

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

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 18, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

House business—routine proceedings. House business.

The honourable—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business.

The Speaker: The honourable Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Johnson: Pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that private member's resolution be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook). The title of the resolution is Calling on the Provincial Government to put Patients over Politics.

The Speaker: It has been announced that pursuant to rule 34(8), the Opposition House Leader has announced

that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Roblin. The title of the resolution is Calling on the Provincial Government to put Patients over Politics.

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Mr. Johnson: Can you please resume the debate on Bill 211—second reading of Bill 211.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—
PUBLIC BILLSBill 211—The Drivers and Vehicles
Amendment Act
(Manitoba Parks Licence Plates)

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will resume debate on second reading of Bill 211, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Manitoba Parks Licence Plates). It stands in the name of the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, who has three minutes remaining.

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I would just like to take these last three minutes while we talk about the parks plate—talk about something I noticed on my way home from work the other day. I took a look at the existing Manitoba plate, and it looked a lot like sitting on the beach at Bakers Narrows Provincial Park. I would even argue, at this point in time, that our provincial plate is a parks—Manitoba parks plate. So I'm really happy to just point that out to everyone here, that Manitoba is a beautiful province with great natural resources that we can enjoy and see across this province.

And I was just thinking of an experience I had when the boys were really young. I was talking, my last time up here, about time I would go to Adam Lake. Adam Lake is in the Turtle Mountain Provincial Park, not far from my home in Brandon. And the—experiencing the natural beauty of Manitoba, and naturally, the natural gifts that we have here. I—we had gone, a very young age—I think my oldest son Andrew was maybe three at the time, the first time he—or two, when we went camping for the first time.

I remember going back. Adam Lake, probably, it was the very—about the beginning of May, season's opening, and we—I think he was about five at the time.

I just tell this story because it really—it goes to what makes kids happy, what makes families happy. And I just love the fact everyone gets to enjoy this. We dropped the camper off. We set it up a little bit. And so I brought the boys in the truck to go get some wood.

And if you've ever been camping with two boys that have a lot of energy, going to get campfire wood is a really good way to burn some of that off. But when we pulled up to the big pile of wood which sometimes is a little wet or whatever, we got out of the truck and he sat there and sniffed. He goes, man, it even smells like camping, right?

And so what I took from that is that it goes to those nerves—there's nerves that were firing in his brain to memory. And at that point in time when he was in that place, all of those great memories about being around the campfire with family and with friends and in Adam Lake, just kind of brought him back to that safe, happy place that I think we want all Manitobans to enjoy.

And so we already have a parks plate. It's a beautiful, Friendly Manitoba plate. Let's keep it at that.

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): It's an absolute pleasure to rise today to put a few words on the record for this important bill as the representative of the area around Rivers that's part of our provincial parks network, as the recreation park at Oak Lake Beach, and of course, the named after—my constituency is named after the jewel of our region, the Spruce Woods Provincial Park, home to the Spirit Sands.

So this is a very, very important bill brought forward by my colleague, the MLA for Riding Mountain. Just wanted to put a few words on the record. We heard last week from colleagues opposite, lots of questions about whether Manitobans really thought this bill was important; whether they, you know, had been consulted or supported on the bill. So I'd just like to read a few words into the record from Manitobans who are passionate about this piece of legislation and about our provincial parks.

Good afternoon, as a long time cottage owner, former president of the Whiteshell cottage association and currently chair of the Manitoba Provincial Park Cabin Owners Association which advocates for provincial park cabin owners paying only their fair share of the operating costs to operate and maintain our beautiful provincial parks in which Manitobans own cottages, I would like to offer my support to the concept outlined in Bill 211, i.e., the sale of specialty

park—provincial park vehicle licence plates with revenues collected dedicated to investment in provincial parks. I support this idea for two main reasons where I perceive this concept will be a win-win opportunity.

* (10:10)

Number 1: From a provincial government perspective, Manitobans displaying this licence plate wherever they may travel would, in essence, become billboard advertising Manitoba provincial parks. By displaying this information, it will be an opportunity to promote tourism to our beautiful parks, which, from a government perspective, is a very large budgetary item for revenue creation to contribute to provincial coffers.

Number 2: From a Manitoban provincial parks cabin owner perspective, the dedicated-to-parks revenues raised from the sale of these popular specialty vehicle licence plates will be reinvested into our provincial parks to enhance the park experience in the way of new refurbished infrastructure, new amenities and services that would enhance lake communities. Cottage owners would expect that this additional source of revenue would assist in attaining MPPCOA's objective where Manitobans owning cottages in MB provincial parks would pay only their fair share of fees in line with other provincial park user stakeholders.

I hope your legislative colleagues agree with the overwhelming benefits provided by this proposed bill. Thank you, Ronald S. Smith—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

If the member is quoting from a private letter, he'll have to table it.

An Honourable Member: Yes, that's fine, Honourable Speaker. Can I table them all at the end, or should I table them individually?

The Speaker: If you have more, you can table them all at the end.

Mr. Jackson: Good morning, I became aware of this bill via the MPPCOA yesterday. I am a cottage owner at Wallace Lake Provincial Park and I also happen to be on the executive for MPPCOA.

I think Bill 211 is a great way to promote our beautiful provincial parks, and this will help generate revenue that could be spent back in parks. It will also help promote our parks in other areas of the country and the USA as people travel there by vehicle. I believe the Province is looking at creating more

revenue streams for the park, so this is a—definitely a great way to do that.

What a great thought this is, and you have our support from the Wallace Lake Cottage Owners Association as well as my support, being a board member of the MPPCOA. Best regards, Greg Dyck, cottage owner at Wallace Lake and board member of MPPCOA.

Good morning. As the chair of the Hecla Historic Village Association in Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park, I support Bill 211. We are passionate about our Hecla Historic Village, which requires regular maintenance and upkeep. Extra funding for our parks would mean that we could properly maintain and hopefully enhance Manitoba provincial parks. Manitobans value parks. Sincerely, Belinda McNaughton, chair, Hecla Historic Village Association.

The Beresford Lake Cottage Owners Association supports the intent and purpose for the proposed Bill 211. Chris Dudek, president of Beresford Lake Cottage Owners Association.

The Davidson Lake Cottage Owners Association supports Bill 211. Spencer Newton, president, Davidson Lake Cottage Owners Association.

It has come to my attention, the MPPCOA, that you are working to have specialty Manitoba parks licence plates developed for sale to allow Manitobans to show their love for provincial parks while helping to revitalize the park with revenue from the sale of the specialty vehicle licence plate invested in the park.

On behalf of the Whiteshell Cottagers Association, I applaud your continued support and efforts to enhance our beautiful parks and have our support for establishing a special Manitoba parks vehicle licence plate, with revenue going to our Provincial Parks Endowment Fund. Thank you. Best regards, Ian Baragar, president, Whiteshell Cottage Owners Association.

I hope this message finds you well. I am not too late in sending you my notice of support. I am the chair of the Grindstone provincial park cottage owners association and was notified that regarding your bill reading of Bill 211 in Thursday's Legislative Assembly, I just wanted to reach out and let you know that the GCOA also supports this bill. Dale Ducharme, president and chair of the Grindstone provincial park cottage owners association.

So with all due respect to the member from Brandon East, it sounds like Manitobans do think

we need a specialty bill for provincial parks. I have more correspondence from Larry Lee, Martin Enns, Wayne Betker and many, many more Manitobans passionate about this bill and its support for our provincial parks.

It's clear that Manitobans support this bill. The question is: Will the NDP?

And I table that correspondence for the House. Sorry. And I tabled it for the House.

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): It's always a privilege and honour to stand and put some words on the record.

You know, I would say to the member from Spruce Woods, I really appreciate all of the outreach that you've done and communication with community. And maybe, if there was a bit more of that over the last seven and a half years, then you wouldn't be sitting on that side of the House.

So I appreciate it very much. But I'm very pleased that they're turning over a new leaf. It's very good. It's fantastic.

But you know, well, truly, I'm very honoured to stand and speak on parks in Manitoba, specifically. It's very—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Pankratz: —it's one of those things that really brings Manitobans together.

And so today, I get the chance to put some words on the record about how important parks have been in my life, and it's also, you know, it's nice to touch on this because our stories are really what draw us together as a province. And so many of our stories in Manitoba run through parks. So I really appreciate this bill being brought forward.

I also just want to take a moment to, before I get into the meat of this, thank our incredible Minister for the Environment and Climate Change for all of the fantastic work being done in this regard, in protecting our lands and waterways. And also, you know, just to say the member for Rossmere (MLA Schmidt) is an incredible representative for that group of folks out in Winnipeg, so they're very lucky to have her. I would also say—*[interjection]* Yes, I think it deserves a round of applause.

I also need to just quickly mention that I'm very excited about the upcoming playoffs, and I need to thank the Winnipeg Jets for putting on a great season for Manitoba. I know we're getting a little bit off topic

here, but I just want to quickly thank everybody in Winnipeg for their support in Manitoba. I think it's going to be a fun playoff run. And if, unfortunately, you are afflicted with an affinity for the Leafs, you may not be quite as on-board, but, you know, we'll still bring you in. We'll bring you into the fold.

But back to things that connect Manitobans like the Winnipeg Jets: parks. Parks bring people together. And, you know, I was speaking about the Minister of Environment, and I just want to touch on some of the great things our government has been doing in regards to environmental protections and supports.

So, you know, we're protecting Manitoba's lands and waters, lowering our emissions by actually investing in our provincial parks—planting trees, increasing wildlife—or wildfire protection and we're adding new staff for Parks and other services through Environments and Climate Change to better support access to natural spaces and protect our environment. We're also revitalizing and staffing up the Conservation Officer Service to build relations and foster an effective and responsive service that works with Manitoba communities to ensure public and natural resources are protected.

The previous government, unfortunately, signed some contracts that increase the costs of e-permits for hunters, anglers and park passes for Manitobans. And, you know, we're reviewing some of these contracts and covering the cost increases so Manitobans don't take the weight of the former government's mistakes. And it's just yet another example of our need to lower costs for Manitobans. So we're really working hard on affordability and also tying that in to some of the environmental concerns around our parks here in Manitoba.

You know, in our budget, we're also investing in multifaceted strategies to protect our lands and waterways. And I just want to touch on a few of those before I get to some of the stories that connect us with parks.

So we've got \$5.4 million in rebates for new and used electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids, which is another focus on the environment—making sure that we have low-emissions initiatives going forward. We're also partnering with the federal government, which goes along with, again, our communication that we want to continue with both municipal and federal representatives to deliver heat pumps to Manitoba homes, reducing emissions and saving families money.

So \$10 million to support plans to meet Manitoba's emissions reduction commitments under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change and part of the Low Carbon Economy Fund bilateral agreement with the federal government. So again, this really speaks to our want and our need to really create strong relationships with all levels of government and make sure that we're supporting important parts of our province like provincial parks, yes.

* (10:20)

So I do want to sort of get into—because I know we don't have as much time today; we've only about 10 minutes to speak. I was talking about the stories that sort of connect us as Manitobans and how they run through our province, through the provincial parks, and how important it is that we continue to support those.

So in 2001, in Birds Hill park, I met an absolutely incredible person, at the Winnipeg Folk Festival, actually. It was an incredibly special weekend. And I should actually say, our Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Simard) has increased funding to the arts by 10 per cent this year. It's unbelievable.

An Honourable Member: Huge.

MLA Pankratz: Yes, it's quite impressive. And I just want to thank him for the support of arts communities.

So—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I'd ask the member to please keep his comments relevant to what's on the paper to be discussed today. He's vectored pretty far afield here a couple of times now. So bring your comments back to the bill.

MLA Pankratz: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I appreciate your guidance.

So what I was saying is the folk festival is actually held in Birds Hill Provincial Park, which is an incredible festival that is supported by a provincial park. And what I was speaking to is my experiences within that park.

So that year, I was fortunate enough to meet an incredible young woman who I had met a couple of years prior, and we spent the weekend chatting and hanging out and seeing music in Birds Hill Provincial Park. And we actually went on our first date a couple of days later. And actually, 22 years later, 2024, that is my wife.

So she—so three kids later—*[interjection]* Yes, well, you know, she very much appreciates the parks in Manitoba and actually, she grew up going to Clear Lake with her family. She had a number of family members in Brandon. They had a cabin out there, and so many of her formative memories come from spending time at Clear Lake.

So whenever I think, you know, of any sort of initiatives or work that can be done towards protecting our provincial parks, I just want to make sure that we're taking the time to really get the proper initiatives in place to support them. And I think that that's exactly what our Minister of the Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt) is doing right now.

And, you know, I'm not necessarily in disagreement with the plates idea. I just really want to make sure that we're having a fulsome conversation, as we are today. That's what this place is about. And I really appreciate the process that happens in this space.

One other story that I would like to tell is from a couple of years ago. I was still working as a firefighter and I came into work and there was a big group in the kitchen. They were talking about a new challenge that they were going to take on. And they said they wanted to do a triathlon. And I thought, huh, interesting. Because I'm not sure who here remembers, but, you know, when the swimming lessons were happening late '80s and early '90s, it went by colours, right? So went up to, I think it was blue. I only got up to red, which is not even out of the shallow end, which is pretty weak, I'll admit.

I actually spent time as an adult getting to the pool and learning how to swim a little bit better because these friends of mine told me I should do this triathlon with them. And guess where it was held? St. Malo Provincial Park; an incredible space, a beautiful beach, beautiful forest.

So we spent time—actually, we agreed we were going to do this thing together and we spent time training. But I'll be honest, I had heard a lot of stories about swimming through the lake, the beautiful lake in St. Malo Provincial Park and I was concerned about whether I was going to be able pull it off or not.

I am proud to say that I actually came out of the water, out of a lot of—after a lot of hard work in second place in the swim. And then I completely tanked. I was exhausted. So the rest of the race was a bit of a challenge. I'm not going to tell you how the rest of it finished, but I do just want to say that my experiences

throughout my life in provincial parks have been so, so formative. I have spent countless weekends and nights and summers with my wife, whom I met at Birds Hill park, as I said earlier, with my three kids.

And you know, I've got to say, just this morning, we were chatting about what I was doing at work and my kids came up to me and they said, you know, Dad, this is so cool that you get to talk about all the stuff that we've done together. And then I have to say—I don't want to get into any trouble here, but they passed me this. It says: coolest dad ever. And they said, you talk about provincial parks.

The Speaker: Order, please.

I'm afraid displaying things like that is against the rules, so I'd ask the member to refrain from doing that.

MLA Pankratz: I'd like to—I apologize, Honourable Speaker.

And I will cede my time here in this space. I apologize.

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): It is a true pleasure and privilege to get up here today and talk about our beautiful provincial parks, something that means a lot to me and my family, and if I may, share a little bit of a personal history with my experience in Manitoba provincial parks.

I moved to Manitoba almost 25 years ago from Alberta and I'm a proud Manitoban. And I moved here with my, now wife. She's from Manitoba. Her family are—the Friesen family, they are from the Steinbach region. When you say Friesens and Steinbach, I mean that doesn't quite narrow it down but they are East-Man Feeds Friesens from Steinbach.

And my partner's father, Larry Friesen, helped start East-Man Feeds and he started a small hog operation just outside of St. Malo. And they lived in St. Malo and they utilized their provincial park there; the beautiful lakes in St. Malo.

And the first time I met my father-in-law—my soon to be father-in-law, Larry Friesen, I went to his hog operation, which is located—was located in the town of—near the town of Rivers, Manitoba. And what he did was he purchased an old military base and converted it into a hog operation. And so I went out there, he toured me in the hog barns. I don't know if anyone's ever toured a hog barn before but it's—the smell—you'll never forget the smell.

But you know what he did? He took good care of his pigs. He took good care of his workers. He was—

he treated his workers really fairly and he was the largest employer in Rivers, Manitoba. And so when I was out in Rivers, visiting my family, it was the first time I was out there and my—I came outside of the house. They had a house on the base and on—at—in the driveway of this house was an RV. I'm like, wow, this is a beautiful RV. My father-in-law takes the keys and throws them at me and says, we're going down to the lake. I want you to drive the RV.

And I was 22 at the time and it was a pretty big RV, and it was quite intimidating. But being 22 and gung-ho, I said, sure, I'll take the RV and we went barreling down the road and we hit the property at Lake Wahtopanah, Rivers, which is the constituency of Spruce Woods, which in Spruce Woods provincial heritage park we have the desert-like landscape known as the Spirit Sands, right? And the sands are home to many unique species, including Manitoba's only lizard, the northern prairie skink, also, western hognose snakes and two types of cacti.

Lake Wahtopanah is an Indigenous word for canoe people. And I've spent several canoe trips at the Lake Wahtopanah, canoeing across to CJ's Snack Shack at the Rivers campground and enjoy some ice cream with my family. *[interjection]* It is a great spot, yes.

* (10:30)

And Larry had four girls, one of them turned out to be my wife, and they all turned into social workers, teachers, nurse and we have one entrepreneur.

You know, I was driving that RV, I never drove anything so big in my life. And I just remember going down the trail, down to the lake, and the RV was rocking back and forth, and I had a big smile on my face. I think my father-in-law was wondering why he gave me the keys. But it was a lot of fun, and we arrived there safely, I'm happy to say. And we ate lunch, and we had a fire by the lake. And, you know, he had a hog roast at the lake many times, and it was a lot of fun. And we go there quite often as a family.

And I also want to shout out Birds Hill Provincial Park, and my colleague from Waverley was talking about the Winnipeg Folk Festival and how they've been able to partner with the Birds Hill Provincial Park and bring people together in such a beautiful way through music and art, and families go camping.

And I don't know if anyone here has been to the folk festival and has had the pleasure of camping at the campground. It's a lot of fun. And families are—you see families sit around the bonfire playing guitar,

you can walk to different campsites, and it's a really good time. And I enjoy Birds Hill park. I enjoy—you can walk on the one trail where you can stick your hand out and feed the birds, and the birds will come land on your fingers. And I think that's so cool.

And I think we were in Elkhorn earlier, a couple of months ago. And it was my first time at Clear Lake. And I just thought about how incredibly beautiful that area of Manitoba is. And the people there are just so passionate about the environment and about their community and—really enjoy that. *[interjection]*

Okay, well, I think since we're going to talk about constituencies, I would invite the member from Spruce Woods to bring out his suitcase and flip-flops, because I have questions as to why the PCs are flip-flopping on Manitoba parks.

The PCs made it clear their priority was looking to privatize our parks. The former minister's mandate letter, the MLA for Riding Mountain, directed the minister to identify opportunities to attract private and philanthropic investments. Now that same member is bringing forward this private member's bill to show his support for our public provincial parks. It would be helpful for the members opposite—could clarify for Manitobans exactly what their stance is on Manitoba's provincial parks.

You know, a survey from 2023 from MGEU found 71 per cent of Manitobans oppose transferring management of parks to the private sector. Isn't that funny? People don't want our parks to be private.

Let's talk about Asessippi. Great skiing. Asessippi Provincial Park is one of many incredible places to take your family for camping trip, a day hike, a fishing trip and take part in many water sports. Asessippi is also one of Manitoba's prime locations for skiing and snowboarding, and it's always great to encourage folks to go outdoor in all seasons to make parks enjoyable.

I enjoyed riding my snowmobile at—on Lake Wahtopanah in the wintertime with my brother-in-law and a lot of friends from the Brandon area and the Rivers community. There's so much we can offer folks to through our provincial parks, and it's really important that we keep them public.

And we can talk about ecotourism as well. Ecotourism, it does 'furel'—fuel Manitoba's economy. And it is the fourth fastest growing industry in the world; 69 per cent of all Manitoba tourist visits occur in the regions. Tourists are drawn to our diverse landscapes. We have a tourism sector to thank for

supporting over 20,000 jobs and contributing over \$625 million in annual tax revenues.

Manitoba has five different ecoregions in the province, from prairie grasslands to frozen Arctic tundra. I think that's incredible. I just—you know, moving to Manitoba, I didn't know too much about this province until I moved here and I learned about just how beautiful it is; the beautiful lakes. And we have polar bears in this province, you know? We have such a diverse ecosystem here, and it's so important that we keep it public for people to enjoy.

Many of our parks have recreation trails for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking and hiking. And I think, you know, it's really important. I know, when I go to a provincial park in the summertime, I see many families, diverse families, enjoying our provincial parks. And I know that it's important for them to gather in provincial parks.

You know, you walk through a provincial park in the summertime and you can, you know, smell the barbecues and see the families, hear the music. You—it's a wonderful time and we're very blessed; we're very fortunate here in Manitoba to have such incredible provincial parks, Honourable Speaker.

And I'm so happy to stand up today and talk about them and talk about my experiences within those provincial parks and how it's helped me love and appreciate Manitoba more and more every year. The more I discover our provincial parks, the more I appreciate Manitoba.

So thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I appreciate your time.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): It is a pleasure to rise today and put a few words on the record about this bill. But before I do, I think it's important to acknowledge the lands, you know.

I thank the Speaker for his land acknowledgement this morning, but, you know, I think it's important to highlight that as we discuss protected lands and waters in Manitoba, what we're really doing is acknowledging Indigenous nations, Indigenous communities and the Indigenous leaders who have really shown leadership and have protected and conserved and stewarded the lands here in Manitoba for time immemorial.

So as the minister responsible for parks and trails, it is really my pleasure to put some words on the

record today. I want to thank the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) for this private member's bill.

But, Honourable Speaker, I must question the sincerity of his party's commitment to parks, to protecting parks, to keeping them public, to keeping them affordable and accessible to the average Manitoban. During their time in government, it's a fact that the PCs cut the parks budget year over year over year, except for maybe one year, which they're going to talk about, but that was in an attempt to buy votes, which failed.

Between 2016 and 2023, the Department of Environment and Climate Change, the staffing was really slashed and burned. The staffing in Environment and Climate Change was reduced by 70 per cent between 2016 and 2023. That's a fact, and that includes parks staff, which were slashed.

The PCs privatized park services, including park pass administration and reservations. They privatized park waste collection. The member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) alluded to this, Honourable Speaker, about the cost of that.

And I'd like to share with Manitobans that just last year, Manitobans—the Manitoba government paid \$1.3 million in additional administration and cancellation fees due to the private contracts that the PCs negotiated quite poorly. Those are fees that our government has chosen not to pass on to Manitobans at the point of sale. We've absorbed those costs at this point. But that's what—that's the cost of privatization, Honourable Speaker.

Unlike the previous government, on this side of the House, we are a listening government. In 2021, as the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham) noted, Manitobans were surveyed and more than 70 per cent indicated that privatization of public parks was wrong. We are a listening government. Our NDP government, like Manitobans, believe that the natural beauty of Manitoba parks belong to Manitobans. That's why we'll never privatize parks, Honourable Speaker.

I am so proud of the mandate given to me by our Premier (Mr. Kinew), which includes direction to ensure that Manitoba parks 'reman' public and affordable for Manitobans. We're going to ensure that. We're going to ensure that Manitobans and their families can enjoy that and for the tourists that our parks attract to this beautiful province.

So again, while I may appreciate the spirit of this bill, I do question the sincerity of the opposition's bill, Honourable Speaker, because actions speak louder

than words. While the words in this bill might appear to make some sense, their actions while in government tell a different story.

So I'd like to speak a little bit about the quality of life that parks in Manitoba offer. You know, parks in Manitoba here, while they are profitable and while they do attract important business dollars to Manitoba, they're not run as a business, Honourable Speaker. They're not intended to generate big revenues. They are truly a public service.

* (10:40)

And that's because we know how much Manitoba parks contribute to the cultural fabric of what it is to be a Manitoban and how much they contribute to our quality of life. I've said before that parks might be the favourite part of my portfolio, and that's because, like many Manitobans, I have grown up in Manitoba parks and have experienced first-hand the way in which spending time in Manitoba parks can contribute to the quality of life and to wellness.

You know, I am the daughter of two public school teachers, so that means that I got to spend the summer with my parents. We spent all of July and August camping and paddling and hiking in Manitoba parks. And our family really bonded in the great outdoors away from the television and the other distractions of modern city life.

And I'm really proud to say that, you know, probably the best memories of my whole life were formed in parks—learning about the constellations, sitting around the campfire with my dad, learning how to fillet a pickerel with my uncle and helping my mom prepare for shore lunch. And I'm now proud to carry on that tradition of memory-making and bonding with my own kids in Manitoba parks.

You know, Manitoba parks and spending time in Manitoba parks also really contributes to wellness and can be a really—a place of solace. I know that when I was on my first maternity leave with my youngest daughter, I would strap her into a Snugli, and we would spend countless days—you know, I'm proud to say that I think I hiked every single trail in Birds Hill park. I've touched every corner in Birds Hill park. Birds Hill park is very close to the city of Winnipeg and to northeast Winnipeg, where I am lucky to live.

You know, getting out and hiking in our parks was a great activity to get me, as a new mom, you know, having some isolation issues, got me out of my house, got me moving my body, got me bonding with

my baby in a safe and quiet and beautiful environment.

And now I spend my summers camping with my kids, now that they're a bit older. We enjoy hiking the Devils Punch Bowl in Spruce Woods. We have climbed the caves in Clearwater Lake, a beautiful park up by The Pas and OCN. Another one of our favourite activities is floating down the Rat River in St. Malo, and I hope that my own children remember these times as fondly as I do.

The opportunities to bond with our loved ones or maybe bond with a stranger you might meet on a trail or on the beach—those strangers soon become friends in our Manitoba parks; I've had that experience also. Those experiences are really unique and don't always present themselves outside of, you know, a remote natural environment like we have in our Manitoba provincial parks.

Parks are also important because they offer recreation and travel in an affordable and accessible way. Not everyone, not all Manitobans, can travel across the country or afford to fly around the world for their vacations. Parks are an affordable way for Manitobans to get away, whether that's by themselves or with their friends or family. And they're also—Manitoba parks are located right across our province—north, south, east, west—so that at—no matter where you live in Manitoba, you are not far from a world-class destination and a vacation.

And that's another reason to be proud of our parks and another reason why government needs to invest in parks and keep them public. We've seen what happens in other provinces when they privatize parks, as was the previous government's intention: prices go up, profitability becomes the only objective and parks often close. We've seen this in Ontario and other jurisdictions.

And unlike the former PC government, who would've loved to sold off our parks to the highest bidder, our NDP government will always keep parks public for the benefit of Manitobans. *[interjection]* Thank you.

And, you know, as the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham) noted, you don't have to take my word for it, Honourable Speaker. It was member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), in his mandate letter when he was the minister responsible for Natural Resources in 2020, that was tasked with identify opportunities to attract private investment.

So again, I question the sincerity of the member's bill. Those actions speak louder than words, those actions speak louder than this bill and those actions speak louder than licence plates.

Conservation and biodiversity is another important role that is played by parks, and that benefit serves all Manitobans, whether they're park users or not. Parks protect ecosystems, they protect biodiversity, and that's because Manitoba parks are protected spaces and have special land-use categories that conserve the natural habitat and the plant and animal species that live there.

Our government has committed to protecting 30 per cent of Manitoba's lands and waters by the year 2030, and we know that our Parks Branch will and has and will play an essential role in that work.

The NDP has a proud history of creating parks and protecting Manitoba's natural beauty and cultural heritage. I would like—*[interjection]* If I could have some respect from the other side of the bench, I would like to honour the memory and the legacy of a great New Democrat, Bill Blaikie, who as Manitoba's Conservation minister created not one, but five provincial parks in a one-year period in 2011, Honourable Speaker, a record and something no other minister has come close to accomplishing. And Manitobans are indebted to Bill Blaikie for that. I am so proud to brag about that on the record today.

And I'll take the opportunity to recognize and thank the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) for his work in establishing the most recent provincial park, our 93rd provincial park, in the summer of 2023, Pemmican Island.

But I will highlight for the record, Honourable Speaker, that much of that credit, as I hope the member would agree, must rightly go to the members of Sapatoweyak Cree Nation after literally decades of advocacy and fighting the PC government to make that so. The PC government refused to designate the park in 2017 because of mining claims, and the PCs refused to buy those out, putting profits over conservation, as is their record.

So I will thank the member for getting it done and I will end my comments by urging the members of this House to ask themselves about the PC records on parks.

MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia): Good morning and thank you, Honourable Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House and speak to, you know, my memories with regards to provincial parks. I have to

say I'm definitely a country kid at heart and grew up on a farm, so I love being outside and in nature and enjoying the outdoors.

It's something that I never did until I was about—I'd say about 20, was the first time I went camping because growing up on a farm and in the country was like camping, so my family wasn't into that. But I have to say my first outing at camping was at folk fest at Birds Hill Provincial Park. And it was really an amazing experience.

My best friend and I went tent camping and enjoyed the show there, and that was the year that there was an enormous thunderstorm and we had a pretty rough night in our tent, but our tent did stay dry and it didn't flip over.

So when we woke up in the morning, we went out and saw practically half the tents were flipped over. People were sleeping in the bathroom trailers. It was pretty wild night. And then it just turned the whole area into a big mud pit for the whole entire weekend, so it was pretty fun, to be honest. The music was amazing.

Anyway, so that was my first foray into camping and I've got to say that I just—I really loved being out with our tent and having a campfire. It's one of my favourite things to do is to sit around a campfire. So it's something that I wanted to do more of and when I met my now—my husband; we've been together almost 20 years—a thing that we did was we went to Jessica Lake, which is in Whiteshell Provincial Park, after we had been together, I'd say about a year and a half, and we had a wonderful weekend.

We rented a cabin there and did some boating and some fishing and hiking. And that was actually where my husband proposed to me, so it has a very special memory for me.

Provincial parks are a beautiful place to spend time and so, as a couple, after we became parents, we decided to buy a camper-trailer, something that my husband had really fond memories of as a child, going camping with his family. And so we did, we bought a camper-trailer. Our kids were, I'd say three and seven, which was a really exciting time for us to get our kiddos out and enjoy nature on the weekends and on holidays.

So the first place that my husband and I took our 30-foot hard-side trailer, towing it, was provincial—Birds Hill Provincial Park. We went on our own and we got used to towing this enormous camper-trailer and figured out how to set it up and how to park it.

And it was a lot, but we did it, and had such a great weekend. And so that was the start of our journey.

* (10:50)

Say about seven or eight years ago, we've been a camping family and so we ended up getting a site very close to St. Malo Provincial Park for a few years. And so we spent the summers there hiking and fishing and canoeing with our kids. They learned how to swim there. And just spending time by the campfire, roasting marshmallows, making s'mores.

Our kids, you know, being able to learn how to ride their bikes and have some freedom in the campgrounds has been just a remarkable childhood for them. They have such fond memories of St. Malo Provincial Park.

We've had to—had the pleasure of having friends come over and stay for the weekend, and they've been able to make memories for their family and their kids as well. Some of the very best food that we have as a family and meals that we have are around the campfire. And when we're camping, we just make delicious food. And by we, I mean my husband, because he is in—a fantastic cook. So I got to give credit where credit is due.

And so we left St. Malo area and we had—during COVID, actually, when everyone was trying to get a camper, we had one. And so we spent a summer in the Whiteshell Provincial Park near Brereton Lake. And so we spent a lot of time hiking. The Canadian Shield was really cool for our kiddos. They hadn't really ever seen that kind of rock before. So right behind our trailer in the campground was a really huge ridge of Canadian Shield rock, and so our kids spent a lot of time hiking through that, and they just had the best time exploring the campground and the wilderness around them.

And then after that, we've moved our trailer to—not a provincial park, but we still do a lot of camping. Our cousins have a place in Falcon Lake which is really amazing. And so we've done a lot of boating there as well. And I've actually conquered a lifelong fear of the water. Almost drowned as a kid, so it was really scary for me to be in water where I couldn't touch the ground.

And so I spent a summer conquering that fear and learning how to swim as an adult just a few years ago, actually. And it's been—it's—it was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders and I got to do that in front of my kids. And they thought it was pretty amazing because they knew how scared I was of the

water. So that was a really amazing thing to accomplish as an adult, and I got to do that at a provincial park.

So there's a lot of really great memories: being able to sit around the campfire with my kids and snuggle in and make s'mores; looking at the moon and the stars and hearing the water. You know, my kids are definitely lovers of nature, and we would enjoy a lot of sunsets together. I—if anyone knows me—love watching sunsets, and so now my kids know that that's not an option and they have to come out with me and do that and take pictures.

So we've had a lot of really great family memories created in provincial parks. That is certain. My son caught his very first fish when he was a little guy, about five, and that's a really great memory when you're out camping in a provincial park. And he even still talks about it. He remembers it very clearly because he actually really enjoys fishing now as an almost-15-year-old.

I'd have to say hiking is something that I've really enjoyed in provincial parks. You know, getting out there in nature and just being able to feel the wind and hear the leaves rustling. It's something that I just really enjoy doing and my kids have really gotten into that as well. My husband enjoys hiking. So we kind of do that, do some trails together and explore where we're at in the provincial park.

We also—you know, there's some winter activities that are pretty amazing as well. I'm not a huge fan of winter, if I can be honest. Though I was really so delighted to be able to take a winter hike with my colleagues, here, on our caucus retreat this past January in Riding Mountain provincial park, and that was just beautiful.

And we had such a great time just getting out, and the weather was beautiful. The hike—I don't know, maybe about a mile and a half long. And it was, you know, it was a pretty easy hike, but it was quite lovely to be out there. We saw some wildlife, got some great pictures and just bonded as a team. So that was probably one of my favourite parts of our caucus retreat.

As well, I just think, you know, being able to be outdoors—I have to say growing up on a farm, being a kid, I spent a lot of time, you know, my brother and I, too—we're really close in age, about a year apart—we would just hang out without any shoes on. That was our thing, is that my mom would—my mom tells us, now as adults, she had to fight to get shoes on us when

school started in September, so we just—we'd run around with our bare feet. And so I enjoy doing that when we're camping. We're out and—my kids, I think, have taken after me. They generally spend a lot of time without any shoes on when they're running around our campsites when we're camping in provincial parks.

So really, at this point, what I would like to sum up by saying is just the incredible beauty that our province has. Manitoba—our provincial parks are such a wonderful, wonderful thing for us as Manitobans to be able to do and to get out and enjoy the weather and our summers because they're so short. And so the camping season is among—you know, right now, we're heading into it. And I'm really looking forward to doing that with my family again this year.

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): What a pleasure it is to rise today to speak to beautiful provincial parks in Manitoba. I want to take a moment to say joe—go Jets go. But, you know, it is—it's such an important topic, the protecting provincial parks.

And when I saw this bill show up on the order paper, I immediately thought about my childhood visiting Spirit Sands provincial park and the very hot, very arid, very sweaty field trips that every student went on if they went to school in Brandon and what a tremendous opportunity it was to not only see nature up close but learn to identify different plant species, get to know our friends and fellow students a bit better, but it really spoke to my memories of exploring provincial parks.

You know, we have a duty and a responsibility to the generations, the seven generations that come after us, to protect these lands. And I'm just really so thrilled to talk about conservation and provincial parks and all that we're doing to ensure that we keep our provincial parks public.

I did want to go back in time to sometime in 2020, when there was discussion about privatizing provincial parks in Manitoba, and what a short-sighted policy initiative that was and what a short-sighted initiative from the then-PCs.

Over \$1 million was paid by Manitobans to a Texas company by April of 2022. That was money that went straight from the pockets of Manitobans into the hands of big Texas corporations. And during that time, the PCs made it clear that their priority was looking to privatize our parks. The former minister's mandate letter, the MLA for Riding Mountain,

directed the minister to identify opportunities to attract private and 'philothrampic' investments.

Yes, so, if attracting private investments to public parks, for me, indicates that there's an opportunity to move towards privatization. And in my mind and my understanding and our collective values on this side of the House, we believe that provincial parks are for everyone.

And we're going to do all we can—they're never for sale, and we're going to do all we can to ensure that provincial parks remain public so that my kids, my grandkids, my neighbours' kids, my neighbours' grandkids are able to enjoy provincial parks and really appreciate all that Manitoba parks have to offer.

* (11:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is before the House again, the honourable minister will have seven minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 9—Calling on the Provincial Government to Address the Overcrowding in Schools

The Speaker: The hour is now 11 o'clock and time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Calling on the Provincial Government to Address the Overcrowding in Schools, brought forward by the honourable member for Spruce Woods.

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk) that the resolution as follows:

WHEREAS all Manitobans deserve a strong, world class education system, from Kindergarten to Grade 12; and

WHEREAS student enrolment and demand for accessible, affordable childcare continues to grow in Beautiful Plains, Brandon, Pembina Trails, River East Transcona, Seine River, and Seven Oaks school divisions, as well as Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine; and

WHEREAS the previous PC Provincial Government committed to address overcrowding, increase capacity, and minimize enrolment pressures in these school divisions by committing to build nine safe, healthy, and sustainable new schools through the Manitoba Schools Project; and

WHEREAS these new schools would have added thousands of new classroom seats and childcare seats to the education and childcare system by the 2027-28 school year; and

WHEREAS a request for qualifications was issued in July 2023 as part of plan to ensure these new schools broke ground in fall 2024; and

WHEREAS the current Provincial Government cancelled this request for qualifications and the Manitoba Schools Project, increasing pressure in Beautiful Plains, Brandon, Pembina Trails, River East Transcona, Seine River, Seven Oaks, and Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine; and

WHEREAS the Deputy Minister for Education has told school divisions that education is not in the top five priorities of the Provincial Government.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to prioritize the education system and take the necessary steps to increase capacity and minimize enrolment pressures in the school divisions of Beautiful Plains, Brandon, Pembina Trails, River East Transcona, Seine River, Seven Oaks and Division scolaire franco-manitobaine.

Motion presented.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Mr. Jackson: It's an honour to rise today to speak on this resolution, to talk about the importance of building school capacity in this province. As we've all heard—I think across the aisles in this place—from teachers in our constituencies that our schools are bursting at the seams.

And that's a good problem for Manitoba to have. It means we have more younger people here in our communities that need to access the high-quality education provided by our public school system. This is a good problem to have, but it is a problem that needs to be addressed by this provincial government.

When the Progressive Conservatives formed government in 2016, over 500 portable classrooms were in use as a result of the previous NDP government's refusal to build new schools. And just to put that into context, that's 11,600 students learning in portables while the NDP was last in power.

Under the last NDP government, school divisions had to convert hallways into classrooms because they would not build schools. The last time they were in power, they refused to build the necessary schools. It

was so obvious even elementary school students were speaking out against it, saying things like our school field is so crowded, grade 5s are tripping over the kindergarteners because there just isn't enough space.

As we know, in Budget 2024, the NDP cancelled the construction of nine new schools across the province, as well as the child-care centres that were to be attached to these facilities. With these cancellations, the NDP are going to cause significant further overcrowding in our schools across the province. This is wrong.

And it's in stark contrast to our Progressive Conservative previous government, which promised to build 23 new schools, 14 of which are in progress or completed, the most recent which, I understand from my colleague the MLA for La Vérendrye, at St. Malo will be opening its doors very, very soon.

No doubt the minister will be there to cut the ribbon and take credit for that, but we know that it is this Progressive Conservative Party that built that school and I bet the residents of St. Malo are well aware of that fact as well.

We were committed to addressing overcrowding, increasing capacity, and minimizing pressures from population increases. We know somebody else, at one time at least in his political career, was committed to this as well. In his 2019 election campaign, when the now-Premier (Mr. Kinew) was asked about our commitment to build 23 new schools, he himself was quoted in the CBC saying that under his leadership, their government would build the same amount of schools or better.

Can anybody tell me how many schools they've budgeted for in this budget? Two. Is two the same as nine? I'm a bit confused because the NDP math is a bit confusing.

So I'm hoping that the Premier will remember his campaign commitment from 2019. Maybe the old campaign commitments die hard with the NDP, I don't know, but we're hoping he remembers that. I can find the CBC article and text it to his team so that he can review that commitment and maybe bring that back.

We've obviously missed the boat with this budget, but hopefully budget 2025 will remember that commitment and bring these nine schools back on the record.

Just to be clear, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the NDP are cutting schools in Pembina Trails School Division, for Division scolaire franco-manitobaine,

for Seven Oaks School Division, the Brandon School Division, Beautiful Plains School Division, Seine River School Division and the River East Transcona School Division.

Not only is this a cut to education seats in the province, but it is also a cut to early childhood education seats. As I raised in question period yesterday, each of these nine schools was supposed to have a minimum 74-seat daycare which means that they have cut a minimum of 700 child-care spaces across the province.

I hope the Minister for Education will get up later today as debate on this resolution and explain to those families why they are going to have to wait longer to get the child-care spaces that they need. And I really would like to hit this home for my fellow constituents in Westman.

Two schools out of the nine were for the Brandon area: one in division franco-scolaire 'francon'-manitobaine and one for the Brandon School Division. Just for some context, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the most recent new school in Brandon was built by the Progressive Conservative government in Maryland Park.

Do you know when the next most recent school was built in Brandon? Honourable Deputy Speaker, 1991, the Waverly Park School for the Brandon School Division. Who was in government in 1991? Oh, that's right, the Progressive Conservatives were.

The 17 years of desert for new child-care—or, new school construction in Brandon were under the previous member for Brandon East, when he was actually Minister of Education.

He couldn't even get a school built, and now we are seeing the same decline in school construction in Brandon under this NDP party again. Why do they hate building new schools in Brandon? Hopefully the member for—the new member for Brandon East (Mr. Simard) will get up and explain why he's following in the previous, previous member for Brandon East's role model to build—not build new schools in Brandon.

And so, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I'm not going to use my full time today because I want to hear what the NDP has to say to explain themselves for these cuts to school construction across the province.

I hope they reverse their decision and I hope we see support from all the backbench members on that

side to support new school construction across the city of Winnipeg and across this great province.

Thank you very much, Deputy Honourable Speaker.

Questions

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

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): Our NDP government is helping growing families and communities across Manitoba. This means constructing more spaces for kids and that our government will deliver on this in a responsible way.

Like his colleague from Lac du Bonnet, does the member opposite think our NDP government funding École Mino Pimatisawin School and École Sage Creek Bonavista School is good news?

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): I thank my colleague for Seine River for that question.

We are very happy to see this NDP government building two new schools. We just wish it was nine like were previously committed.

* (11:10)

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Can the member explain a little bit more why—or what the impact is by cutting these new schools on the education system?

Mr. Jackson: I'd like to thank my colleague from Dawson Trail for that question.

The impact will be more crowding in schools. We have an NDP government that ran on reducing class sizes and then, on the other hand, cut new school construction in their budget. So we're not really sure where they're going to put these smaller class sizes, because there will be more of them if they're planning to reduce the size. Are they going in portable classrooms? Are they going in gymnasiums? Are they going in hallways, like the previous NDP government? We don't know, but we hope that they clarify their plan for Manitobans in the days and weeks to come.

MLA Cross: Unlike the previous failed PC government, we're making consistent progress on building

more schools in rural Manitoba. Where they built false hope, we are building space for kids in their own backyard. So this should be good news to the opposition.

Can the member opposite tell us if he thinks the funding to finish the construction of new schools in Morden, Steinbach and for Sage Creek is good news?

Mr. Jackson: Of course, when a building is half completed, it's very responsible of this government to complete those construction projects and not leave them half built. I would argue that the members opposite had little to no choice. But if they felt that they did, they should have left them half built and committed and defended that decision to the constituents in those areas.

So, again, it's very disappointing that they've chosen to only budget for two new schools inside the city of Winnipeg instead of supporting the nine new schools which were province-wide to support growing class sizes, not just here in Winnipeg but across the province.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): As we have heard how widespread the cuts are to new schools in Manitoba, can the member list the school divisions that will be impacted by these cuts?

Mr. Jackson: Thank you to my colleague from La Vérendrye for that question.

Very sad to have to read this list because it's far too many schools, far too many school divisions, and Manitoba families will be impacted by this. But, nonetheless, this is where we are with this NDP government. And so the schools are being cut from the Pembina Trails School Division, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, Seven Oaks School Division, Brandon School Division, Beautiful Plains School Division, Seine River School Division and the River East Transcona School Division, and I would remind Manitobans that those school divisions have some of the fastest increasing student populations in the province, which is why they were identified as the top nine priorities to build new schools in—by the school divisions themselves.

MLA Cross: The previous failed PC government cut, froze and underfunded K-to-12 education for seven years. I know because I was a teacher working under that time. They attacked teachers with their failed bill 64 and consistently left parents in the dark.

But we're taking a new approach with Budget 2024 which provides \$160 million in funding for our public education system.

Can the member opposite please explain why his colleagues underfunded schools throughout their time in government?

Mr. Jackson: I thank the member for Seine River (MLA Cross) for her question.

And listen, between her and I, I do respect her work as an educator. She did a very, very important career and contributed back to future generations for Manitobans, so I thank her for her work there.

When it comes to the content of her question, I think if she looks back, she'll recognize that last year, the provincial Progressive Conservative government gave the largest increase in modern history to the education system, but I was very glad to see them offer that level of support and that we were also on top of that level of operating support, building new schools through capital funding, something that this NDP government is failing to do.

MLA Lagassé: Can the member explain which communities will be impacted by this cut?

Mr. Jackson: Again, thank you to my colleague for Dawson Trail for that excellent question. Again, very disappointed to have to read this list out because I know these communities need new school construction. They need the space. Their schools are currently bursting at the seams and they need support from this new government to help them build new schools.

Winnipeg, of course, is impacted by this decision; Brandon; Carberry; St. Norbert and Neepawa, all impacted by this decision. Very disappointing. And I hope that the Minister for Education will get up and explain to constituents in these communities why their new schools are not a priority for him and his government.

MLA Cross: I appreciate the member's answer to the last question where he noted that there was important funding in their last year of government. So Manitobans know they can't trust this PC—this former PC government, or their record on education.

It wasn't until they realized just how angry Manitobans were with their austerity government that they finally decided to do something.

Can the member opposite explain why his previous PC government waited 'til right before the election to address overcrowding in schools?

Mr. Jackson: Well, I think the opposition member's missed the point. Yes, we increased operating dollars in last year's budget, but we have been building new schools in this province since 2016. That's not right before the election. In fact, there were two elections between now and when we started building new schools in this province.

Maryland Park was opened in the first term of our government. So we were addressing overcrowding in schools many, many years before last year; in fact, immediately after we took office from the former, failed Greg Selinger government that built no new schools in Brandon in 17 years.

Mr. Narth: As we know, the NDP haven't been big on capital investment throughout their history. So I'd like the member to answer a question on how many new schools did the former PC government build during their time?

Mr. Jackson: I thank my excellent colleague for La Vérendrye for that great question. I know he is so excited about the new school that's coming to his constituency in St. Malo funded by this Progressive Conservative government. We are so excited about that because we are delivering for the students in his region.

We built seven more schools, completed and seven more under construction, ready to be done for Manitoba students within the next couple of years. That's our Progressive Conservative government's record: 14 schools. The NDP have no leg to stand on when it comes to that level of new school construction in this province.

MLA Cross: The PCs continue—continue—to put false information on the record every time they talk about education in Manitoba. But don't worry, we're going to correct them every time that happens. Because the reality is you can't cancel what was never approved.

Can the member opposite please tell us the reasoning why his colleagues from the previous PC government never got the proper budget approvals?

Mr. Jackson: I thank my colleague for Seine River for the question. She didn't make the cut for Cabinet this first go around for the Kinew government. Hopefully she does next time, and then she'll understand how the process works.

You have to send out an RFQ for proposals for people to build schools. Those get submitted to government and reviewed and then they go through the Treasury Board and budgeting process. That's how the process works.

We were well under way on that process. Hopefully this government follows through with that and follows through with the proper budgetary processes for budget 2025 to get these new schools built.

The Deputy Speaker: And that concludes—*[interjection]*

Order. Order. Order.

That concludes question period.

* (11:20)

Debate

The Deputy Speaker: That brings us to debate.

Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): It's always a privilege to get up in this House and to put some words on the record that reflect the true record of this new NDP government. I will say, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that as a new member I learned early on that PMRs are important.

I do want to thank the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson) for bringing this forward so that we can have a fulsome debate in this House regarding this issue. This is a very important issue.

I'm on the record, Honourable Deputy Speaker, many times saying that Manitobans really care about their public schools. They care so much that when they reviewed the record of the previous government, they decided it was time for a new government to represent not only the people of Manitoba, but to also undertake the important step of stewardship of our students that attend our public schools every day.

It's a privilege that we certainly honour and we honoured that in our latest budget. I can say part of the PMR as outlined here is that it says that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to prioritize the education system. And that's something that we certainly did, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

We came through on predictable, stable funding—so much so that many school divisions were able to take that predictability, take that funding, and put it

into supports in classroom that's going to impact positively our students here in Manitoba.

I do know that member has also brought up our class size initiative. Absolutely, the class size initiative is an important piece. I can tell you that we recognize the enrolment pressures and know that the class size initiative—and I've said this on the record before—is focused on the student-to-teacher ratio. We're going to ensure that the student-to-teacher ratio is 20 to one.

So if it's a classroom of 24 grade 1 or 2 students, they'll have an extra professional, either one and a quarter or one and a third, extra professional added to that class so that they can provide the programming necessary. That's how the class size initiative is going to work in this budget and in budgets moving forward.

I can also say, Honourable Speaker, that because of the predictable, stable funding, we have been able to add—when I say we, of course, we are working with school divisions all the time to make sure that they get the support necessary. Due to the stable and predictable funding, 632 net staff additions have been added directly to Manitoba classrooms.

Out of that number, 315 classroom teachers have been added because of our budget; 22 clinicians have been added; 43 resource teachers have been added; 217 educational assistants have been added; 15 guidance counsellors and 20 other categorized supports have been added to Manitoba classrooms because of our budget.

And these numbers will continue to grow, Honourable Deputy Speaker, because we have yet to hear from seven school divisions, but when we do, I'll be sure to inform the House of these more updated and additional supports.

Honourable Speaker, I've said this many times in this House: Manitobans are fair-minded people—so fair-minded they saw right through their previous government's plan to build these schools. We know the process that they have to undergo. All I can say to that member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson) is that it's too bad they didn't run on that.

Instead they ran a divisive campaign, a campaign that Manitobans didn't buy into, Honourable Deputy Speaker. And that's actually quite a shame. Because if they were so committed to their plan, they would have talked about it, they would have ran on it, and it's something that they could have stood up and said with pride to Manitobans: This is how we value our schools; we're doing it by doing this.

Instead, of course Honourable Deputy Speaker, we saw what they ran on. They ran a campaign that was divisive and that did not reflect the values of Manitobans. I can tell you that's very difficult.

You know, many of us are classroom teachers on this side of the House, and there are classroom teachers on that side of the House. I can say they must have been horrified or actually quite concerned regarding their campaign strategy, that they didn't talk about their support of public schools.

I can tell you, I do like the switch that this member from Spruce Woods has come in here with. All of a sudden now, a Conservative Party is supporting public schools. I love that. It's too bad in the seven and a half years previous they weren't putting that into action.

I can tell you, Honourable Deputy Speaker, when you look at the FRAME reports—Financial Reporting and Accounting in Manitoba Education—in 2016, the provincial government had 62.4 per cent of the total cost of public ed in Manitoba. By the time they got to the end of their mandate, that number has shrunk to 58 per cent.

That shows a lack of commitment to public education and a lack of commitment to Manitoba students. This is something that we're rectifying and we began to rectify with our budget.

The formal—the former government, Honourable Deputy Speaker, waited until the end to make their announcement. I get it; it's part of a campaign piece, absolutely. But the key thing to remember is, is that Manitobans didn't believe them in the end. Didn't believe them, and instead, elected an NDP government, one that's going to take this responsibility seriously.

So when we say, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that we're going to build schools, we absolutely are going to build schools, but we will have the funds in place, and once they're in place, that is when we will make the announcement.

But not only are we committed to the building of schools, we're also, Honourable Deputy Speaker, committed to ensuring that schools get the expansion that they need. I'd like to announce today, at this moment, to the House, that the renovation and expansion of Maryland school in Brandon School Division will now proceed this year.

You know, I can also say, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that this is important. Manitobans don't see their public schools as being a partisan issue. They

want them invested in. They want a government that takes the investment in public education seriously. They want a government that plans seriously and ensures that funds are in place before announcements are made. And that's why we were elected.

We have the credibility on this side of the House to follow through on our commitments. We outlined that throughout our campaign; a campaign that unified Manitobans, brought Manitobans together with our clear vision—a vision, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that reflected what Manitobans really believe in.

And it's important because, I know, the irony here is actually quite stark, it's quite remarkable because Manitobans care so much about their public education system. It's too bad they didn't run their campaign on that.

It's too bad that they couldn't run on their seven and a half years of how the public schools are run by the former PC government, because if they knew that they did and if they were going to run on that, they knew Manitobans weren't going to buy it.

And even though they tried to divide us throughout the campaign, one thing became abundantly clear, Honourable Deputy Speaker, we were going to bring Manitobans together. Our public schools are the expression of our very best intentions moving forward.

Manitobans, as I said earlier, really care about their public schools. They really care about having and ensuring that their children have the support that they need, not only when they go to school, but while they're at school. There are many, many other initiatives that I'm sure my colleagues will raise in debate this morning—important initiatives that support students, that express our values.

* (11:30)

And like I said when I began my remarks, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson) bringing this up because it allows us to clearly articulate our vision to Manitobans and to clearly articulate to our Manitoba students that you have a government that finally will get to work and provide the supports necessary for your education.

I thank you for the time.

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): I don't usually like speaking in the House, but I just admire our colleague from Spruce Woods so much, so just wanted to put a few words on the record in regards

to his resolution here and support our—the hard work of our Education Minister who is doing the best he can with a really dire situation that we walked into, with, you know, a lot of things that were promised on the campaign trail that weren't sent to Treasury. *[interjection]* Yes, well, you're welcome. Yes. *[interjection]* I am.

I also—I do also want to acknowledge all the people on both sides of the House from the 2023 class, so all of our folks that we went to school with, with Rick, and just to acknowledge what happened yesterday very briefly and then just say, from both sides of the House, that I know that we can all do better to uplift our colleagues and try to make sure that we're doing the best to keep the consistently high behaviour that we all discussed, that we were hoping would be better going forward with this year.

So yesterday was a little rough, and hopefully we can all move past that on both sides of the House. So that's to all sides of the floor, 2023 folks. So thank you.

I worked as an educational assistant all throughout the pandemic and afterwards, and that was not when there was an NDP government. That was when it was a PC government. So with all due respect, all the commentary that's been made today, with overcrowding in schools, it's just nonsense.

That was when it was during PC government and there were incredibly painful things to watch, where there was over 33 kids in some classes. It was very hard for the teachers to get any productive learning accomplished, and the administration had to make very, very challenging decisions made at the local level.

What one very, you know, particular moment stuck out to me when our principal came in, talked to us, you know, educators, about money—which they normally don't do—and said our school in particular was going to get \$30,000 less from the board office that year, and that meant no classroom educational assistants; all the educational assistants in our building were going to go to the very most high-level-needs students.

And it was super hard to walk by every day and see students struggling in the hallways, in the, you know, outside of the school. They just needed some guidance to come in and find a safe place every day, and that was what the role of educational assistants used to be. But under the PC government, that was not happening because of all the cuts, the real cuts, not

this fake news cuts that are being talked about in the House all the time lately.

So these things were happening under the—

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Apologies for interrupting the member.

I just want to direct all honourable members' attention to the gallery. We have 25 grade 4 students from River West Park School under the direction of Ms. Allmendinger, located in the constituency of the MLA for Roblin, so welcome.

* * *

Mrs. Schott: Thank you for reminding us that there are students here watching us at all times, or very often, because that's another reminder for us to be on our best behaviour in here.

So, you know, these school divisions had no choice but to cut, you know, for the last seven years because the funding just simply wasn't there. There was a, you know, a total lack of morale. It was very hard to be an educator over the last number of years.

The PC culture that was created in education system because of bill 64 was very toxic and I'd actually, you know, it's super unfortunate that all happened. I'm glad that society stepped up. So many people signed up to speak against it.

And I'd like to thank some of you for being part of that toxic culture because that's why so many amazing educators are part of our team, because we signed up to run as candidates and are now here to fight back against that sort of nonsense. So that's the only good thing that came out of that.

And our NDP government absolutely recognizes the need for more schools, but we're going to proceed responsibly, as the minister said. And we know how important class sizes are, and small class sizes give teachers more time to teach. And, you know, we just can't clean up the mess left behind by the PCs overnight, so we are taking the necessary steps to do that to ensure kids are fully supported by the school system.

And I'm going to let some of the other amazing educators on our team speak about their stories and their experiences.

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): I'm honoured to rise today representing Fort Richmond and put some words on the record.

We all take the education of our children seriously. As a former school trustee, over the four years of my term, school boards have been asking for stable and predictable funding for schools.

Between 2018 and 2022, school divisions were forced to make drastic changes. They were struggling to meet the growing needs of the community. The previous PC government tried to make teachers, education assistants and school support workers to take 1 per cent—sorry, to take zero per cent, zero per cent, 0.75 per cent and 1 per cent wage increase over a four-year contract, despite of the cost of inflation, resulting in a highly demoralized staff who were working hard during the pandemic.

Our NDP government is committed to stable and predictable funding for schools. We will continue to work with school divisions to create enough room for our growing student population.

I want to acknowledge all of the hard work that school support workers do in the education system. I acknowledge education assistants, secretaries, bus drivers, trades, custodians, counsellors and more. They keep schools up and running every day.

Thank you for your tireless work and steadfast dedication. This NDP government will always support teachers, staff and students in Manitoba.

As a parent of two young children, I want to see quality education and better opportunities for our children. Our NDP government will always work alongside educators and families to support students and families. And we want every student and child in Manitoba to feel prepared for their future and to contribute to this great province.

This government cares deeply about kids and their development in our school system. Our Budget 2024 increases the funding for K-to-12 schools by \$104.2 million. Funding of schools includes: \$30 million for K-to-12 universal school nutrition program; \$3 million toward smaller class sizes; \$51.5 million in operating costs for public schools; \$11.3 million for capital support which—including principal and interest to costs related to building schools; and \$10.9 million to independent schools.

We're not only increasing the funding, but we're also developing a new model that will ensure our schools receive stable, predictable funding that meets students' needs.

Budget 2024 also provides \$160 million in capital funding for our public education system.

Budget 2024 restarts renovations and repairs to existing public schools with funding for classroom additions and expansions, vocational training space renovations, gymnasium upgrades, new and upgraded elevators, new roofs and siding and mechanical systems improvement.

* (11:40)

Our NDP government recognizes the need for more schools and will proceed responsibly. As a member of Treasury Board, it's important that all big expenditures, including schools, go through proper checks and balances.

Our government takes our responsibility very seriously. We are continuing to review capital projects and make informed decisions in the capital planning process for new schools and major additions.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, we know how important class sizes are. Small class sizes give teachers more time to teach and students more time to learn. One of the first things the members opposite did when they came into office was cut the cap on 20 students in K-to-3 classes, started in 2017-2018 school year.

Our government believes in putting the educational needs and health and safety of our children first. By staffing up our schools, investing in repairs, building two new schools and making the plans for building more, we are prioritizing kids' learning in Manitoba.

Our government is committed to families in Manitoba and I am proud of the work of our team.

Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): It's a privilege to put some words on the record today about a topic that's dear to my heart about education. As many people in the Chamber know, I was a school trustee and a former chair of the board of the Winnipeg School Division for three terms.

It's a job I absolutely loved. I actually had no ambition to come to this House and be a member of the Legislative Assembly. I was very happy being a school trustee. But in 2016, something changed for Manitoba.

Sadly, for Manitoba, we elected a PC government which was absolutely hostile to public education. They didn't value it and they felt it was a waste of taxpayers' money and they took a harsh and ideological approach to it.

And, you know, it would be a very exciting thing, when you're a school trustee, you come to the board, and you're like, how can we make our schools better today? How can we ensure that our children get the most out of the public education system?

And after 2016, things changed. We would be coming to the board office and going, okay, what do we have to cut today? And every meeting after meeting, it was more cuts coming from Broadway and more critical programs that were on the chopping block, and our education system was diminished.

And, you know, the former PC government did a number of things. They took away school boards' right to tax. Well, why did they do that?

Well, when you are getting cut by the provincial government, you have the power to backfill those cuts by raising taxes. And that's what school boards were doing. They were replacing the money that was being cut by the PC government with property tax increases. So the PC government put a stop to that, so they couldn't do that.

So then they put a cap on how much money the school board could actually spend. So the combination of those two actions forced school boards across Manitoba to cut funding. And what you saw was a huge explosion in class sizes, because whenever school boards are under stress, they have to change the teacher-student ratio in order to make the books balance. They can't run a deficit.

So you saw class sizes go from 22 kids to 30, to 32 kids and in some growing divisions, it's shocking. And of course, the quality of education is affected by that. You know, kids are crammed into a classroom. There is only one teacher. The teacher can't get to everyone and the entire classroom suffers for that.

And then of course, we saw for many years the PCs declared war on teachers and public school educators. And they cut their funding, and they had a hostile tone with their relations with them. And it was always a curious thing because, you know, okay, PCs don't like teachers, and they don't respect them as professionals, and they don't value their workplace.

But a teacher's workplace is a children's learning environment and if they don't have a good workplace, they don't have a good area—community to learn. And so if we invest in our classrooms and we invest in our teachers, our children are the ones that will benefit from it.

One of the things that, you know, we—you know, we're talking about school building today. The PCs created a huge infrastructure and deferred maintenance deficit in the school boards. I know, in 2017, 2018 at the Winnipeg School Division, when we were investigating this, it was \$360 million just in that one school division alone.

Basically, we would be sending crews out to put, you know, a Band-Aid over a Band-Aid over a Band-Aid because there were—they had so few resources that they couldn't actually get things repaired. Things that were past their useful life by 10, 20 years couldn't get replaced and you would have a catastrophic failure that ended up costing taxpayers huge amounts of money, right?

And, you know, that was the approach from the previous PC government, was to ignore, to take from Education and then send cheques to billionaires. And instead of, you know, supporting our students, they attacked some of our most vulnerable children with some absolutely offensive, horrible language and rhetoric during the election.

And, of course, they tried to take Manitobans' right away to vote, and that's all you have to say is that, who does that? Who thinks that there's too much democracy in Manitoba? The PCs do, and they thought that the solution was to take the right to vote away from Manitobans so that they would not have a say in their children's schools.

Well, I can tell you, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that this government has turned the page on those dark days; that we value teachers in this government, we value parent's choice, we value students and we were going to spend our time here in office lifting up Manitobans, not trying to tear down the one institution that unites us all.

Thank you.

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I'm proud to stand here, as an educator who has put three decades of his heart and soul into our education system.

And I can tell you from personal experience and my involvement in the education finance and dealing with matters of financing our public schools that we are, indeed, in a better place, with our Minister of Education, who is working tirelessly on behalf of school divisions, students, educators, education assistants and all of the support workers in our schools, that sunnier days are here.

And that I personally went through, with my colleagues in 2022, in a, I'll admit, rising populations in our school in Brandon, we were cutting 11 FTEs in our school division. I don't know how we can look back on those days and say that this was a government that cared about teachers and students. This is absolutely an indicator for everyone that I worked with—all of those colleagues that had to look for other work—that it wasn't a good place.

And we can talk about many, many things: class size. Class size, that was something that in the middle of my career that was earmarked by this—by the former, former NDP government. That was an important thing, that in the K-to-3 classrooms, these students were assured, these schools were assured: no more than 20 kids in the class.

* (11:50)

And the—we knew, going into September, that those class sizes would be in a manageable size so that students would get the support they need from their teacher.

And my colleagues here, my education colleagues here, they know what it was like when there was fewer kids in their classroom, because they have a diverse range of needs. Every student is different. Every student needs individual attention. That is a fact that we, as educators, know.

And yes, that might mean in one classroom, 15 different approaches to the same lesson plan. Small groups, people floating around, working individually, catching up students who are—have trouble recognizing large numbers while another student beside you is able to multiply two digits by two digits in a grade 3 class.

So how are you going to do that with 27 kids? And we had to live through that in Brandon. And we were cutting those positions in our school division at a time when enrolment was going up. And we were looking at each other: How does this make any sense?

And we talk about some of the moves that were made by the previous government, and it was like we were already in a six-foot hole as educators in school and school trustees and boards. And the only thing they sent us was a shovel and told us to keep digging. They didn't help us out of that hole.

And I'm proud to be in a government, now, that is going to lift those educators, lift those students up and lift them out of that hole. And make sure that our

path forward is stable, predictable and one that puts students first.

Thank you.

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): It's a pleasure as an educator with over 28 years of experience to have a chance to speak about this this morning.

I'm proud to stand on this side of the House, where there are so many educators that, by their words and their actions, are now showing Manitobans that we care about families. We care about class sizes, we care about teachers, we care about our communities, and in fact, it's one of the reasons why I went into education, is because I deeply care about my community, deeply care about my Métis community, my francophone community.

And if we're going into education, Mr. Honourable Deputy Speaker, I had the chance—in fact, the incredible chance to study in French to become a teacher. For five years, I went to the University of St. Boniface. After that, I worked as a teacher's aide for a year at Collège Louis-Riel.

After that, I decided to go into industrial arts and study industrial arts for a couple of years at Red River College, and then finally, you know, I'm proud to say, finished on the dean's honour list at U of M after eight years of university, because I am passionate about education.

Before going into education, I wanted to make sure that I was prepared to work with students in Manitoba that require our time, require our love and, you know, require everything that we have to give to students because, you know, our education system is the foundation to not only a province where the economy is strong, but where we work together, where we help each other out and where we understand each other.

One of the greatest things that I had the chance to accomplish over my education career actually is to build a school. It was an adult ed program called Youth Build. I had the chance to work in that program for 16 years in the inner city, from 2000 to 2016.

We actually—we built a school at the corner of Ellice and Agnes for Indigenous students that faced multiple barriers and didn't quite fit in the education system. And a lot of them had street-related issues. Some of them, actually, Honourable Deputy Speaker, were coming straight out of gangs directly into our program.

And that was one of the best experiences in my life, because it showed that education is a transformative experience, education brings us together as Manitobans and education, you know, is not just about bricks and mortar; education is about families, it's about students, it's about all the best that we have to bring as a province.

And I can tell you having, you know, taught during the pandemic and during the last seven and a half years of this failed PC government, I can tell you we didn't feel the love as teachers at all—not when teachers were left for years without a contract, not during the debate over bill 64—which was horrible legislation, by the way—not when they cut the assistant deputy minister responsible for the bureau of French education, sabotaging education in Manitoba. Absolutely a horrible move.

I'm proud that as a government, we've actually reinstated the ADM responsible for le Bureau de l'éducation française. And Manitobans didn't feel the love when the PCs promised a bunch of schools without any sustainable funding behind them.

So what's our approach? Well, we have teachers on this side that are listening to the experts. As I've said, we've reinstated the ADM responsible for the BEF. And we're working with our families. We're showing Manitobans that we care about kids. We're working with grandparents, aunts, uncles. We're showing that we care.

And one of the best ways to show that you care is actually by doing what we've done and that's put in place a nutrition program. Because kids can't learn when they're hungry.

For 20 years, I worked in the inner city with Indigenous youth. Coming to school was the best part of their day. Coming to school got them out of harm's way.

Coming to school gave them a chance to get a job, to get their life back on track and sometimes coming to school was the only chance for them to have something to eat that day. And in 2024, kids should not be going to school hungry.

And that's why I'm so proud of this government, proud of the work of our honourable Minister of Education to have basically said, it's time kids need to learn with food in their stomach.

And the other thing is that, you know, nothing shows Manitobans and families and kids that we care as a government—nothing shows more than saying,

hey, when you come to school, there'll be something for you to eat.

So that's what we're doing on this side of the House because we care about kids, we care about our communities, we care about our schools, we care about education.

And I'd like to come back, Mr. Honourable Deputy Speaker, to the fact that, you know, as an educator for 28 years, it was important for me to always create a loving and caring and safe environment, and I know that all teachers across Manitoba feel the way I feel about education. Because it often takes a village to raise a child.

And our schools are maybe one of the last common experiences that everyone in Manitoba, all our families, can still share. The fact that our kids can go to school to learn, to play with other kids, to grow,

to eat something if there—nothing for them to eat at home.

Sometimes, you know, kids need food, and with our nutrition program, that's what kids will have now: food at schools.

And I'm also very proud of the fact that, yes, we do have communities that are growing. My personal experience as a teacher for the last six years at École Précieux-Sang—well, I remember when my daughters were there, when they started—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 18, 2024

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