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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated.

Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): If you could call this morning for debate on second reading Bill 210, The Wildlife Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 210, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage).

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 210—The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage)

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I'm—oh—I move, seconded—sorry. I move, seconded by the member from Dauphin, that Bill 210, The Wildlife Amendment Act, property—(Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Johnson: I'm happy to be here today to discuss this non-partisan legislation that's being brought forward.

I guess I want to start with the—currently, there's a substantial administrative delay with the process of requesting the removal of beaver dams or lodges or debris thereof from beavers, and this legislation is going to help clear that up by empowering local municipalities to help make the

decisions if there's a problem beaver in the area and, obviously, dams and lodges are the result of them.

So right now there's substantial resources that are spent on—from both departmental and conservation officers. The permits and the permitting process is a long, drawn-out process, and I've spoke with farmers where some of them are years trying to get a permit in and removing a beaver dam.

So this legislation will allow these removals. They must occur in a timely manner. We're having a lot of farmers with crop damage and stuff as result of dams. Water backs up on the land, drowns out alfalfa fields, for example. If a beaver dam is just off of a person's property and on a piece of Crown land, the water still backs up on the farmer's land and it's—it takes a long time and it's very time-consuming to get the permits through.

And there's nobody that knows the watershed more than the local government. So the municipalities, our local Northern Affairs districts, they pretty much—you can ask any one of the councillors or reeves or mayors as well. You can pretty much ask any one of them and they know what direction and how the creek meanders or any waterway in their ward or—and the municipality itself.

So they're very knowledgeable, and with my discussions with both AMM and local reeves and councillors themselves, they're excited to have a timely result to removing them, and they're excited about this legislation and hope that—hope it moves forward today.

So I was with a concern—a farmer, he took me up in an airplane and we actually flew over some of these dams, and the thousands of acres of trees that were drowned out is astounding. So it—this isn't normal wetlands now. Like, we're talking, you know, poplar trees that are 18 inches around at the base and, you know, in the Interlake that takes a long time for a tree to get to that size. And there's so much damage and wildlife area that is been destroyed over the years just by flooding out.

So their application took many, many years to get through for the removal of that—and this is not only, you know, sure, it's just trees but, you know, it's habitat for bald eagles and our—maybe our provincial

bird of a great grey owl as well. Like, those are the ones that use the habitat and the boreal forest—and not to mention all the methane that's emitted from all of the 'drowning' trees, and, as it rots and decays, it releases a lot of methane.

So I just want to point out that, you know, in consulting with the local authorities, they're actually excited to take this on. AMM as well, many, many—well, many years ago, I was still a councillor at the time, brought forward a resolution that moved in this direction as well to allow them to have their fair say on removing these administrative barriers that they face.

So—and I also want to point out that harvesting of wildlife or beaver, it does not change. Like, this isn't a bill that allows, you know, an all-out war with beaver, but licensed trappers still have, you know, have to be employed to harvest the beaver prior to any removal of the dam. Like, none of those laws will be altered or changed and, again, this is to prevent further damage and a timely solution. And the local governments, they deserve their fair say, of course.

So it's so slow to get a permit right now and the process—our conservation officers have to come out, look at the dam, find out where it is. That's if they can find it because when—on the permit you give a quarter-section description, the section township range. So as we all know, like, that's a half-mile by a half-mile area, and it often takes a conservation officer a lot of time to find it.

So—where the local authorities, they can pretty much tell you, you know, to how many paces in from each fence line it would be. They know exactly where it is, and this bill would allow those conservation officers to focus on more important things like, you know, poaching of our wildlife or, you know, there's the person out on the—out fishing, maybe, with barbed hooks or something like that, and they could focus on catching the people that are breaking the laws and allow the local authorities to make decisions on this.

* (10:10)

So I want to—I'm looking forward to a fulsome debate here today and, you know, this is a definitely a non-partisan issue—and I know the members opposite, they're building bridges with rural Manitobans. I see that in some of their Twitter feeds, and this is a way to build the bridge from both sides, or a fence in the case of a farmer. I guess it doesn't have to be a bridge, but to move forward and allow farmers to contact their

closest level of government for permission to remove this.

It doesn't allow a farmer just to—or anybody—just to go out and start removing dams willy-nilly. They do have to go to the local level and they need to get permission from the local government. The local government will then notify the appropriate department in a timely manner to what's going on with the removal of the beaver dam.

So a passage of this non-partisan bill today will ensure members on both sides of the House can bring the voices of rural Manitobans forward for a positive change.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Questions

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

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I want to say thank you to the member from Interlake-Gimli to present this important Bill 210, which talks about moisture and drainage issues which are very important for the farmers in Manitoba.

I have a few questions. Can I ask, will consultations be held for—before authorization is granted to a property owner? If yes, how will consultations be held? If yes, how will stakeholders be identified? If no, why not?

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): If the member could clarify: consultations of each dam or consultations of this bill?

If it's consultations of this bill, consultation has been done through AMM. They've sent out the general discussion of this bill. It was last year and the president at the time had no negative feedback on the bill, and I've also consulted with my local constituents and local municipalities not just in Interlake-Gimli, but in neighbouring constituents as well.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I'd like to thank the member from Interlake-Gimli for bringing this really important bill to the front because in rural Manitoba, and especially along the fringes of the

Duck mountains and Porcupine, we definitely have lots of issues with this.

And can the member please speak to how this bill will empower local communities and government while continuing to cut the red tape in our province?

Mr. Johnson: That's a great question.

Local municipalities, they know their watersheds, and they are the best ones to make decisions on their watersheds. They know if it's a problem area and they know best how to address it. If a dam is removed and there's going to be water that's flowing, they will know all the downstream precautions that they need to take and they know the route of the water. So it's empowering the local municipalities is what this bill is about.

Mr. Brar: I want to ask, will there be an environmental assessment or some means of analysis before a dam is destroyed?

Mr. Johnson: Currently, there is no environmental assessment. It's not changing the legislation as it currently is other than empowering the municipalities to make the decision. So it's—there's no environmental assessment as of today.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): I want to thank the member from Interlake-Gimli for bringing this important bill forward.

This has been an ongoing issue for many, many years. I know AMM and municipalities have been asking to have more control and authority over beaver dams and lodges. It cause—because they do cause a lot of anguish for farmers and for municipalities.

So can the member please explain how this bill will make life easier for rural Manitobans to protect their property from water and wildlife damage?

Mr. Johnson: It's a timing issue. Well, I guess we've all heard the saying busy as a beaver, and beavers can lift the height of their dam up overnight substantially, so a problem that you don't notice for a period of time can all of a sudden have water encroaching on a farmer's field. So it's the timely response.

Right now it is a long process to go through to—go through permitting, and a person who decides—ultimately decides the permit doesn't even live in the community and know the local watersheds. So this will make life easier by a timely response.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I want to thank the member for bringing forward this bill.

I'm just wondering: Who is responsible for the permitting and why is it so slow?

Mr. Johnson: Currently, it's a conservation officer has to go out and locate the dam, and that often takes a time in itself. We've currently just hired eight new conservation officers, but we would like them to focus on people that are poaching, breaking the law. And after the conservation officer looks at the dam, locates it and gives the locations, then the permitting comes to either Selkirk or Winnipeg, and it's just a long bureaucratic process for it to go through.

Mr. Wowchuk: I—again, thank you to the member from Interlake-Gimli. I actually recall a few times where some of the farmers in the agricultural area—in our area not been able to feed their cattle herds because of substantial flooding that occurs. So, again, I really appreciate bringing this forward.

Has the member received any feedback from Manitobans about delays with the current process for removal requests?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I have spoke with farmers where their permit has taken years to get done, and by the time, you know, that this is drowning out their pastures, their hay land. Their fences go under water, and if it goes through a year of a freeze-thaw cycle where the fence posts are underneath water, the ice actually jacks the post out of the water and starts destroying their fences.

So there's a lot more to it than just water and drowning out crops. There's a lot of damage that happens, including drowning out large portions of our boreal forest.

Mr. Brar: The member spoke of a local mayor, reeve, being consulted. Were the First Nations leaders consulted?

Mr. Johnson: Municipalities, they don't have jurisdiction over First Nations. Right now First Nations, they do not have to apply for a permit to remove a beaver dam on their land. So the municipalities do not have jurisdiction over First Nations. They only—each municipality only has jurisdiction within their own municipality. They cannot give permission to remove a beaver dam outside their municipality, even in the neighbouring municipality. At—it—they only have authority within their own watershed and municipality.

Mr. Michaleski: Again, I'll say again that AMM and the municipalities have been after this kind of authority for a long time. A lot of these projects are

really small in nature. You know, when you look at the environmental impact, there you're talking about lodges and dams that are obstructing municipal infrastructure—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Michaleski: —backing up on farmers' land. So how—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Michaleski: —how is—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Michaleski: How is this bill an improvement on the current process for requesting the removal of beaver dams or instructions to water flow?

* (10:20)

Mr. Johnson: Well, it boils down to local knowledge and the knowledge that they have. The conservation officers, they're not in the municipalities every single day. They don't live there in most cases, so the local knowledge and reducing the timelines with the local knowledge. They know the local municipalities, reeves, councillors. They'll know whether it's safe to remove the beaver dam and it just—well, it'll speed things up and make it better for rural Manitobans.

Mr. Brar: What will the approved mechanism be for destroying a beaver dam? How will they be identified, case-by-case? How was this decided? Who are experts consulted?

Mr. Johnson: Well, I've talked to conservation officers and they're—the ones that I've spoke with, they're excited to have this lifted off. But the local municipalities, they have water conservation districts as well, and they're very, very familiar with how the water flows and where the natural water should pool. There is no intention of changing that. The local experts know how the water flows, and the conservation districts will be involved as well because councillors are on—councillors sit on the conservation districts as well. So that's the local expert level there.

Mr. Wowchuk: I know some farmers who've encountered some pretty substantial vet bills with the flooding in pastures and the cattle being in those damp conditions, and—with hoof rot and things of that nature. But more importantly, also in addition to that, how will this bill result in freeing up time for department staff to focus on other responsibilities under their mandate?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I spoke to that a little bit already. The many, many extra miles that a conservation officer has to put on, that's time that he's in a vehicle driving around, not to mention traipsing across a quarter section somewhere to try and find the dam that's affecting the property. So just in time alone, not to mention the departmental time that it'll save from the—creating the permits when it's done at a local level.

So I just want to thank everybody for their great questions today and on, hopefully, this non-partisan bill can move forward and come to a vote today.

Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has ended.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): The Bill 210, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Protecting Property from Water and Wildlife Damage) amends The Wildlife Act.

The municipality, local government district or incorporated community may authorize a person to destroy a beaver lodge or beaver dam, or to remove an obstruction to water flow caused by an accumulation of debris if it adversely affects local water flow or land use.

Currently, a landowner has the right to kill or take certain wildlife in defence of their property. This bill extends the right to tenants of private or leased Crown land. While Bill 210 addresses an important issue, we have concerns because the bill does not outline thoughtfully or thoroughly the process behind authorizing the destruction of a beaver dam and the means to which it is carried out.

Beaver dams are a real concern because they can affect waterways, but it is important that adequate consultations occur when we make major disruptions to wildlife. There are many stakeholders that need to be consulted when destroying a beaver dam, and this bill does not make it clear how this is supposed to happen. There can be neighbouring communities potentially affected by changes to water levels that come from destructing a dam, and neighbours of a property owner who chooses to apply for an authorization may be implicated.

With consultations also come notification. Will community members be notified when an application has been made by an individual to destroy a beaver

dam, or will community members be notified once the application has been granted?

Will community members be able to appeal the application, or will they have to wait until individuals are authorized? And, if authorization is granted, will an individual be able to make an appeal to the municipality, or will an individual be able to appeal to water rights board?

Many questions arise from Bill 210 because it lacks specificity, and there are also real concerns regarding environmental impacts of beaver dams. Both the presence and destruction of dams can cause impact to the natural environment they surround. Will some type of analysis or assessment need to be done prior to destruction of a beaver dam? And will implications to water levels need to be assessed?

It is also unclear if liability issues have been considered in drafting of this bill, Bill 210. In the event that beaver dam is destroyed and there are unintended consequences, such as rising water levels in another municipality, for a neighbour, or impacts to a business's operations, who would assume liability? The municipality or the individual? This is very important factor that should be considered while proceeding in this direction. So these are things that need to be clearly laid out and detailed for Manitobans.

Bill 210 also doesn't provide any detail on which means are used for destroying a dam. Many dams can be quite large; many can be difficult to access, and many can be in close proximity to other important wildlife and ecosystems, so we need to consider these factors.

That's why the methods in which are permitted, such as backhoe or dynamite, to destroy dams be thoughtfully analyzed, considered and clearly laid out. Methods of destruction can also be quite intrusive for this surround environment and wildlife. Experts should be consulted. I'm not sure if they were. So, and there have been consultations, then the bill should clearly indicate permitted methods. So this is why we believe that Bill 210 is too vague. Rather, it should have been specifically mentioned to clarify these questions and concerns.

When we talk about Crown lands leasing, when we talk about this government and its policies, the government continues to make it difficult for Manitobans to keep their Crown land leases. Cattle producers lease Crown lands from provincial governments for pasture for their animals. Each

province establishes its own process to grant these leases. These leases are often on very long terms, up to 50 years in length. As a result, they're highly desirable when they become available, often when a rancher retires.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba currently has approximately 2,500 leases and permits with cattle producers, and there are currently approximately 7,000 cattle farmers in Manitoba. Until last year, Manitoba set rental rates by an assessment of comparable private rents and allocated them based on a scoring system where points were objectively awarded based on forage availability and land management practices; the size of livestock herd; the age of the farmer; prioritizing access for young farmers; new lessee status—again, prioritizing access for young farmers; proximity to parcel; ensuring farmers can move their animals between pastures; distance from headquarters; and non-farm income.

* (10:30)

This point-based system prioritized access for young ranchers, allowing families to add parcels to their existing operation. Contiguous access are important issues for ranchers. That is, unlike a combine, you can't move 200 head of cattle down the road very easily. So that's why these concentrations are very important while leasing Crown lands, which is no more the case.

The 2017 Throne Speech announced modernizing regulations for agricultural Crown lands, and Agriculture Minister on December 13th announced that leases will now be granted based on a new tendering system, which is unfortunate for many beef producers as demonstrated by them opposing this.

The minister claims that this new system had to be introduced because of trade arrangements. Yet our neighbour Saskatchewan, who is engaged in the same trade arrangements, maintains the point-based system to award land leases.

In September 2019, just after the election, the Province launched—changed regulations that decreased Crown land leases from a maximum of 50 years to just 15, and removed unit transfers except for those to direct family and cement allocations by auction. Northern ranchers argue that the regulations undermine long-term security for ranchers made up mostly of Crown lands. How can a producer or rancher of a Crown land can invest hundreds of thousands of dollars on that land improvement which is not sure to maintain or have after 15 years because

they could be bid out by anyone and there's no point investing so much in that land?

So we care about the future for beef producers that ensures young people can continue to farm, and the new tendering process is hurting young farmers the most. And while this government keeps on saying that our auctions are successful and it has been won—the bidders, successful bidders were young farmers, I want to mention here that one of the farmers near Dauphin who win the bid was 76 years old. So I don't know how they define what young farmer means. So 76 years farmer is a young farmer, then I feel like I'm just a baby. I'm just 45, so.

And if we talk about the environment track record of this government, I don't—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Are there any further members speaking on debate?

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We do have some concerns about this bill. There's a saying, if you find yourself screaming it's because you don't have a plan, and there doesn't seem to be enough co-ordination or planning around this bill.

We do recognize that drainage is one of the most important issues in Manitoba on a continual basis. If it weren't, we wouldn't be planning and building a \$500-million flood outlet, nor would we be spending—nor would we have spent hundreds of millions over the many years in order to protect Winnipeg and other—and in taxing the entire province to deal with flooding, which is a much larger issue than beavers and beaver dams alone.

I do think we need to look at the fact that it is so slow to get a permit. That is entirely in the purview of this government to make a difference, whether they're issuing permits quickly or not. For this to happen that is something—this—they've—you know, they—people have said they've been waiting years to get a permit. This government has been in power for years and that, it seems me, is a signal failure on their part.

It's also important to recognize that, you know, you can get rid of water, but it's not going to—it doesn't simply disappear. If someone breaks down a beaver dam or any other kind of flood-control structure, that water—to get the water off their land it has to go somewhere. It—and it, often, the risk is it may go into someone else's land. The fact is it's easy to solve your problems if you just dump them entirely on your neighbour, which is the entire philosophy of this

government when it comes to austerity or anything else.

When we look at the fact that this has been extended to Crown lands, it's also worth recalling exactly what's happened with ranchers and Crown lands. I travelled to the Interlake to talk with dozens of ranchers who have been horribly impacted by this government. And one of the issues that they face is that is precisely that their land has been harmed by flooding, and in some cases it was deliberate flooding engineered by previous governments in an effort to spare some producers and some communities, but dumping those costs onto others, dumping the impact and pain onto others, but not actually compensating them for it.

You know, there's a saying—and there are risks along with this so-called unintended consequences, and that's precisely that this is a scatter-shot approach. We are extremely concerned that, on the one hand, it's extreme—it's important to have local decision making, to respect local expertise. But there's a saying that good fences make good neighbours, but water doesn't care about fence lines or property lines or the lines of municipalities. The water has to go somewhere, and it's no good if you're just avoiding flood on your own land and dumping it on somebody else. This is—that is a major concern.

As far as the concern about conservation of—not inadequate conservation officers, a lack of resources for permitting, those are both 100 per cent in the purview of this government to solve, which they're not doing. If it's a problem that conservation officers have to traipse across the landscape to find a dam that needs to be dismantled or reduced, if this government had actually supported the expansion of rural Internet, and you could get a cell signal in parts of rural Manitoba, you could drop a pin on Google Maps and conservation officers wouldn't have to waste any time.

This bill should have had consultation with First Nations. Municipalities may think they don't have a duty to consult, but this provincial government does.

And the fact is that not only have First Nations been treated as disposable and deliberately flooded in the past—that is an ongoing issue right now. The Manitoba government sacrificed First Nations like Lake St. Martin to save others, and many people lost their homes, were rendered homeless at enormous expense to themselves and others. And these floods were certainly not caused by beavers alone.

We do want to empower farmers. We want rural communities to thrive, and we need a plan to make sure that we're dealing with flooding in a way that actually makes sense. Now my—as it happens, my family does have a quarter section near Rosburn. We've dealt with issues of flooding, we've dealt with issues of beaver dams, and there are times when people are accused when—because of problems with water management, it was suggested that we had a water control device that was flooding our neighbour's land, which was not the case. It was happening naturally.

But the issue of drainage is incredibly important, and the issue of how the water flows needs to have a bigger picture than—and have larger oversight. So, even if this bill goes ahead, even if we make it easier for people to remove these structures, it's incredibly important that it's being done within the context of a larger plan so the people aren't just flooding their neighbours, so that farmers aren't just 'flubbing'—flooding their neighbours or passing the cost onto somebody else.

But the thing—but that also applies to rural municipalities and municipalities; that they're not just relieving the risk of flood on their own land and passing it onto another municipality, to a First Nation, or having other environmental that—which have other environmental, social, political, and economic risks. The fact is that this is an incredibly—the issue of water, the issue of—has been—is incredibly important because it actually makes the difference.

As many of the members of the government side said, it makes a colossal difference to farmers' capacity to make a living. It makes—if their land is under water, if their crop land is under water, if they're unable to graze, this has been a massive impact and it—but it continues to be a massive impact.

And, again, I'll just return to a moment on the issue of Crown lands. Crown lands and cattle farmers who are ranching on Crown lands, that part of the reason why there hasn't been a recognition on the part of this government for the damage they are doing is that so many of those farmers are actually dealing with the impact of past floods that have rendered their land much more marginal.

And what we need to do is have a plan to make sure that conservation districts are involved, and that there actually needs to be times when there needs to be something more than just people going out on their own and blowing up beaver dams, or people going out on their own and doing this on their own without fully

thinking about what might be happening to their neighbour, because that is actually the role of municipal governments, but also of this government as well.

*(10:40)

We do and—excuse me—so that's the most important thing is that we cannot have—we need to have—we still need to have a framework that exists and a process that needs to go through. If it—the process is too slow, again, that's on this government to address, to put the resources into permitting if it's that urgent and if it's that important, to make sure that these things are moving forward quickly, but this is, I understand, a problem that's existed not just under this government, but the previous government as well.

We need to be able to deal with these things in a way that's prompt and expeditious because this is also the sort of the thing that can cause emergencies. But, ultimately, there needs to be a broader plan put together, or if this bill is going to move forward, if this bill is going to be continued, that it needs to be set in a broader regulatory framework to make sure that when these—if a dam is to be destroyed, there may be times that it's a bad idea to do it, and that there needs to be a—there needs to be—people need to be willing to say no when it does happen in order to prevent something worse from happening.

The fact is that that there are always going to be unintended consequences from any of these measures and this is—on the one hand, this is being portrayed as empowerment and—but, really, part of this is passing off costs and, frankly, risks to individuals that should really be borne by government—is that, ultimately, what happens—the other question about this is actually, and I think that is a critical question, when it comes to liability.

Part of the reason to have a plan, part of the reason to have a bigger picture is to recognize that they're—because of the economic impacts of flooding—if one—if a farmer or an individual blows up a dam and floods his neighbour's land, we are—we could actually end up having lawsuits. We could have liabilities. There could be tremendous damage in costs, so this is something that needs to be approached carefully and I'm not sure that that's something this bill has addressed adequately.

So in many—there are certainly basic principles here. We recognize that this is a problem, that damming and water is a problem. We recognize it needs to be dealt with in a way that's smart and

effective and, hopefully, is efficient and low-cost as possible. We recognize that people at the local level have a great degree of expertise.

But, ultimately, there's a point when if you're only focused on your own self-interest and the self-interest of your land or the self-interest of your municipality, and you don't take into consideration the impacts on your neighbours, there's going to be a problem, and that's what has to be considered in the broader context of this bill. Ultimately—look, we're all Manitobans, and the fact is that if all we're going to do is destroy a dam to relieve flooding on our part and flood somebody else instead, it's not going to work.

So I thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I look forward to further debate on the bill.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): In regards to Bill 210, I've heard farmers, landowners, consultations, local reeves, mayors, councillors, but I have not heard First Nation leadership in regards to consultation process with this bill.

And I understand it's been introduced as a potential non-partisan issue, but at the same time, how can it be declared a non-partisan issue when you won't involve all parties? Not just parties in this Chamber, not just parties within rural Manitoba, but parties all over Manitoba, and that's a big issue that we have with our First Nation communities when it comes time to dealing with things like this.

While we understand Bill 210 addresses an important issue, we have concerns because of the process behind this and exactly what happened. There are many stakeholders that need to be consulted when destroying a beaver dam, and this bill does not make it clear when—and when that is supposed to happen. There could be neighbouring communities in First Nations potentially affected by changes to water levels that come from destruction of a dam. Neighbours of a property owner who choose to apply for an authorization may be implicated.

With consultation also comes notification; so will people be notified after the fact, after an application has been made, after approval has been made, and what kind of dispute resolution do they have to be able to say this is going to affect me, and exactly what does that process entail?

I think about my own First Nation and exactly—the grey area that something like this does create. For our water supply that we have in our community, it comes down to Wanipigow River, and at one point in time that river got dammed by cottagers upriver just

simply because their water level was too low. So in order to increase their water level to a certain height, they actually eliminated ours with no consultation, no discussion.

And again, because it didn't cross in the First Nation reserve land, reserve boundary, they felt they didn't have to consult or didn't have to talk to anybody. So those kind of things have implications over jurisdictional boundaries. And we're not saying that there should be a veto power over anything like this.

It's all about consulting and being able to talk with everybody that's involved; all the stakeholders and all the potential stakeholders that may be affected. It may be just simply as a matter of forming a committee, forming a board that actually does oversee this. And for the most part, maybe a lot of these issues are rubber-stamped. But it needs to involve everybody at that table and involve people and all the stakeholders that are involved over all jurisdictional boundaries that may be affected by something in the area.

When we have no jurisdiction and we talk about jurisdictional issues—provincially, federally, on-reserve, off-reserve, municipalities, I think it's something we can all work together on, and it's something that we need to be able to work together on. And if we want to declare this a real non-partisan issue, then let's truly make it that way and involve all parties and have all parties discuss what matters go.

And, if we have Bill 210 go forward, what kind of parameters are there? Again, there's still so many unknowns in this bill. There's so many grey areas. Again, it comes back to some of the other bills that we discussed over time where it's: we're going to do this, we're going to put a thing in policy. Trust us to do the right thing later on.

So what kind of parameters are going to be involved? And those are the kind of questions that we are asking today. We're asking exactly what's going to happen today. What does this mean today? What—is there a dispute resolution? There's a lot of unanswered questions in this supposed non-partisan issue.

So, instead, when we spoke and the questions were being asked, it was only referred to as having no jurisdiction on First Nation territory. Have efforts even been made to work together, or is it just simply no jurisdiction and that's kind of the cop-out answer to say we don't want to work together? There are matters of jurisdiction definitely, but there are also matters of attempting to work together over

jurisdictional boundaries for the betterment of all involved.

And I don't see that happening in this case. I don't think that's happening in many cases in regard to First Nation territory and First Nation issues and jurisdictional boundaries. But it's not something that nobody is open to, nobody has shut the door on that. But it seems to be a cop-out to just not work together. So while we recognize the needs of and the rights of First Nation communities, the First Nation members to hunt, this is also an issue of water and wildlife damage is what we're talking about here.

So, when we talk about the water and exactly where the water flows in all of Manitoba, we talk about the experts, or the so-called experts. So I asked the question that who was consulted and who was part of developing this bill and developing the wording to be able to say, this is what we do, this is what's right, I'm the expert. We—it was mentioned earlier about the municipalities and the reeves, they are the stewards of the lands. Well, First Nations people are the original stewards of the lands. But again, not consulted on this and I would beg to differ. And I would have that strong argument that they are, in fact, the experts when it comes to dealing with things like this.

So, when we talk about going forward and working together, bills like this, bills that are spoken about as non-partisan issues; then let's truly make that a non-partisan issue. Let's bring all the stakeholders involved, both parties of both sides of this Chamber, but also all of Manitobans. Not just farmers, not just rural Manitoba, but all people that are affected in this.

I understand there is real consequences for things that may happen in regards to damage from wildlife, damage from water but, again, let's involve all, and that's something that is clearly not happening here, and doesn't happen on a number of issues.

And that's the awareness that I really want to raise, is being able to involve everybody in this process on a truly non-partisan issue over jurisdictional boundaries because we have—we are all living on this one Mother Earth. So let's involve everybody in this process, and let's be able to work together. Let's not fight over jurisdictional areas. Let's not fight over, well, we can hunt up to this point, we can hunt up to this boundary line, up to this reserve line. Let's not do that. Let's work together.

Where I come from, we have a lot of beaver population in our area. It affects the water system, it affects the roadways, it affects it in all kinds of

different ways. We describe sometimes as maybe nuisance beavers, we talk about—and what exactly—what does that mean? But, at the end of the day, they are a part of our civilization. And that is exactly what we need to discuss too. We need to discuss exactly, is this a free-for-all? Is this a free-for-all for somebody to go out and say, I determine this to be a nuisance, so I'm going to do this?

* (10:50)

Exactly what kind of dispute mechanism is there, and what kind of approval system is there, and who is involved in that approval system? Is it a matter of, well, I have some friends that are connected in various organizations, so I have the right to go out and hunt? Again, where is the safety issue in this? How is this going about? How is this going to be brought about? How is it going to be instituted? We don't know that.

Again, a lot of unknowns, and way too many unknowns in this situation. And again, we're not talking about somebody who's going to go out there and just grab something out of the water. They perhaps are carrying a weapon. Are they using guns? Are they going to use dynamite? Are they going to use whatever means necessary, and who determines exactly what that is, by any means necessary, to be able to do that?

And those are simply the questions we're asking. We're asking very simple questions, and we're not getting simple answers. And to me that should be an easy back-and-forth, again, on this supposed nonpartisan issue. And, I mean, I've heard that term, and I heard it mentioned a couple of times—non-partisan, nonpartisan, nonpartisan. Let's truly make it that way, involve everybody.

But, again, this government has proven time and time again that they're not willing to do that. They're not willing to involve all the stakeholders. They're not willing to be able to sit down and just have a conversation, hear the input. They play fast and loose with the word consultation. There's consultation versus consent versus engagement, and I've heard all those words time and time again. They're all interchanged.

But at the same time, let's sit there and have a truly meaningful dialogue to be able to deal with things just like Bill 210. It's good—sorry—and be able to engage everybody and all the stakeholders that are involved, you know, whether they're First Nations, whether they're reeves, whether they're mayors or councils, whether they're anybody involved in this process,

because it is—it is an issue for today. It is an issue that's now setting policy, now setting bills, now setting legislation; that's going to affect going forward.

And exactly what does that mean, going forward? People think that we can just destroy a beaver or a beaver house with no consequence, but what does that mean for us? What does that mean for our ecosystem? We—there's a lot of things that we don't understand in what goes on. A lot of things happen for a reason. We talk about the marsh, the marshlands, and what does that mean? Well, you know, my marshland is flooding, so now I'm going to kill this beaver house, I'm going to destroy this beaver house. I'm going to free that up.

So now those marshlands are in fact the dialysis and they are the kidneys of our system, exactly what we need to survive to clean our water. So who's going to determine that? It's going to be determined by somebody with a gun who feels, you know what, this is improper for me to do.

So, with that, thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'm pleased to put a couple of words on the record in respect to Bill 10.

I thought that since we are discussing beavers and their habitats and, I mean, some of it has been talking about beavers only in a context of the destruction that they do. I thought it was important if we put a couple of facts and information on the record about beavers, Madam Speaker, since we're talking about beavers. So—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Before the member goes too far down that road, I would indicate that relevance to this bill needs to be ensured, so that if the member is going to be talking about beavers, as she's indicating, that it be relevant to the bill and what this bill is intended for.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, Madam Speaker, I believe it is relevant to talk about some of the characteristics of beaver when we're talking about the habitats of beavers and the potential to have landowners expedite the right to kill beavers in their natural territories and their natural environments.

So I think it's important to understand some of the characteristics of beavers, and so I did, like I said, want to put some facts on the record. I mean this bill is specifically—and the member for—where?

An Honourable Member: Gimli.

Ms. Fontaine:—Gimli, thank you, Madam Speaker—did mention primarily in this bill only about beavers and beaver dams and the destruction that they—or, and the heartache that they create for landowners. And so I haven't heard anything else about any other animals, and so I think it's important to put some of those on the official record as we are debating this.

And so, Madam Speaker, I learned some interesting facts this morning about beavers that I thought that we would all be interested in knowing. And so the basic units of beaver social organization, are families consisting of an adult male, an adult female in a monogamous pair with their kits and their yearlings. Beaver families can have as many as 10 members in addition to the monogamous pair. I think this is quite fascinating.

Groups of this size—groups this size, or close to this size, build more lodges, Madam Speaker, to live in while smaller families usually need only one. So I think that when we're talking about this bill and we'd look at some of the different dams and social organizations that landowners are coming into contact with, it's important to have this information in respect of how these dams or these family units are actually constructed by beavers. So large families in the northern hemisphere have been recorded living in one lodge, Madam Speaker.

Beavers, like I said, pair—they mate for life. However, Madam Speaker, if a beaver mate dies, it can—the remaining beaver can partner with another one, and then I thought that this was quite fascinating. Actually, both male and female beavers take part equally in raising their offspring. They also mark their territory and defend their territory and build and repair the dams and lodges.

So I think it's fascinating, Madam Speaker, and I'm sure that most in the House would agree that actually beavers are one of the few animals in the world that actually build their environment. So often when we talk about animals, they are a part of the environment, obviously, but beavers actually also construct their little biosphere, their little environment to protect their social organization and to allow them to survive and to thrive in North America and in these territories. Miigwech.

So they—when the young are born, Madam Speaker, they spend their first month in the lodge and their mother is the primary caregiver while the father—the male beaver—actually protects the territory. And they—by the time they leave the lodge for the first time,

babies or yearlings will help their parents build food caches in the fall and repair dams and lodges.

So you can see, Madam Speaker, when we're talking about Bill 10, and we're talking about these lodges, actually it is the whole family beaver unit that contribute to ensuring that the dam and their home and their environment is actually protected. I think that that's quite important to put on the record here. That it is not just one, it's not just the male beavers, but it's actually the whole family unit that contribute to the construction and upkeep of their environment. Still, the adults do the majority of the work.

I thought that this was quite interesting. Where did I see this? Young beavers, Madam Speaker, actually spend most of their time playing, which I thought was interesting. They do also copy their parents' behaviour. That's where they learn their behaviours. They mimic those behaviours and they imprint those life skills from their parent beavers which allows this beaver behaviour to continue in respect of creating your own environment and safeguarding your family.

It's older offspring—and we're talking about maybe at two years of age for beaver—may also live in families and will help their parents, Madam Speaker. They've also been known—older sibling beavers have been known to actually also help in the care of younger beavers. So they'll take on those roles of parents—

* (11:00)

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have three minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—\$2020 Tax Rollback Guarantee

Madam Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on \$2,020 tax rollback guarantee, brought forward by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

And, before I recognize the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, I would like to introduce some guests to you that have just arrived in the gallery.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: We have seated in the public gallery, from Linden Christian School, 69 grade 4 students under the direction of Karen Schroeder, and this

group is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister.

On behalf of all members here, we welcome all of you to the Manitoba Legislative Building.

* * *

Madam Speaker: I will now recognize the honourable member for Portage la Prairie to introduce his resolution.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I move, seconded by the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk),

WHEREAS the previous NDP Provincial Government (NDP) took money off of the kitchen tables of Manitobans through various tax increases; and

WHEREAS the NDP increased taxes 15 times over 14 years, routinely failed to balance the budget and projected increasing deficits year after year; and

WHEREAS the NDP increased the PST to 8% as well as expanded the PST base to more goods and services, including home insurance and haircuts; and

WHEREAS the NDP missed every budget target they set since 2003, resulting in Manitoba's debt doubling in just six years and debt servicing charges reaching record levels of over \$1 billion; and

WHEREAS the current Provincial Government believes in fixing the finances, repairing the services and rebuilding the economy and is committed to making life more affordable for all Manitobans; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government introduced the \$2020 "Tax Rollback Guarantee", saving Manitobans an average of \$2020 over the next four years, thereby bringing significant savings to everybody across the province; and

WHEREAS on July 1, 2019, the Provincial Government reduced the PST to 7%, allowing Manitoba families to keep more of their hard-earned money; and

WHEREAS the reduction of the PST is the largest tax cut in Manitoba history, saving Manitobans more than \$300 million annually; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has also eliminated the PST on the preparation of wills, and will be eliminating the PST on more goods and services, such as home insurance, haircuts, and tax return preparations; and

WHEREAS the \$2020 Tax Rollback Guarantee includes measures previously implemented by the Provincial Government, such as indexing the Basic Personal Amount and personal income tax brackets; and

WHEREAS the 7,700 Manitobans already removed from the tax rolls have saved more than \$75 million due to changes implemented by the Provincial Government; and

WHEREAS in 2020, it is estimated that another 3,300 Manitobans will be removed from the tax rolls, resulting in additional tax savings of \$34 million.

There—the BE IT RESOLVED be—that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to fight for Manitobans to have the right to retain their money and to sustain low taxes throughout the \$2,020 tax rollback guarantee.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), seconded by the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk),

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to fight for Manitobans to have the right to retain their money and to sustain low taxes through the \$2,020 tax rollback guarantee.

Mr. Wishart: It's a pleasure to rise and talk about this particular issue.

It's important to all Manitobans that they are able to retain as much of their hard-earned income as possible and to put it to uses that are of their choice and strengthen their own community through their actions in their own community. And this is all about building community and building families. And it's never easy for government to put in place policies that help build communities and strengthen families, but we're trying very hard to do that as a government, particularly after a decade or more that has led to a lot of decline in income stabilization and incomes suffering badly, mostly through taxes of various types being rained upon them by provincial governments.

I know that during that period of time when there was an NDP government in Manitoba we had 15 tax increases in 14 years, and that type of increase is not sustainable.

One of the reasons that I as a individual got into politics was because we could see that the route that was being followed was definitely not sustainable moving forward, and it was a motivator in particular

on the education tax issue in rural areas with—that is a real burden to many rural people, the farm community, the rural community in general. It's something that needs to be changed and fixed, and there was certainly no sign that that was going to happen under the previous government.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The implementation of the \$2,020 tax rollback in Manitoba will save Manitobans an average of \$2,020 over the next four years, and, of course, this is the time of year when everybody's getting ready or has, in few cases, I think, already filed their income tax, and so people are very aware in particular that this is a major saving. We've done a couple things in the area of personal deductions. We have indexed it so that the creeping progress that was made, the erosion that was made by not having it indexed and reducing the value of your personal deduction now has stopped, and that alone is worth about \$30 million across Manitoba. So that's certainly a move in the right direction. And then the increase in personal deductions will put a lot of money back on Manitoba tables.

Over the next four years—there's approximately 880,000 taxpayers in Manitoba. That'll put about \$1.8 billion back on kitchen tables, and that's a significant shot in the arm. And I think we're all very aware that about 40 per cent of Manitobans at the end of the month only have about \$200 left to their name. We're helping to improve that situation very dramatically by not taking the money from them in taxes in one form or the other.

So Manitobans also are very sensitive to the issue of PST. If—I remember the campaign where the NDP premier at the time made the promise that PST would not be increased. And then, of course, as we all know, without taking the referendum up—the increase to people in the referendum—that, in fact, it was increased. And that was a real blow. And it made us, as a province, less competitive with our neighbours. So it was certainly a burden in regards to that. And that type of blow tends to erode everyone's income—or, the impact of the dollars that they spend in the community.

It's particularly 'burdison' to the working poor—people with limited and fixed incomes—when you raise a consumptive tax like PST. So I'm very proud to be part of a government that has already lowered the PST 1 per cent, as our promise, and is now looking at moving for even further and lowing the PST another per cent.

During the time that there was NDP in government, the cumulative total of their taxes—of 15 taxes over 14 years, was about like raising the PST another per cent. So they certainly eroded the spending power of people an awful lot. The NDP also expanded the base on which they had PST calculated. Things like haircuts, but other goods and services that are important. In particular, at this time of year, the PST would have applied to accountants' fees and legal fees if you use either of those things in terms of business planning or planning for your future or planning your estates. And, of course, the issue of estate taxes is another one.

So, during their NDP tenure, a lot of money went off kitchen tables and into their coffers. And we certainly want to be sure that we can maintain the services that Manitobans need while putting more money back on kitchen tables.

The PST reduction that I referenced earlier reduced—that put a lot of extra money back in Manitobans' hands. The 1 per cent reduction that was in July of 2019 was worth around \$300 million to Manitobans. And the—when we move forward on the \$25-per-ton green levy, that will further reduce the PST to 6 per cent—that will be another \$300 million that Manitobans will have on their own kitchen tables.

And there's lots of evidence to support that the \$25-a-ton green levy will have an impact in itself in changing people's habits in terms of consumption. Everybody's watching gas prices these days, of course, because they've been volatile in their own right. And, of course, now, with some of the impact on—in the oil industry, they're doubly volatile for the next little while. And we're very much aware that it has an impact. But for those of us that live in rural and remote areas, we don't really have a lot of choices when it comes to whether or not we burn gas to go and—to provide—to go and do an errand or do what we need to do. It's simply not a choice that we have to make. And, of course, there is no other option in terms of using public 'transput' or anything like that. We certainly have all got to the point now where we plan our trips very carefully and don't make anything extra in terms of trips to try and keep our consumption down.

I think many people in rural communities are far more aware of environmental issues than they're giving credit for, and certainly have come to understand so that what we do on the environment has a major impact beyond the farm gate or beyond the rural community and that it's part of the whole issue

of global warming and are very aware of it and are doing a lot of activities to reduce the impact.

During—the \$2,020 tax rollback guarantee will also remove the PST—we will also be removing the PST from home insurance, personal services and fees for wills and tax returns. Removing PST on home insurance is a major move in the right direction. It's very important to get Manitobans to protect themselves against events beyond their control, and insurance is a major part of that and is something that I think most Manitobans are very aware of.

* (11:10)

It's interesting to look at it this year in particular because, of course, we're worried about flood, and this is the first year that there are—there actually is flood insurance available in Manitoba, private flood insurance for some parts of the province, and that has not been the case in the past. And so it's changing a few things quite a bit, and people are looking—having a look at it.

And then, of course, across the line in North Dakota they're also in a situation very similar, where now flood insurance is available down in that jurisdiction on a private basis, but, of course, they too are—there are regions of the state down there that are not eligible for that. And it's generated quite a lot of discussion, actually, if you follow North Dakota papers at all, running up to the flood, that some people can get insurance for it and some people can't, and why the boundaries are where they are, which, it's based very much on whether or not appropriate—government has taken appropriate steps to protect them.

Now, I know I'm running out of time here, and I know there are many people that want to talk about the tax situation in Manitoba, but I did want to touch in particular on education tax. It's one of the reasons that I got involved in politics, because the formula that's been followed for many, many years on education tax is actually based on The Homestead Act. The Homestead Act of 1893 is the reason we have education tax on property. Now, that's a long time ago. We clearly have many reasons to look at how we have been funding education, because we all want good education for our family members in Manitoba. But we need to find a sustainable way to fund it, and our government has made a promise during the last election to move forward with moving education tax off property. That's a major shift, and something we're planning on doing over 10 years.

So thank you very much, Mr. Deputy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Questions

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

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Is the government concerned that high-income earners will disproportionately benefit from these tax cuts?

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Actually, if you look at the—how the personal income benefit is calculated and how you get your return on the tax return, it's actually low-income earners that proportionately do better than high-income earners on the basic personal exemption. It's the same for everyone. It's a higher percentage of your income when you're low income than it is for the larger income people. So, proportionately, they do better.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I'd just like to ask the member why he believes that Manitobans deserve tax relief.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

Certainly, we mentioned in my few remarks that Manitobans have—many Manitobans have very little personal disposable income left at the end of the month. The more we can put back on the individual's kitchen table for their discretion and to spend in their own community to strengthen their family and their community, the better I think they will be, and I think the whole community and then the province will be. So it's sort of strengthening the community or strengthening Manitoba from the grassroots up.

Mr. Wasyliv: The member opposite raised the basic personal exemption. Now, when we look at the lowest tax bracket, the average taxpayer is going to save about \$53 from these changes, but those making more than \$70,000 a year are going to save more than \$250 a year.

So I'm going to ask this member: Does the government believe that that is fair?

Mr. Wishart: We certainly believe that everyone needs to have more money put back on their kitchen

table. If it's question of income, those that are at low and fixed incomes—limited and fixed incomes certainly need the benefit of an increased personal deduction. They get to keep more money as well. But they're also the part of the community that is most impacted by changes to the PST.

So lowering the PST has a proportionately better outcome to them because, of course, their spending habits. Youth spend a bigger portion of their income on consumables, in particular. So, we look at all sectors of society and we certainly—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Ms. Audrey Gordon (Southdale): Can the member please tell us how much our \$2,020 tax rollback guarantee will save Manitoba families?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

And, of course, the \$2,020 tax rollback is aptly named. Over four years, you'll get—you're going to get about \$20,020 in terms of savings. So it comes to around \$505 per year. Significant saving to each individual across the province and also very strong benefit to the family.

Mr. Wasyliv: Does this government support a progressive taxation system, one where the more you benefit from the economy and the higher your income, the more you pay into the system?

Mr. Wishart: I know the member wants to be sure that every Manitoban pays their fair share in terms of a—the tax burden that the Province requires to support the services that they provide across Manitoba. So we certainly do support a fair tax system that makes sure everyone contributes to their fair share to what the taxation is—that need—is needed to support Manitoba. So I think that that's the best way to look at that. You cannot just take a simple analysis to a very complicated tax formula that applies not only here in Manitoba, but across the country. I know the member's probably very familiar with the tax—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Could the member tell me, since we're running a deficit right now and we're having to borrow to pay for every dime of this tax cut, how much is this going to add to Manitoba's deficit and how long—how much longer we will—this is postponing our actually balancing the budget?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question, because certainly he's been associated with a federal government that likes to spend—deficit spends in a major way in this country. And we have, provincially, reduced the deficit, as he knows. And we're getting to a point where, somewhere in the next year or two, we're going to balance the budget, which is a great step forward. Some—there is some spending incentive when money is spent in a—when you have deficit spending. It creates a little economic stimulus in the community. The question is, do you—when do you overdo it, as a government? And, of course, we're watching with great interest—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Wasyliw: Why shouldn't businesses who failed to pay their taxes on time pay a fair interest rate for withholding tax dollars from the Manitoban people?

Mr. Wishart: Well, certainly, we want to see Manitoba businesses pay their taxes. And, though we are reducing the amount of interest that they are charged, they are still paying an interest rate that would probably, in most cases, be higher than bank interest rates if they were to go to private lending. So they are being penalized, as the member says, but we do want them to pay it back. And that's certainly why we're looking at structuring in a way that encourages them to pay back in a prompt manner.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Can the member for Portage la Prairie—he mentioned that during the dark days of the NDP's tenure, that they had raised taxes a multitude of times.

Does the member know why the NDP think that Manitobans don't deserve their own money?

Mr. Wishart: I certainly appreciate the question from the member for McPhillips.

I can't actually look into the minds of the members opposite and understand why they believe what they believe in some circumstances, but it was very obvious, I know, watching a number of budgets come forward under the NDP. You knew that there was going to be hidden taxes in there. It was—they seemed to believe that their money was—that private individual money was better in their hands, and that they would spend more wisely than a private individual would do. I think there's little evidence to support that.

The other thing you knew for certain, is that they would not hit the budget anyway.

* (11:20)

Mr. Wasyliw: We're hearing on a daily basis that the world is entering into a pandemic, and Manitoba will not be excluded from that. In a time when we may have a crisis in our health-care system and we need more resources to battle this pandemic, is it a good idea to be cutting taxes at this moment?

Mr. Wishart: I can assure the member that we are prepared for any health crisis that comes into Manitoba.

We are taking steps. I know I spoke with the Health Minister the other day, and there—special steps are being taken to be prepared for the—for anything that might hit Manitoba. We cannot foresee the future with great certainty. I know that H1N1 and a few other examples that we have seen here in Manitoba in the past have been opportunities to learn how to be better prepared, and we're very serious about being well prepared.

So money would be available and within the budget that we have now, and we will certainly do our best to make sure that anything that is necessary—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can—or, sorry—I'm wondering if the member can give an estimate to this House of how much is going to be borrowed and how much the interest cost will be on that borrowed money to cover the budget shortfall from these tax cuts. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wishart: I would remind them—the member opposite—that we actually have refilled the rainy day fund. We actually have something in place in case we do have a crisis.

We did not deplete the rainy day fund like previous governments did to the point where they were vulnerable to any sudden impact or any sudden change. We certainly hope and will take all steps necessary to make sure that there isn't any form of epidemic and that the impact is minimized here in Manitoba.

But, should there be any special need, we do have a rainy day fund to draw on. And I thank the member very much for that question.

Mr. Smith: I'd like to ask the member from Portage la Prairie why he believes—or why tax relief for

Manitobans is important to the people of this province and also to this side of the House.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

Tax relief leaves the money in the individual's hands to benefit their family and their own—their local community. As I said earlier, we believe, on this side of the House, the community is the strong basis that we want to build Manitoba from. This sets the right standard.

And to strengthen a community makes all of Manitoba stronger. It's the right way to approach building a great Manitoba in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate is open. Any speakers?

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): The average Manitobans are not going to save what this government is claiming they're going to save, and this is unfortunately, since I've been here, more of the same—more of that sort of creative accounting, cooking the books, moving money here and there. And we see that pattern.

And they call this the—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —2020 tax rollback; that is a misnomer. What this bill is, is the reverse Robin Hood tax. This is where the purpose of these tax cuts are having working-class and middle-class Manitobans hand over their money, which will flow up the food chain to high-income Manitobans who are doing just fine in this economy and don't need this assistance at all. That's who will benefit from the nearly \$1.8 billion in lost revenue from these very reckless cuts.

And let's look at them. We have PST on home insurance. The government hasn't said exactly how much it's going to cost the Treasury, but we know it'll be in the tens of millions of dollars. They're saying it's—an average insurance policy will be \$70. But what's going to happen, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the insurance industry, it's just simply going to absorb that and they're going to raise their rates by \$70 a policy.

And this is—and again, more corporate welfare to the insurance industry. And, again, are we surprised of that? No. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: Then we're looking at personal services. So, if you spend more money at the salon than \$50 or your haircuts are more than \$50, you're going to get a PST break. That's a \$7-million hit to the Treasury. Well, who has more than \$50 to spend at a salon or at a hair place? Well, wealthy Manitobans do, the people that aren't even asking for this tax break. So they're going to disproportionately benefit from this gift.

Then we have PST off professional income tax preparation. Again, you need to have money to hire an accountant to do your taxes. That's \$3 million in lost Treasury money. This isn't going to help you at your H&R Block-type accounting services. This is going to be a gift to large companies and wealthy Manitobans.

Then we have the phase-out of the education property tax—over \$800 million. And, of course, the larger, wealthier house you have, the more property tax you have, the more you'll save from this. Again, it disproportionately benefits those that least need it.

And then we have the PST reduction from last year—that was \$325 million. And then we have a new PST reduction this year of \$325 million and, then, of course, the index to 'basinal'—basic personal exemption and the indexing of the personal income tax brackets. One of the estimates is in the first year alone it's \$75-million loss from those two measures. In 2020, another \$34 million will be lost to the Treasury.

And, again, in my question, I mean the data's pretty clear, if you are a low-income earner in Manitoba, you will save \$50 from this measure.

If you're in the top bracket you're going to save \$250-plus. There is absolutely nothing progressive about this. The PST changes, the indexing of the basic personal exemption and the indexing of personal income brackets all make a progressive tax system less progressive and it creates loopholes in which wealthy Manitobans can drive a Mack Truck through and benefit from this tax regime. It does the absolute opposite of their Orwellian language that my friend opposite uses, saying that somehow the working Manitoban should be happy to have their pockets picked and hand over to their bosses part of their paycheque, because that's what all of these cumulative effects of these taxes will do.

So we also have the next thing, is PST will be exempt on the preparation of wills? Well, that's legal fees where, again, you need money to hire a lawyer. Most Manitobans don't have wills because they don't

have anything that's going to get passed down to anybody. You need to have wealth to pass it down, and if you have wealth to pass it down, you also have the money to hire a lawyer and you don't need a coupon for your legal services. We're going to lose \$1 million from that as well.

And then probate fees—this is fantastic—\$10 million lost in probate fees. We do not have an inheritance tax in Manitoba. We have no way to address wealth inequality in Manitoba. An inherited tax, a probate tax, all those things are measures to make us more of an equal and fair society.

When you get rid of a probate fee, and for those who don't know, it means that, basically, you register with the courts and a judge reviews the estate and the will and charges a percentage based on the wealth of the estate in order to ensure that it is fair and it is proper and that nobody's getting cheated and that everything's above board. That's a service that our province provides people to keep things on the straight and narrow and it allows for some redistribution of wealth because it's based on the size of your estate.

So this is a direct attack on wealth equality in Manitoba. This will make us less fair. This will make us less equal as a province, and there's absolutely no justification. You don't see the good people of Manitoba rising up and saying, you know, I want more money being inherited to me that I didn't earn and you need to bring that to me. That's just—nobody's asking for this. Nobody's asking for many of these measures.

And then, what's deeply troubling, is this government is eliminating the interest on debts owed to Manitoba Finance for unpaid provincial taxes, and that will be in the multi-millions.

So a business decides they're not going to remit their retail sales tax. They're not going to remit a number of other taxes that they're required to remit. Well, you charge interest on it. When you don't pay your income tax or your corporate tax, the federal government charges interest on it because you're withholding money that's no longer yours; it's the peoples' money and you have to pay for renting out that people's money. But apparently not this government. When a business in Manitoba doesn't pay their fair share and withholds their fair taxation, we want to reward them and give them an incentive to do that.

* (11:30)

That is bananas. That is, like, opposite world. And there's been no justification from this government other than its corporate welfare as to why they would do this.

So we have a loss of \$1.8 billion in revenue here. And so tell me again why we can't spend \$30 million to feed every single hungry child in Manitoba. That's unconscionable. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$14 million to keep an ER open every year—why did we have to shut any of them? We got money to spare apparently.

Why are we underfunding our education system? Why have we dismantled our health-care system? We have the money here. Our child-care system is on the verge of collapse and we're running around here saying we don't think that wealthy people in Manitoba are wealthy enough, so let's give them a break, because that's what this rollback does.

So these are eye-popping numbers, and what's going to happen here is the tax burden is further going to get shifted from wealthy people and businesses to working people and the middle class. And we are getting less and less fair because of it.

So PST cuts—they hurt poor and middle-class people. They don't have the money to spend, so people who have more money spend more money, save more money. But the reverse is true: when you pull out \$108 billion from the budget, it means you've got to find that money elsewhere, and you're doing it by cutting our education system, our health-care system, our child-care system. You're not maintaining our roads and our schools and those are the things that working families and Manitobans need and rely upon. They disproportionately use these services that you're now going to say, well, the cupboard's bare, we got to cut.

How on earth, in a time that you claim that we're in a deficit, that you're further cutting taxes? Isn't that the height of fiscal irresponsibility? Wouldn't this make sense to pay off the deficit to fill up all our rainy day funds and then say, oh, okay, let's repair our education system that's—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —underfunded. Let's repair the health-care system, which is—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —underfunded. Let's start rebuilding our roads.

At the Winnipeg School Division, the infrastructure deficit alone for that one division—
[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Please be seated. I just want to remind everyone we—I just cannot—I can't hear the speaker, so if everybody can keep their conversation down and respect the person who's speaking, and less heckling.

Mr. Wasyliw: So, under this government, in the last three, three and a half years, poverty is now back on the rise; income inequality is now getting worse in Manitoba. We are also seeing that the poor are getting less healthy and sicker, which are causing bigger strains on our system.

This is disastrous. This has not been well thought out. This government needs to rethink this.

Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I do appreciate the opportunity to rise and put a few words on the record with respect to this resolution.

I do want to thank the member from Portage la Prairie for putting this resolution forward, and I also want to thank him for all his good work he's done on the K to 12 education review. We do look forward to the results of that coming forward.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the House here this morning we've heard the opposite—the NDP opposite talk about how concerned they are for the Treasury and—which is funny, because while they were in power for 17 years, they had no concern for the Treasury. They raised taxes and managed to raise the deficit at the same time. I guess that's a skill only that members opposite could acquire.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just this past week—
[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: —we lowered the PST further, so July 1st the PST will go from 7 per cent down to 6 per cent, saving Manitobans more money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've heard members opposite talk about the Treasury. And, again, with feigned indignation, stands up here and has the audacity to say that it's taking money out of the system and making—taking money out of Treasury to give back to Manitobans. Well, it's Manitobans' money in the first place, so I don't know what they're concerns are in this respect.

Just this—well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a track record of lowering taxes over the past few years. Our—under our \$2,020 rollback, we'll remove the PST from home insurance, we're going to remove PST from personal-care services such as haircuts, saving Manitobans roughly \$7 million, eliminate the PST on will preparation, saving Manitobans \$1 million per year, eliminate the probate fee as of July 1st of 2020. In fact, over the next four years, Manitoba's 880,000 taxpayers will save \$1.8 billion.

I think it's important to recognize that Manitobans work very hard for their money. They get up early in the morning, they take care of their families, and they spend their time trying to improve not only their family, but their community. And putting money back in their pockets not only is good for the economy, it also incentivizes hard work and saving, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I do encourage members opposite to get on board with this and support this resolution. It's a great resolution.

We know that the member from Portage la Prairie has worked hard in the resolution, and he's done quite a bit not only in this House, but I know he's done a lot of work in his own community, so we do thank him for that. And I know his constituents are very lucky to have him represent them in this great Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

You know, the average Manitoba has some \$200 of disposable income at the end of the day, and that is not a lot of money, as we all know, if any unsuspecting repairs have to come along that could put in peril—put them in a financial hardship. Putting any extra money back in their pockets is not only the right thing to do, we think it's also economically beneficial so people can then have the money to spend, and spend as they so choose. We believe that—we do believe in choice here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Manitobans should choose how their hard-earned money is spent, and keep the money on the kitchen table, not the Cabinet table.

We know that the previous government under Greg Selinger, he managed to raise taxes and increase the deficit. The deficit was approaching a billion dollars a year. We had debt servicing fees of approaching a billion dollars a year. That was not sustainable financially, and it would be unfair to future generations to leave that kind of debt burden to them. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are on track to balance the budget.

We've made major strides in reducing the deficit and lowering taxes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We

understand how to manage money on this side of the House. Members opposite obviously do not. They had 17 years to prove that very fact. It's a very poor resume for them on financial management. That's why Manitobans soundly rejected them in 2016 and voted for a huge majority Progressive Conservative government.

In 2019, we witnessed record back-to-back majority government for us, and I believe it's also historic in the sense that it's the largest two back-to-back majorities ever in the province of Manitoba. The people have spoken, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We believe in democracy, and democracy is about giving the people a voice and a choice. And we believe that the voice—they've selected the Progressive Conservative Party to govern this province, and choice—they get to choose how to spend their money—their hard-earned money—on items and programs that they would like to see spent on.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I won't belabour the point any further. I do again want to thank my colleague for bringing this resolution forward. I do encourage all the members opposite to get on board with this and support this resolution and support our government in all our efforts to reduce the tax burden on hard-working Manitoba families.

Thank you.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this resolution that's been put forward by the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart). And I'm concerned about what this government is doing to the state of finances here in this province.

We're taking \$1.8 billion away from the Treasury at a time when we're facing a lot of uncertainty. There's a lot of uncertainty in this province about the future of the economy. This is probably not a great time to be slashing government revenues when we're staring down the barrel of potentially huge and significant economic disruptions.

* (11:40)

And so the member from Portage la Prairie referred a lot to, you know, their focus on helping Manitobans put more on the kitchen table. We're just not sure which kitchen table they're referring to.

Looking here at, you know, just for a second, at some of the decisions that this government's made in

education, in housing, in health, in utilities, let's take a second to talk about how this government has been impacting affordability in this province, and let's weigh that against their claims of being a government that's supposedly working in support of Manitobans.

Let's talk about tuition. Tuition fees have gone up significantly and are set to go up \$1,000 in the next two years. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is certainly not going to be helping Manitoban students who are already struggling to pay the bills. Nice that they get to save \$50 a year on their PST costs, but, you know, taking \$1,000 away from them over the next two years—some of the most economically challenged people in the province—probably works against this claim about being in favour of increasing affordability.

Let's talk about what this government's doing in utilities. Two years ago, their hand-picked board for Manitoba Hydro sought a 7.9 per cent increase to hydro rates in the province. That was an unprecedented ask that would have placed a huge burden on Manitobans. Fortunately, we do have Public Utilities Board that saw fit to reject that outrageous proposal and protected Manitobans from that significant increase. Still, what we've seen since 2016 and since this government has taken power—we've seen a 3.35 per cent increase in 2016 to hydro rates, a 3.36 rate increase in 2017, a 3.6 per cent increase in 2018—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —a 3 and a half per cent increase requested in 2019. So this talk about affordability and about making Manitoba a more affordable place to live doesn't really jive very well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with what they're doing in making hydro, a basic cost for all Manitobans, go up significantly over a very short period of time.

Of course, we know that MPI hasn't itself escaped increases as well. Again, this government's hand-picked board for MPI have seen a 3.7 per cent increase in 2017, a 2.6 per cent increase in 2018 and a 2.2 per cent increase in 2019.

So, talking about affordability, talking about the basic things that cost Manitobans—the basic costs of living—these are the types of costs that most Manitobans are struggling with, and any reference to this party being somehow more in support of working Manitobans is clearly ludicrous given their seemingly,

you know, endless interest in raising these basic costs of living.

Let's talk about the cost of housing and the struggles of low-income Manitobans here in the province in dealing with rising costs of housing. We've seen, as a result of decisions of this government, 300 people who've been cut from Rent Assist and have seen that level—many more have seen that Rent Assist support be reduced over the course of the last three years. That is having an increase in the cost of living for Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who are desperately in need of that support.

So we're talking about taking away some costs, on one hand, but then, on the other hand, we're simply moving those costs back into the laps of those low-income Manitobans who are forced to cover increasing housing costs.

Talking about housing and what's happening here in the province, this government has sold off 950 units of social and affordable housing. Just down the street, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 185 Smith was a building that housed about 350 individuals or could have housed 350 low-income individuals here in Manitoba. That apartment building has now been sold off to the private market, no longer offering Manitobans access to social and affordable housing that we desperately require. Instead, again, sold off for profit for a one-time gain that we will never be able to again profit from, and likely have an incredibly difficult time ever restoring that 350 units that's been sold off.

This is all at a time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we've got 7,000 Manitobans sitting on a housing wait-list. So we've sold off 900 units of social and affordable housing when we've got wait-lists that are bigger than ever before. And this government has the audacity here to talk about wanting to save Manitobans money, to do more for low-income Manitobans. It's clear with every decision they're making, policy decision across countless departments, that that is not the case.

Let's talk about health. I know myself, having spoken with a lot of constituents and folks on the doorstep over the course of the last summer, I met a lot of senior citizens who were staring down the barrel of significantly increased costs in dealing with personal health issues tied to joint replacements or other treatments or other procedures that were going to require physiotherapy in order for those individuals to get to better, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government, as we know, eliminated out-patient physiotherapy, eliminated services like foot care, and what we have now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is lots of Manitobans who are forced to pay for these services out of pocket. And we talk about some of the services and some of the cuts that we've seen from this government, especially relating to, for example, physiotherapy. We know that this is going to have an outsized impact on lower income Manitobans who do not have personal insurance in place that will allow them to cover the gap that's been created by this government and their decision-making.

Again, more evidence that this government is not working for working-class Manitobans, they're working for the few, not the many. Decision after decision makes this clear.

Looking at seniors, I know, again, we—St. James as one of the highest densities of seniors of any constituency in the province. And I hear from them all the time about their affordability challenges, about the challenges that they're facing in terms of ever-increasing levels of rent, about their fears about assisted living facilities and skyrocketing costs to live in facilities that will meet their needs—\$3,000 a month, \$2,500 a month, increasingly unaffordable.

And yet, this government has not built a single unit of social or affordable housing or a single unit that will help service the needs of low-income seniors in this province. Great that we're helping put \$50 approximately back in their pockets through a PST reduction, not great that we're significantly far beyond that increasing their costs of living as a result of the decisions that are being made by this government.

Let's talk about families and Manitoba families here. We've got a government that is doing absolutely nothing to create more affordable child-care spaces when we've got a growing wait-list of people in the province. Instead, we're cutting \$1.8 billion in government revenue, and yet we have daycares—not only do we not have the affordable care spaces that our communities require, we are also seeing daycares who are struggling under significant, significant financial stresses as a result of underfunding, as a result of the struggles that are being faced because they have had funding frozen since 2016, which is de facto cut to them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Speaking with daycares in my community, I can tell you that they are all reeling right now under the

weight of those funding cuts under that funding freeze and are barely able to keep up. And yet, again, we've got from the member from Portage la Prairie some type of suggestion that this government is actually concerned about the challenges, the realities faced by working Manitobans.

Looking at what we've seen in terms of the impacts on workers, this government imposed a wage freeze on thousands of front-line workers and has frozen the minimum wage at the rate of inflation. If you look at what's happened to the status of our minimum wage under an NDP government, we had the fourth highest minimum wage in the country. We've fallen to ninth place, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Again, these are all creating increased struggles for working Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to the realities of so many Manitobans in regards to affordability in our province.

You know, this bill purports that it will be able to save Manitobans approximately \$2,020 over the next four years.

* (11:50)

I think it's really important, sort of echoing what some of my colleagues have already stated—certainly my colleague that represents St. James—in regards to what this government has actually been doing to negatively impact affordability for Manitobans. And I find it—I've—actually really glad that one of the members opposite talked about the working poor and makes the claim that this decrease in PST is going to help the working poor.

So I appreciate that the member talked about that, and I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the realities of the working poor.

The fact that this government refuses to increase minimum wage to an actual living wage in a province where we see so many families, so many individuals working full-time, in many cases more than full-time, living in poverty.

It was, you know, only a matter of a few years ago when our province was fourth in the country in

regards to our minimum wage. We have fallen into ninth—ninth in the country under this government in terms of minimum wage in this country. Minimum wage has increased a mere 35 cents, and that increase was last fall. It's a poverty wage.

I, on a regular basis, day in and day out of my own constituency, hear from families, you know, meet with constituents who are literally working two and three jobs, working around the clock to provide for their families, working with a poverty wage, and this government has made no efforts whatsoever to address that.

And so, when we talk about the working poor, let's talk about the realities of what it means to be living in Manitoba, working more than full time, not earning an actual living wage. We need to talk about also the fact that folks who are working more than full-time—two and three jobs—have an extremely difficult time finding housing, and under this government, there hasn't been not a single unit of affordable, socially accessible housing developed—not one single unit.

And so, when members opposite talk about putting more money on the kitchen tables of Manitobans, every single time they say it, I have to laugh because it's a nonsensical statement to make when there are so many Manitobans who don't have housing. You're talking about kitchen tables in housing that doesn't exist for many Manitobans and can't be accessed by many Manitobans because this government is selling off accessible housing. This government is selling off Manitoba Housing to private corporations. This government hasn't developed a single unit of affordable housing for Manitobans. I see that in my constituency in disproportionate ways in other areas; certainly, in the city and surrounding areas.

It—you know, some of the comments that have been made here today, and I can appreciate that everybody—everybody does want Manitobans to be able to have a more affordable way of living in this province. Every Manitoban deserves to have an affordable way of life, deserves to be able to feed their families, feed themselves, have a place to live, you know, maybe even have a little bit of extra money at the end of the month to engage in recreation with their families.

Unfortunately, due to this government's cuts, however, access to recreation is being clogged up,

actually. Community centres are facing the threat of closure. You know, we see services that are having to close their doors earlier and earlier and shutter the doors completely because of cuts under this government which, really when we're talking about, you know, saving Manitobans money, those are the consequences of this government actually putting, you know, profit ahead of people. This is not—this bill does not actually fundamentally address the root issues that members oppose and this government claim to suddenly know so much about when they talk about addressing root causes.

And so, if this government wants to talk about, you know, how we actually—over the next four years, next two years, next one year—make life more affordable for Manitobans, then this government needs to actually foundationally start talking about investing in areas of prevention, addressing areas that actually are root causes.

We'll look at the realities of how expensive not addressing the root cause of issues will become in our province. You know, what we're going to see is that some of this decision making is going to have an actual, long-term negative impact in terms of affordability for all folks in Manitoba. When we look at the realities of folks who are accessing health care, hip and knee replacements no longer being able to access physiotherapy in hospital before you go home, you know, forcing seniors to pay out of pocket for physiotherapy and for occupational therapy after major procedures, how is that putting more money on the kitchen tables of seniors in Manitoba? It's doing the exact opposite, actually.

That 50-something dollars that folks are going to save around tax time is nothing in comparison to what seniors are going to have to spend, what they're already spending to pay for physiotherapy and for out—and for occupational therapy services which, in reality, because many Manitobans can't afford those costs—that's the reality for many folks living in Manitoba—certainly, many folks living in my constituency. That just forces them to make really difficult decisions around what they can and cannot pay for and, ultimately, ends up costing all Manitobans more money when we see those same individuals back in the health-care system dealing with health-related issues that simply could have been prevented had they had access to the health care they deserved and not been forced to pay out of pocket and, in some cases, not afford to pay out of pocket in order to have those needs met.

And so I'd also like to talk about a comment that was made by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) publicly about—I'm going to go back to minimum wage because I think the comment really illustrates just how completely out of touch the Premier is in regards to the realities of minimum wage. Publicly stated that raising the minimum wage actually hurts young people, and I quote: You jack up the minimum wage, you know what you do? You reduce entry-level jobs. You stop young people from being able to get into the workforce in the first place.

I'm just going to read some stats here about who actually works minimum wage jobs outside of just young people. According to Statistics Canada, 38,600 Manitobans work for minimum wage, and 55 per cent are over the age of 20. Many of the people working minimum wage jobs are women with children, and many of them are working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Certainly, in the constituency that I represent, many of those folks are over the age of 50, newcomers, working two and three jobs, earning poverty wages, can't even find a place to live because there is no affordable housing—social housing being developed. And, you know, let's hope that they don't require any sort of hip or knee replacement where they can't even access, you know, in-patient physio or occupational therapy. They're going to have to go home and try and figure out a way to pay out of pocket when they're earning barely a living wage.

That, to me, is unacceptable. It doesn't make sense. It literally doesn't make sense to talk about, you know, putting more money back on the kitchen tables of Manitobans when, in the same breath, you are actively eliminating ways for folks to have a more affordable way of living in our province. You are actively creating more challenges and more barriers for the folks who are most disproportionately impacted by decision-making like this.

You can't talk about addressing root causes and not—actually, I guess you can, as evidenced by the decision-making members oppose. You can talk about addressing root causes and the importance of that and actually do the exact opposite. That to me is unacceptable, and that's the conversation that we need to be having, is how do we actually make life more affordable for Manitobans. That's investing in prevention—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This is truly a disturbing statement. I have to just—I know it's always risky to try to put facts on the record in this Chamber, but I am going to do so nevertheless.

The entire idea that this is—that the 2020 promise is something that's going to be equally shared by Manitobans is completely untrue. The fact is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for St. Boniface will have 10 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

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