert Arts Centre and the many historical sites that are located throughout the heart of St. Norbert.

Having these connections to the community has created a bond for many residents of St. Norbert. The diversity of culture is welcome and embraced by all who live in the area. St. Norbert Farmers' Market

offers locals and visitors alike a taste of locally grown produce and garden goods, and I have been to the market many times throughout the years and have yet to leave without a purchase. The talents of these crafters and the delicious homestyle baking continually draws people back to the market every week. And our government is proud to support each and every individual who partakes in this community market.

In this appreciation for the community and the desire to be actively engaged in one's community that lends to the rural-urban blend, making St. Norbert the best place to live in the city while still having the feel of being in a small, country town.

Seine River on the east side of the Red River offers a variety of businesses and combines the urban and rural elements of living. For anyone who has ever driven south on St. Mary's Road, they will have been introduced to the numerous greenhouses that supply local and community gardens with plants, trees and shrubs. The proximity of the greenhouses, coupled with the rural environment, offer a relaxing atmosphere to purchase all one needs to beautify and diversify their yard.

The newly constructed Duff Roblin park is a highlight for anyone who wants to have a picture-perfect view of the renowned floodway, also known as Duff's Ditch, while also learning about the history behind the construction of the largest project outside of the Suez Canal. The history and culture of the south is captured on both sides of the Red River.

Deputy Speaker, it is this diversity and varied landscape which has created a surge of families who live just south of the perimeter. This increase in population and traffic flow has also created a need for expansion on the south perimeter. It is this increased flow of traffic which highlighted the need for an overpass on St. Mary's in the Perimeter.

This colossal project will begin construction this year with an expected end date in 2023. The continued safety of all who use our roadways and especially the 30,000-plus cars that pass through this intersection continue to be a priority of our government. The continued growth and advancement of areas south of the city will have the added advantage of an interchange that will ensure the ability to safely get to work and home again.

Investment in our infrastructure and our roadways is one way we are keeping our promise to Manitobans.

Investing money into our economy and creating jobs—oops, sorry.

Looking back at the year that has just passed, one can say the profound impact COVID has had on the economy, health and welfare of people globally. The ability to travel, visit with loved ones, enjoy the basic luxuries in Canada has been challenged. COVID has impacted lives and caused undue hardships for many. The health and social being of Manitobans has been tested.

This has resulted in financial and economic challenges in our province. As the minister stated in his speech, the Province has a projected deficit of \$1.59 billion. The impact has been felt by all Manitobans and now, more than ever, we need to support Manitobans so we all can get through this together.

The budget highlights the many areas that have received and will continue to receive support as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Health, social service sector, business infrastructure are just a few of the areas receiving support as the economy rebounds from the past year.

Deputy Speaker, Manitoba has invested more per person in health care, education and social services combined than any other province in Canada. Budget 2021 further increases funding to these priority areas by 1 and a half billion dollars.

Health is a main priority for Manitobans. We pride ourselves on a health-care system that is renowned all over the world. We can all think about a time when we needed to access a hospital, seek out a medical professional for their expertise, or go to a walk-in clinic because of unforeseen injury. We in Manitoba are fortunate to be able to access a medical support at any time.

To continue to benefit generations long after the pandemic, our government is investing almost \$7 billion into our health system. This is the highest investment ever in the history of Manitoba. Manitobans living in northern, southern and all other regions will benefit from the financial investments being made to health. The money will build on the current services and treatments that are available to Manitobans.

COVID has impacted wait times for individuals who are waiting for surgery. Most of those who are on the wait-list are seniors, seniors who have been the cornerstone to our economy and now need our support

so they can enjoy their retirement in comfort and safety.

Our government is investing \$50 million to reduce wait times for he—sorry, nip—sorry, hip, knee and cataract procedures and surgeries and services which were delayed by the pandemic. People who were on the list and waiting will now be able to have the necessary surgeries so they can return to their lives without the pain caused by a knee or hip needing to be replaced.

An additional \$23 million being invested in CancerCare and treatment will offer additional supports to the professionals and offer treatment to those who have unfortunately been diagnosed with cancer. Family members will receive assurance that their loved ones struggling with life-threatening illnesses are being treated and cared for.

The hardest thing any one person can live through is watching a family member or loved one struggle with any sickness and only wanting the best of care so they can be treated and begin the road to recovery. Enhancing the already necessary supplies administering to those who are needing additional medical attention will ensure Manitobans are receiving the best medical supports possible.

Our government is creating a program to cover costs of continuous glucose monitors and insulin pump coverage for youths up to the age of 25. This much-needed medical support offers parents peace of mind. The continuous glucose monitor will eliminate many hospital visits, reduce the parents' worry when their child is in school or away, and monitor sugar levels in the individual wearing the monitor. I know family members who have diabetes and the amount of time they invest in their health and maintenance of sugar levels, the glucose monitors will offer peace of mind to family members and those who must check their sugar levels many times throughout the day.

The glucose monitor administers the insulin as needed to a diabetic that's eliminating the need for needles, test strips and the need for type 1 diabetics to self administer their medication. The monitor offers a readout indicating the spikes and drops in a person's sugar level and adjusting the amount of insulin they need so they do not experience extreme drops or spikes in their sugar levels.

Mental health and addictions have increased throughout COVID. To better be able to address the increased demand for mental health and addiction supports, a new department has been created. The

department will offer outreach, offer support to those struggling with their health and offer comfort for families worried about loved ones.

A total of 2 and a half million dollars has been invested in strategies and housing supports to assist individuals and family members struggling with a mental illness. The additional supports will further support the existing groundwork that is in place to assist individuals and families dealing with mental health and addictions.

Those seeking supports for mental health and addictions have unfortunately increased in numbers. Our government is listening and has opened a few new—has opened new department to offer the programming for those individuals. Deputy Speaker, the health and safety of Manitobans has been our priority.

Budget 2021 invests an additional \$34 million in the Department of Families. Our government has focused on programming that will continue to support families and youth and the challenges they face. Individuals and families living on fixed or lower incomes, those who may have been unemployed due to COVID, and families seeking supports for their child-care needs will benefit from this additional funding. An increase of about 11 per cent to Rent Assist will help families struggling with higher rent payments. The additional funds will relieve some of the added stress and financial burden that COVID may have created. Having a home and safe place to live will remove some of the unnecessary stress and anxiety created by the insecurity of struggling to pay rent.

*(16:00)

Families will be able to benefit from their monthly assistance until 2023. This additional funding will provide additional time for families and individuals to financially recover from any of the extra financial strains they have had as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

An additional \$2 million will also be invested to increase funding, training and supports for individuals. More than 7,000 individuals will receive the benefits of this extra funding. Families who have been living with a disability and receiving supports from employment assistance will benefit from an increase in the amount of funding provided through these programs.

Budget 2021 has allocated an additional \$5 million towards housing in Manitoba. The number

of individuals struggling to find secure housing and to have a safe place to live has been growing. This growing concern is a priority for our government. Those that are in this demograph are mostly youth and vulnerable persons. Our government has always supported youth and housing initiatives, and the additional funding will help with housing for many.

Deputy Speaker, our government has led many initiatives to support those who need a hand up. The additional funding to continue to enhance existing programs, introducing new supports, further cements the commitments our government has made to Manitobans.

Manitoba is a great province to raise a family, start a business and to enjoy the many wonders of nature. Over the last year, families have explored the many wonders our province has to offer. The many hiking trails, campsites and tourist attractions offer everyone an opportunity to take in and explore the great outdoors. Manitoba has many lakes, and for those who enjoy boating, swimming and fishing, this province has an endless bounty of scenic escapes, both local and remote.

Churchill, world renowned for its polar bears, the International Peace Garden and the dinosaur area in southern Manitoba offers families a great escape while providing a peek back into history for these local areas. I would encourage anyone who can take a train ride or drive to explore all the beauty that Manitoba has to offer.

Deputy Speaker, Budget 2021 begins to phase out the education tax portion on property taxes. Every home owner receives a property tax bill that has a list of the various taxes attached to their property. One of the taxes that makes up a huge portion of a property tax bill is the education portion. Depending on the size or area of land—residential and/or farmland—one owns, the education portion is quite high. Going forward, our government will begin to phase out the education tax portion from our property tax bill.

Starting this year, there will be a 25 per cent reduction in the amount that is attached to a person's property tax bill. This will average about \$480 or so for the people living in Winnipeg. Next year, we will see an additional 25 per cent removed from the education portion of the tax bill, bringing the savings up to around \$1,100 or so, or 50 per cent of the education portion for the first two years.

For those who do not own a house, the education rebate of 10 per cent will be offered to those living in

an apartment and those in commercial properties. Education funding will become a budget item in the Department of Education. The government will ensure that all students in all areas of the province will have the best education based on a fair system of taxation and supports for those programs they need to study. I have spoken to many families, and every one is in support of paying less tax and not having the education tax as part of their property tax bill.

The ability to save money allows Manitobans an increase in flexibility for what to purchase and how to invest in their future or in their children's future. Our government has always believed that hard-working people should be the ones to determine where their money is spent. The reduction in taxes paid, the amount of money that is saved and put toward family projects or reinvested into children's activities has been a priority.

The pandemic has impacted so many people, and the ability to be able to invest in themselves and their families has also been gravely impacted. Therefore, our government is continuing to further reduce the amount of taxes paid. The PST paid on haircuts and salon services will be removed. The amount of this tax will benefit women more than men, unfortunately.

I say this as a woman who knows the difference in what I paid for a haircut versus what a man pays. I would never trade my hairdresser for anything, and with COVID, I'm grateful and appreciate her and her profession. Salon services, although used by all people, are predominantly supported by women and thus we pay the larger portion of these taxes.

Vehicle owners will also benefit from a 10 per cent reduction in their registration fees. The money families save will be able to be used in their homes and put towards purchases they want.

Deputy Speaker, Budget 2021 offers supports, resources and tax savings for all Manitobans. Our government has made a commitment to make Manitoba the most improved province, and we are keeping our word.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to put a few words on the record about the budget, which was delivered yesterday.

One of the first things that most people in Manitoba are concerned with is the imminent presence of a third wave of this COVID pandemic. We have seen—and are seeing—what's happened in

Ontario and in BC; we would have expected that the government would have presented a clear plan in the budget for dealing with the third wave, that that clear plan could have alleviated people's fears and anxieties about what may be coming.

Instead, we have vaccination snafu after snafu. I raised concerns from just two of many individuals who've come forward earlier today in question period: the failure to recognize and help somebody appropriately with Alzheimer's, the failure to recognize that somebody who was 80 needed something better than just being forced to stand in line for three hours.

This government, sadly, has been much more disorganized than anyone ever expected it would be, but it's a sad testament to the lack of effective planning and effective execution, and we should have had a detailed plan for the third wave laid out.

What we got was a budget with a lot of money for COVID-19, but no clear plan on how to spend and how to deliver—and how to make sure that we get beyond the current snafus into a system which is actually helping people effectively get vaccines quickly and helping people who are caught up in lockdowns to be able to survive financially and to have their businesses survive.

Seniors are clearly an area where there needs to be a lot of planning, and yet we had no announcement of a seniors advocate office, which is so badly needed to make sure that seniors have somewhere that they can go for help.

We need—as we all know—to have personal-care homes which have sufficient, well-trained staff to look after people well, with empathy and compassion and caring.

We know that hearing is one of the most critical things for people as they age so that they can stay in touch with the world and talk with people, and yet the government failed to deliver on a cochlear implant processor replacement program, in spite of more than 700 people having signed petitions and in spite of me and the MLA for Tyndall Park presenting many, many petitions in this Legislature asking, calling on the government to fund and make sure that the hearing of people as they get old can be helped if they have cochlear implants.

There was no plan presented for what a third wave lockdown would look like. We should have some vision and we should have some expectation so that people can plan—people can know why it is so

important, right now, to be paying very close attention and protecting themselves and their loved ones from getting a COVID-19 infection.

*(16:10)

Sad to see the lack of sufficient 'support' in the mental health and addictions area. There was, yes, a small increase in budget; yes, the announcement of a new ministry, but there's nowhere near the funding and the support for detox, provisions for those with addictions and for ensuring that there's a seamless process for people to get through the various steps and back on their feet. When that doesn't happen, we have so many people who fall through the cracks, so many lives which could have been helped, which are not.

In the COVID pandemic we have had a drastic increase in the number of people with eating disorders. This has happened in other jurisdictions. But has the government done? Instead of recognizing and provide the resources, the government has just let the waiting list get longer and longer and longer. It's as if the government doesn't realize that eating disorders are one of the most deadly, right. They have one of the highest mortality rates of any mental illness. It is terrible to have a government which doesn't pay attention to eating disorders and provide the support and the funding to make sure that people get the help quickly when they need it, instead of having to wait and wait and wait. I think the wait-list now, last I heard, was about two years. Totally unacceptable. Ridiculous. Unbelievable.

We're supposed to be a third-world country. Are we? Is that what the Premier (Mr. Pallister) wants to put us in, to take us back to third-world status? Come on. We can do better than this.

We should be funding psychologists and psychological services, putting many services under medicare. You know, this has been known for many years; Liberals have pointed out how important this is, if we're going to get a mental-health system which is working properly. And yet, psychologists were not considered, they were not mentioned and they were not paid attention to, as they should have been.

The government did put a considerable emphasis on infrastructure, but sadly there wasn't the vision that we needed, the vision to come out of this pandemic and the economic turmoil with a focus on green infrastructure, on doing things in Manitoba that would position us ahead instead of behind, that would position us with products and services which are going to be much more in demand in the future

because they are green and they are recognizing the situation with climate change and the need to pay attention to it.

Sadly, it was not just green infrastructure which is missing, it was basic infrastructure to make sure that our children are healthy. South of the border in the United States recently, President Joe Biden announced \$45 billion as an investment to replace and remove and then replace all the lead water pipes in the United States.

And here we are in Winnipeg and we have no plan. In Regina, they have already delivered on a plan to end and replace all the water lead pipes by 2025. And yet here we are, it is already 2021, four years away, and there wasn't even a mention of this.

And when this is so important, when 'lead' causes so much devastation, so—messes up kids' brains so that they are not able to do well in school, their—have behavioural problems. If the Premier wants to really address real issues in the education system, he should start by paying some attention to the brains of our kids. This can make a big difference.

And we know in Manitoba that we've had, for many years, major issues with lead pollution and it was hidden under the NDP government and it's not being paid attention to by the current government.

Instead of these sorts of formative, forward-thinking approaches, which would address the need for improving our human potential in Manitoba, improve our circumstances for the long term—instead of this, the government is proceeding with property tax reductions which, when you look at them carefully, although they will help homeowners across the board, the fact is that those who have the biggest homes, those who have the biggest farms will be the ones who benefit the most.

And this is an example of a government which, instead of helping those who need it the most, is pandering to their supporters who are wealthy and helping those who are wealthy, and hope then, I presume, that they will get money to run elections and so on. You know, this is a government which is not doing what it should've been doing and that is putting the common good first.

Talking about education, we have had Bill 64, a bill to eliminate school boards, to make school boards the scapegoats for the government's failures. It's based on a false premise that 80 per cent of what school boards do has related to negotiating with teachers and to setting taxes. Actually, from many people that I

have talked to and school trustees and others, it's about 5 per cent of the time; a gross exaggeration that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is making to try and make school boards scapegoats.

The premise on which he's working is that there would be replacement of 37 school boards with 794 mini-school-boards called community school councils. It is likely, sadly, that it won't work in the way that the Premier hopes, based on experience elsewhere, based on experience here that the students who need it most in low-income areas are likely to get the least help. Their parents are struggling, often working two or three jobs. They don't have the time to be working, delivering and spending a lot of time volunteering on community school councils.

So this is poorly thought out. It's a design, sadly, which pays more attention to schools where there are students doing well than to schools where students are struggling.

Paying attention to schools where students are struggling has been critical. For example, in Seine River, where they have done just this—and what they have done is to increase their overall average on scores from below average for the province to above average. It's an example of what can and should be done, and yet the Province is not paying attention to the real experience of schools and school boards and students here in Manitoba.

One of the big problems that we have with the government's budget is that, from our experience with this government, they bring forward a budget, but a lot of the money never gets spent. So we don't really know what will actually be spent.

We have a budget which says we're going to do this, but, you know, let's look at last year. Even though the Province set aside \$46 million, it only spent \$18.7 million on a Back to Work initiative and Summer Student Recovery Jobs Program: \$27.3 million not spent.

A \$10 million program announced last fall to provide pandemic staffing support payments to eligible non-profit organizations in the child-welfare, adult-disability services and child-care sector left 9 and a half million dollars not spent, in spite of the fact that there is a big need there. The program was poorly designed and poorly delivered.

* (16:20)

It was last year a Hometown Green Team program which provided funding for organizations

to hire youth 15 to 29 for summer jobs: \$42-million program—\$4.2-million program, but \$2.7 million of that was not spent.

Then there was the restart Manitoba Event Attraction Strategy program. The budget was \$8 million. And guess what? There wasn't even a dime spent; \$8 million was left on the table. Poorly designed and poorly executed program, once again.

This government may make promises, but we have learned that it rarely keeps them. It is a big problem in terms of this government, in terms of their credibility. It is a big problem, in that many people no longer believe so much of what this government says. It is a big problem for all of us that this government pays more attention to those who are very well off as opposed to supporting the common good of all in Manitoba.

So it is a real issue. There are many issues with this budget.

And I want now to move on to a motion, which I will move, seconded by the MLA for Tyndall Park.

I move,

THAT the amendment be amended by adding after clause (bb), the following clauses:

- (cc) failing to adhere to the most basic standards of honesty, confidence and human decency, with a budget that gaslights Manitobans with empty promises, while denying the basic necessities of life of housing, food, clean water and life 'sabling'—saving and enabling medications and devices; and
- (dd) failing utterly to learn from its own catastrophic failures and incompetence in mishandling the second wave of COVID-19, business supports and the vaccine rollout, and choosing to plow ahead with radical right-wing policies that will eviscerate public services and the families and communities who depend on them; and
- (cc) failing the basic obligations of every government in a crisis to place the common good ahead of blind partisanship and ideology, choosing instead to present a budget that steals from the poor and gives to the rich, loots the public treasury while running up billions in debt in order to cut cheques that enriches itself and its political cronies.

That, Mr. Speaker, is my comments, and I thank you for the opportunity—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I just want to remind the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) that—I—bit—when you—doing the, like, the amendment, he did—he said (bb) instead of (dd). The 'letterling' was incorrect.

Is there leave to consider it as written by the 'monourable' member for River Heights, on his amendment? [*Agreed*]

THAT the amendment be amended by adding after clause (dd) the following clauses:

- (ee) *failing to adhere to the most basic standards of honesty, competence and human decency, with a budget that gaslights Manitobans with empty promises while denying the basic necessities of life of housing, food, clean water and lifesaving and enabling medications and devices; and*
- (ff) *failing utterly to learn from its own catastrophic failures and incompetence in mishandling the second wave of COVID-19, business supports and the vaccine rollout, and choosing to plow ahead with radical right-wing policies that will eviscerate public services and the families and communities who depend on them; and*
- (gg) *failing the basic obligations of every government in a crisis, to place the common good ahead of blind partisanship and ideology, choosing instead to present a budget that steals from the poor and gives to the rich, loots the public treasury while running up billions in debt in order to cut cheques that enriches itself and its political cronies.*

It has been moved by the honourable member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux),

THAT the amendment be amended by adding after clause (dd), by following clauses:

- (ee) the following to—appeared by the most basic standards of honesty—[*interjection*] Okay.

It has been moved by the honourable member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable member for Tyndall Park,

THAT the amendment be—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense? So ordered.

It will be agreed as written by the honourable member for River Heights.

The motion is in order. The floor is open for debate.

The honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare). [*interjection*]

Oh, sorry. The honourable member for Assiniboia.

An Honourable Member: Can I begin?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Assiniboia. Sorry, we—there was a mix-up of the lineup here, so.

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): I'm sure my honourable friend from Transcona can cool his jets for a little bit. I'm sure that there will be ample time for him to express his thoughts. So I certainly will look forward to hearing that and I will jump on the opportunity to express my thoughts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to speak to Budget 2021. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the fantastic community spirit in my constituency of Assiniboia. The community, as well as all communities, have dealt with the significant challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the community of St. James-Assiniboia has a high demographic of senior citizens, many of whom are living in personal-care homes and 'congradegate' living facilities.

I am pleased to announce that the FIT immunizations teams have provided second doses to all eligible and consenting residents in our licenced personal-care homes. Deer Lodge Centre Golden West Centennial Lodge, Heritage Lodge and Oakview place have all been serviced with vaccinations.

The FIT teams are now visiting the other living sites in Assiniboia to administer the first dose of 'pfetzer' vaccine to the senior residents. I look forward to sharing in the celebrations of the All Seniors Care seniors games at Sturgeon Creek I and II this June.

I've always enjoyed participating with this seniors group who are always very exciting and, also too, very encouraging for the activities they carry on at their age. So, putting the pandemic behind, I look forward to participating and—in an activity that goes on in Assiniboia with our seniors.

As we continue the vaccine rollout plan, the vaccine doses can now be administrated by local

Assiniboia doctor's offices and our Assiniboia community pharmacies for Manitobans over 62 years of age and for those 55 to 64 that meet the specific conditions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very proud to say that we have a very supportive health community in Assiniboia, and certainly they're always willing to contribute, should they be given the opportunity.

I am pleased to note that our community members are taking advantage of this opportunity whenever the 'vaccinines' are available.

We all have a strong desire to return to some type of normalcy. Families in my community are well served by our community clubs, Heritage Victoria and Assiniboia West. Sports registrations of soccer and baseball have already occurred, and we are eager to have our children engage in the much needed physical activities, in a team environment, that they haven't been able to take advantage of during COVID. These community clubs are made up of volunteers who are engaged in our community and so supportive, and they're looking so forward to getting back involved in these type of activities.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

The City of Winnipeg has reopened the St. James-Assiniboia Centennial Pool facility for swimming and gym usage in my constituency, to a capacity of 25 per cent, meeting the regulations. It should be noted that this facility also, too, was housing COVID tasting-testing facilities in our area, and certainly was a key area—or, a key central area to address the needs of our community.

Our Assiniboia restaurants have really stepped up and adapted to the challenges of the pandemic by changing the dynamics of their method of service to their patrons. In order to keep our restaurants from closing their doors completely, our community members know to support local, and they've really done a fabulous job doing that.

In the Assiniboia community Facebook posts by our residents, you can always find interesting stories to share, with pictures and praise for their quality and their values. Even through tough times, these restaurants find ways to give back to their community.

The Bruce Oake Recovery Centre and the Grace Hospital can attest to the generosity of our restaurants and small businesses in our community. Madam Speaker, Assiniboia Downs continued to offer recreation to the residents of Manitoba with off-track gaming and, as well, acted as a facility for COVID testing.

I am confident that my community—constituency of Assiniboia, like other constituencies in Manitoba, will continue to rise to the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19. Social distancing, wearing masks and good hand-washing hygiene have become a norm there.

* (16:30)

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the hard work and commitment and dedication of our Grace Hospital staff. The courageous staff of Grace Hospital has stood in there for our community and city and certainly deserve the accolades that they get from our community. Many times I've witnessed just parades going by and recognizing their hard work, as well as people standing outside their doors at a given time and banging pots and pans in support. It certainly is humbling to see everyone stand up for those very brave people.

My constituents of Assiniboia are remaining vigilant and mindful of opportunities for community transmission. I wish to take the opportunity to thank them for their patience and support as we address and defeat the COVID threat.

Madam Speaker, may I offer condolences on behalf of the people of Assiniboia to all those who have lost loved ones due to COVID-19.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to speak in favour of the 2021 provincial budget. I am pleased to highlight some of the many wonderful initiatives our government is taking in Budget 2021.

First, let me acknowledge the dedication and commitment to the people of Manitoba our Finance Minister continues to display. I have had the pleasure of working with the Finance Minister as a legislative assistant, and I'm always impressed with the expertise that our—the government of Manitoba can depend on in the Finance Department.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to be a member of our government. As a member of our government, I will always be able to take pride in the fact that we keep our promises; people of Manitoba have rewarded us knowing just that.

The budget of—the budget Manitoba can be proud of has two priorities: to protect Manitobans through COVID-19 and to advance Manitoba as we put COVID-19 behind us.

Madam Speaker, this budget is designed to continue to create comfort and security for the people of Manitoba. As we continue to meet the challenges

of COVID-19, to date our government has committed more than \$3.2 billion support—to support health care as well as education systems and investing to ensure our vulnerable people are protected.

Madam Speaker, our government supported Manitoba businesses when they needed it. We continue to do our due diligence and continue to work with business stakeholders to find real solutions.

Madam Speaker, this budget recognized the continued demands on our health-care system. Our government is committed to an increase of \$156 million, bringing our total expenditure on—the health-care system of \$6.98 billion, which is the largest expenditure in Manitoba history in health care.

Madam Speaker, having a significant seniors population in my constituency of Assiniboia, this increased expenditures will continue to help address the needs of those who have supported and built this great province.

Madam Speaker, our new department of health—seniors offers a voice and support for our seniors going forward into the future. Our government understands and recognizes the increasing age demographic in this province.

I was pleased our government has addressed type 1 diabetes challenges. I have heard from many parents of children with type 1 indicating the need for further supports.

Budget 2021 finds a new program to pay for continuous glucose monitoring devices for children and youth under the age of 25. Our government is also increasing the age limit to support young people with type 1 diabetes to access the insulin pump. We have increased the eligible age to 25 from 18.

I must compliment the diabetes organizations who have raised this issue with our government. We have listened to them, Madam Speaker. I was very impressed with their presentations, which I've had the pleasure of hearing a couple of times, and they're certainly a dedicated group and they present a common sense position.

Madam Speaker, our government will continue investing further into health care with several measures, including \$40 million to continue to shorten wait times caused by the pandemic; \$10 million to reduce wait times for hip, knee and cataracts; \$23 million for cancer treatments and 2.7 to expand dialysis treatments.

Madam Speaker, COVID has taken a toll on people's mental health, and many of my constituents have certainly been under stress. I know, even in my own household, my wife and I needed to support each other from time to time. Whenever we got down, we reminded ourselves of how fortunate we are to have family and health. Reviewing a video of our grandchild growing quickly certainly didn't hurt either.

I am blessed to have a family support, but I do recognize not everyone has that opportunity. Our government has established a new Department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery. Budget 2021 commits \$342 million to programs and services as part of that new mandate. Mental health, as well addiction strategy, is part of the new department's mandate.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to advise that the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre is opening soon in Assiniboia. I would like to acknowledge the Premier (Mr. Pallister), the former minister of Health, the current Minister of Health, former minister of Families, current Minister of Families (Ms. Squires), Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) and Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery (Ms. Gordon).

Our government of Manitoba has endorsed this very worthy undertaking and supported it all every step of the way. I've had the opportunity to watch the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre evolve and it is really something to see. The Oake family can be so proud of what they've accomplished in tribute to their son.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to support the government's initiatives to meet the needs of families in Manitoba. We've realized the significant challenges many families face when coming to terms with child-care expenses. To help address child-care costs, Budget 2021 freezes fees for three years. Madam Speaker, I have many parents express concerns that they would be challenged by increases to child care, particularly during the COVID-19 hardship.

We continue to address poverty in Manitoba. The poverty rate created by the previous government was unacceptable and the government has reduced child poverty significantly.

As indicated in Budget 2021 our government has frozen the rent guidelines through '22-23. Madam Speaker, our government understands the pandemic has lasting effect and, by freezing rents, those who are experiencing hardship can catch their breath.

The Rent Assist program is being increased in Budget 2021 between 2.4 per cent and 11 per cent.

Madam Speaker, our government continues to alleviate other financial stress by keeping our promises, in particular maintaining our position that the PST continues to need to be reduced.

Madam Speaker, in 2021 budget addresses the ongoing review of Manitoba education. Manitoba government was elected in 2016 and re-elected in 2019, and one of its platforms was to address education reforms and, as part of that initiative, created the Manitoba education review commission. The commission was made up of members of various backgrounds and was tasked to assess all aspects of existing Manitoba education. As part of the commission's review, they called for public input as well as opinions and observations of Manitoba stakeholders.

The government received the commission's recommendations and developed a long-term strategy for the future of Manitoba education, resulting in a change in legislation. After reviewing the recommendations and study of education in Manitoba, our government took the position one of the challenges Manitoba—in Manitoba education was an inconsistency in the delivery of education. Our government has presented legislation which is structured to address inconsistencies and create a central strategy to ensure all students reap the benefits of current successes as well as identify and focus on the challenges with an overall provincial plan.

* (16:40)

The new provincial strategy further establishes the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen) as overseer of education in Manitoba and has established three levels of education authority. The grassroots, which will be school community councils, will have the responsibility of further liaising with teachers and principals with new responsibilities. The provincial advisory committee of education will be created and each SCC will elect a member to the provincial advisory committee. The provincial advisory committee will advise the Minister of Education and the overseeing body of Manitoba education delivery will be the provincial authority. The provincial election authority will be a term appointment made up of individuals who bring a multitude of educational expertise with a variety of backgrounds.

I wish to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the St. James-Assiniboia board of

trustees. Our school trustees are passionate when serving our children and our communities' best interest. It has become apparent to me that the responsibilities of school trustees are diminishing.

The government of Manitoba was elected on platforms to fund education from general revenue rather than assessing an education property tax. The Budget 2021 does speak to that. The ability to implement a special level-levy is being eliminated, and as education will now be funded from the provincial general revenue, a major responsibility of school boards has been having a taxing authority, and now that's going to be done through the provincial government.

There are certainly a lot of different components to being a school trustee, and I know that the former speaker from River Heights has indicated that the opportunity of dealing with taxing authority as well as doing provincial bargaining may not have contributed to the responsibilities of a trustee. I can assure you, as a former trustee, with the amount of money that is invested in those two components, it's far more than 10 per cent of a responsibility of a school trustee. And it is—if it's not more than 10 per cent as the member indicates, then, frankly, the trustees are not doing their jobs.

Budget 2021 calls for an investment of over \$3 billion in our school system. Madam Speaker, our government is living up to its promise to ease the pressure on the Manitoba taxpayer. We are reducing the education property tax by 50 per cent the next two years for residential, and farm properties at 25 per cent per year. Manitoba homeowners can expect an average rebate of \$800 over the next two years.

Included in 2021 budget is a \$5.5 million expenditure into special needs requirements, and certainly this is a growing area of expenditure, and we understand that and address it.

Madam Speaker, I can see my time is getting extremely short. I would end off by saying I believe this budget is beneficial to the people of Manitoba, and I look forward to being part of the government implementing it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): It's always a pleasure to rise virtually, even in this sterile, one-dimensional environment of the office out here in the constituency. It kind of reminds me a little bit of this budget: sterile and one-dimensional.

I will say that this is a budget of missed opportunities: missed opportunities presented to us by a pandemic that is relentless and requires not only dedication but also some imagination in helping Manitobans deal with the realities that we've been having to deal with since last March. And what we have here is a budget that certainly misses the mark on a number—a number—of areas.

And just to—want to talk a little bit about the constituency of Transcona. It's an area of the city in the northeast that is served by many employers with an industrial bent; an area of people that work hard for a living and that understand the value of a government that can provide services when they need them—instead of services that, unfortunately for our part of the city here in the northeast, that have been cut, reduced and left on the side of the road, almost, like, kicked to the curb, I would say. And that is something that our constituents have been bringing to me and to my attention.

There are a number of areas I will go into. Health care, I'll go into child care, and we will go into education.

On the health-care front, a lot of it has to do with the personal-care-home space that we have here in Transcona and in the northeast. This is well documented that this part of the city has the lowest per capita personal-care-home-bed space in the city. As a matter of fact, I recall somebody campaigning in front of Park Manor Personal Care Home in 2016 to be in government and saying—standing right in front of our personal-care home—saying that they would invest in this particular area.

And yet here we are in 2021. We have—Park Manor had to endure one of the worst COVID outbreaks because Park Manor wasn't modernized, wasn't brought up to 2021 standards, because the residents at Park Manor have to be in rooms, that some are four to a room. We still have quads, we still have doubles and very few single-room accommodations.

Now the community five, six years ago had a plan in place to expand Park Manor. And then we were told by the WRHA to, okay, that's not the plan that we want to put in place now; we want to do something that reflects modern-day personal-care-home initiatives, one that includes a pod design. So back to the drawing board.

And of course, the good people out here put together a plan and have yet to see it put into place.

And I'll tell you, this has a number of our residents very concerned. They want to see this government take seriously the lack of space, the lack of quality space. Because, like I said earlier, we had to endure one of the worst outbreaks in the city and in the province. Out of 100 residents, we lost 27, many of whom I had a personal relationship with, many of whom that I worked with on a number of committees in our community in the years past, and that, you know, we greatly miss. And I want to extend my condolences to our families that had to endure that.

And yet again, here was an opportunity for this government to say, you know what, we have to address this need in northeast Winnipeg. And what do we have? We have nothing. We have silence. It was an opportunity, once again, in the northeast quadrant in Transcona, one of the fastest growing areas of Winnipeg, where the needs for health care are beginning to rise, where many people are calling home because it's such a great place to raise a family. So, here was an opportunity for this government to restore some services that had been taken away from our area of Manitoba and our area of Winnipeg.

* (16:50)

One of them was a very highly regarded CancerCare clinic at Concordia Hospital, where patients here in the northeast had the opportunity to have health care close to home, where they have to endure the ravages, I would say, of chemotherapy and of cancer treatment, where it's a short walk from a parking area, where they can have nurses that can provide, of course, quality care—doesn't matter where they are, they're always going to get that—but an opportunity to be in community, to have a sense of community, because many of the professionals that worked at that centre also lived in our neighbourhood and knew many of the patients.

And now these same people—these same Winnipeggers, Manitobans—have to go to areas that require more walking, require paid parking, require getting to know new people again during a time when it is very stressful.

I'll tell you, the walks to those clinics are long. When you get into month five, month six, month seven, or a year of treatment, they become very difficult to navigate. And it would have been an opportunity for this government to rectify that in an area of the city that is, like I said earlier, growing.

And so, we would like to see—and I will certainly be in support of—the number of the amendments that

the member, our leader from Fort Rouge, brought into place. And we're hoping that the majority of the House will take those amendments and seriously ponder and support after, because these are important amendments that really bring forth the—not only the experiences of working-day people, but also the needs of our working-day, everyday Manitobans, of which Transcona is made up of a lot.

So when we talk about missed opportunities, we have with us now—or, we have in front of us now, an education property tax reduction that, really, I believe, again, is yet another missed opportunity. Instead of having an across-the-board 25 per cent cut, we could have done—and what we've talked about too and what we're having this discussion in our caucus all the time is how we properly fund education and that sometimes, yes, yes, we can't have a reliance on property. But here was an opportunity where we could have said that we were going to—we can remove the education property tax completely from homeowners that have property values of \$300,000 or under.

People that live in wealthy neighbourhoods certainly can afford to, you know, be patient in receiving their rebate, but I will tell you, for people that live in homes that have a value of under \$300,000, here was an opportunity to say, you know what, we're going to remove the education property tax completely.

And then we'll have those people that have wealth, that have better—or, not better—that have nicer homes, can certainly wait for theirs. But no, it's right across the board, and of course this disproportionately favours the wealthy and well connected.

But like I said earlier, another missed opportunity that really would have shown what—how seriously this government takes the welfare of everyday working Manitobans.

You know, in Transcona, in this area of the northeast, it's—again, like I said earlier, was—is a growing area, one that is in need of child care, licenced child care, to the tune of almost a 1,200-family wait-list in my own constituency. Canterbury Park Day Care: 400-plus wait-list; Jaycees day care: 300-plus waitlist; the learning tree, which is a daycare located in Radisson, but nonetheless, 500-plus waiting list.

Here was an opportunity for this government to really deal with this scarcity, to deal with what's known as the child-care desert of the city of Winnipeg. And what do we have? We have in a

budget something to the tune of 149 spaces, I believe, if I was reading that correctly. A drop in the proverbial bucket.

And I recall the member from Portage la Prairie saying that, whoa, we froze child-care fees so that, you know, they don't have to experience any increases. But you can freeze all you want. I mean, when you don't have any space, what does a freeze mean to somebody that needs child care? It means absolutely nothing. What they needed to see instead is a plan to deal with this.

We have examples throughout the country of how a government can creatively deal with child-care shortage. It can start first with proper training and incentivizing the ECE career. No, instead what we have is we have very little in this budget to deal with that piece.

And the other piece too, is that many in child care are still stung by what happened—or what is currently happening and happened earlier in the pandemic—where masks were sent that were expired.

Now, I know that that may not sound like a big deal, but I tell you that sends messages. And it sent messages to people in the child-care sector that this government wasn't taking their needs for PPE or their needs for a safe working space seriously. And so these are areas, again, that was—that indicated a missed opportunity.

Speaking of missed opportunities, we have, of course, education—I could go on for hours, and hopefully I'll get the opportunity to do that at a later date—where we have an opportunity, a once-in-a-lifetime, generational education review that went into great depth, that met with many Manitobans, that articulated their desires for an education system that is responsive, of course, to our students and to our communities.

Instead, we have now in front of us something that certainly doesn't reflect what was in the education review, to the point now where I've received a number of letters. And, of course, in our consultations with parents and with school boards, they have sent letters to my office.

And I just want to quickly read one into the record, and some of the points that were made.

Dear Mr. Altomare, the release of Bill 64 on Monday, March 15th, brought a sad day for democracy, education and truth in politics. Citizens and our young stand to lose the most in this latest

assault on public ideals and the people who serve them.

Conservative means a small government that is held accountable to the most local of electorates so the opinion of individuals is respected.

The PC Party's idea of conservative is to completely change the way we do education so that one provincial education authority, answerable only to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and minister, is in charge. This translates into the complete removal of democracy in education. That is not what the costly taxpayer funded educational review advised to do.

Now, I can go on, Madam Speaker, but the tenor of this really says it all. Have a review and then do not implement many of the recommendations that were brought forth in a review.

The review itself talks about child poverty and inadequate transient housing for children as the No. 1 impediment to child improvement in school and child education in school. Yet, in the bill that was brought forward by this government, it is mentioned only once.

Now, if that isn't something that is—that confounds reality, I don't know what is.

And what we have now is a situation where (1) the review certainly doesn't reflect what is in the current Education Modernization Act.

And this is something that when we get to debate that particular bill, we'll be sure to bring to—forth on the floor of this Legislature.

The other piece, of course, now is we're dealing with a bit of a tax piece that, much like the Harper Conservatives were doing in the early 2010s, one where you have these boutique tax cuts, hoping to keep the teachers quiet and just keep them over here on the side—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have four minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 8, 2021

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Ministerial Statements		Education System	
Holocaust Memorial Day		Altomare	2239
Stefanson	2229	Cullen	2239
Brar	2229	COVID-19 Vaccine Sites	
Gerrard	2230	Gerrard	2240
		Stefanson	2240
		Pallister	2240
Members' Statements		Affordable Housing	
Howard Barker		Micklefield	2241
Wishart	2230	Squires	2241
Manitoba Educators		Rural and Northern Manitoba	
Naylor	2231	Sala	2241
Jean Gunter		Helwer	2241
Lagimodiere	2231	Petitions	
Kraft Hockeyville Contest		Public Child-Care Grants	
Brar	2232	Adams	2241
Lead Exposure Screening		Bushie	2242
Gerrard	2232	Lathlin	2242
Oral Questions		Diagnostic Testing Accessibility	
Health-Care Funding		Maloway	2243
Kinew	2233	Public Child-Care Grants	
Pallister	2233	Sala	2243
COVID-19 Vaccine Program		Dauphin Correctional Centre	
Kinew	2233	Sandhu	2244
Pallister	2233	Wiebe	2244
Long-Term-Care Funding			
Kinew	2234		
Pallister	2234		
Education System			
Kinew	2234		
Pallister	2235		
Long-Term-Care Funding			
Asagwara	2235		
Stefanson	2235		
Renters and Small Business			
Wasyliw	2236		
Fielding	2237		
Post-Secondary Education Funding			
Moses	2238		
Ewasko	2238		

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