

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 27, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Virtual Sitting of the Legislature

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of all members and all of our constituents around Manitoba, I would like to thank a group of women and men who are not seeking recognition this afternoon.

A year ago this Assembly was only able to meet once a week, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then it could only meet with members who were in the Chamber. People were not able to participate virtually.

A year later, this Assembly has advanced about 100 years in one year. It has advanced more in the last year than it did in its previous history. Members' ability to be able to participate virtually is critically important, because if they can't participate virtually, the voice of their constituents are not able to be here in the Assembly.

Now, we know that there are members from across Manitoba online who are in their constituency offices, who are in their living rooms, who are in their kitchens by their kitchen tables where there's more money being left, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But we also know that not only are they participating now in this Assembly but they're also able to participate in committee, and that members of the public can come to committee and participate virtually. And that also is a remarkable advancement in only the last year.

Almost without a glitch, I would say—there's been the odd crash of the system; there's been a phone call here and there when members were online and sometimes we forget to unmute ourselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker—but almost without a glitch, this has been able to happen.

Yesterday, House leaders met the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) and the member of

the Liberal Party and we decided, because of the new health orders, to reduce our participation from 50 per cent to 25 per cent and they were able to do that almost seamlessly.

I want to thank, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Clerk's office, the table officers, the Speaker's office, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the technology people, the pages and everybody who's been able to ensure that the voice of democracy remains in this House, even if we all can't be here.

On our behalf, thank you to all of them.

Status of Immigration Applications

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans come from diverse cultures and traditions, which is what makes this province such an amazing place to live.

But many Manitobans are stressed due to increased wait times in the processing of applications for the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program as well as for Canadian permanent residency. I often hear from constituents who are waiting months or years to hear about the status of their applications, or the applications of their loved ones.

Applicants living in Manitoba are seeing some draws and processing of applications for MPNP, but overseas skilled workers have not seen any draws since July 2019. There are skilled workers around the world who want to come to Manitoba, but they are unsure if this opportunity will ever be realized.

Slower processing times during a pandemic are understandable, but programs should not come to a complete halt. This government's lack of accountability and transparency has contributed to negative mental and emotional health outcomes for many families.

At the federal level, the parents and grandparents category for Canadian permanent residency is also slow-moving.

PGP-2019 Tracker has organized an online petition that has garnered hundreds of signatures locally and around the world in regards to delayed wait times.

This government must show solidarity with Manitobans at the federal level for their residency

applications and help accelerate the process of family reunification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the perseverance of families experiencing these challenges is immense. On this side of the House, we stand by families during this time and support their cause to provincial and federal governments.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Frank Capasso

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I rise today to recognize a pillar of our community. That person is Frank Capasso. He began his journey decades ago, born in another country, coming here to fulfill his dream, as so many immigrant families have done, and still do, as Manitoba is often seen of the home of hope.

In 1967, Frank's family immigrated to Italy—from Italy to Canada and, at the age of 17, in order to help support his family, he took a labour-intensive job at Canadian Tool & Die fabricating manual and semi-automatic latches. He did his job so well that soon the company paid for his education at a local technical college so he could become a journeyman and a machinist.

As technologically advanced, so did the company, and it was at this point that Frank realized that he could make a career out of an agricultural manufacturing. Through the years of hard work and specialized expertise, he became an executive vice-president of The Canadian Tool & Die Group. He is also a chair of the board of directors of agriculture manufacturers of Canada, is being honoured by them for his 50 years of service in the manufacturing industry.

Aside from his career, Frank is a family man, a devoted husband and father. His community is also very important to him, so he lends much of his time to helping make Sage Creek a great place to live. When Qualico re-established the Sage Creek Residents' Association in 2013, Frank became their president, and remains president, and is sometimes considered the unofficial mayor of Sage Creek.

Frank is also known and honoured figure in Manitoba's sports community. Alongside his years of practising tae kwon do at the black belt level, as well as teaching it, he's also been heavily involved with soccer. In fact, he has held many key roles in the soccer community, including former president of the Manitoba Soccer Association, founder and president of the Molson Super Soccer Alliance, and board

member of the Canadian Soccer Association, and former owner of manager—

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

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to have the member for Lagimodière to finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Smith: Frank Capasso was also active as head of the delegation for both the Manitoba Soccer Association and the Canadian Soccer Association, and the driving horse—force behind the negotiations with Canada Soccer to host exhibition games and World Cup qualifying games in Winnipeg in 2000.

Frank Capasso has been recognized for his work in the soccer community in 2002 when he was awarded the Canada Soccer Award of Merit and inducted as a Life Member of the Manitoba Soccer Association, and again when he was awarded his induction into the Manitoba Soccer Association Hall of Fame in 2018.

I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in congratulating him.

Priority Vaccinations for School Staff

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the need for vaccine 'prioritization' for all those that work in Manitoba schools.

With the recent rise of COVID-19 cases, of school-based transmission of COVID-19 and the variants of concern, the closure of in-person learning in Evergreen School Division and now in a school in the Louis Riel School Division, is high time that we ensure our schools remain safe for all and remain open for all to in-person learning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that all 57 members of this Legislature have expressed their sincere gratitude to all of those working in our schools for their heroic efforts in keeping learning environments safe for in-person learning.

From those who keep schools clean, to those that work in our school offices, to those providing in-person support, those implementing student learning plans, clinicians, specialists and, of course, to our teachers and school vice-principals and principals, what better way of saying thank you than to ensure that they are—all are prioritized for vaccine?

We know that the Manitoba Teachers' Society and CUPE have been calling for this. We know that school staff have been recently prioritized in hot spot areas, as well as other essential workers. We know that keeping schools open is important for our kids and their families, and we know that teachers and all those that work in our schools are essential workers, for without them, many other essential workers and activities would be greatly impacted if we had to move back to remote learning.

* (13:40)

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of Manitoba teachers, vice-principals, principals, school clerical, clinical staff, custodial staff and all others that work in our schools, I implore the Manitoba government to 'prioritize' the vaccination of all of these essential workers—no matter where in the province they live, for the good of our kids and the good of our community.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Two Ten Recovery

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2007, an organization was founded in Winnipeg to provide safe transitional housing to individuals who've completed an addictions treatment program. Help is provided for individuals to achieve a sustainable recovery with paid employment and successful reintegration into the community.

The program, Two Ten Recovery, uses traditional—transitional housing and an abstinence-based approach developed after consultation with groups focusing on prevention, treatment and recovery for individuals and for families.

It has successfully served over 700 men and women. Residents stay for three to 12 months. They attend anywhere from one to 10 meetings per week with sponsors or support networks and continue to attend meetings after returning to the community.

Over 90 per cent of those housed at Two Ten are off social assistance within the first 90 days and become self-supporting by working, paying their own bills and paying taxes. About 80 per cent of program participants return to the community sober, employed and/or attending school.

One former resident in the program said: I can honestly say that this place has kept me grounded and proved to me that good days are to come as long as I'm willing to do the work and allow myself to be taught.

Two Ten Recovery is cost-effective in decreasing addictions and overdose deaths. Its success means residents return more to the community in employment, in helping others and in taxes paid than the program costs. It also saves money by reducing recidivism and thus decreasing the number of people in correctional institutions.

It has been estimated that the program saves the provincial government more than \$2 million a year. Not bad for a program which does so much to improve the lives of individuals and families.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Child-Care Centres Government Spending

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): One thing that is clear: in order for us to have an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to ensure that child care is affordable and universally accessible for everyone in Manitoba, but the Premier and his government are simply failing on that front.

Now, in addition to freezing funding to non-profit child-care centres for five years, we know that the \$22 million in supports that they provided through the chambers has largely gone unspent. I'll table a document here because I know the Premier always likes to review these things when I table them. It shows that less than 8 per cent of that money has actually been spent as of this March 19th.

That's shameful. We've heard the impact: cuts to food at child-care centres, some even forced to close their doors.

Will the Premier scrap this failed program and immediately invest these funds in public child-care centres?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I'm glad that the Opposition Leader's raised the issue of child care. It's a important issue and we have created over 4,000 new spaces since coming to government. We are investing millions of dollars more than the previous government ever did and we'll continue to focus on this important issue.

This is a particularly important issue to raise in the context of our country. Most of the western world has a situation where the baby boomers are going to be retiring, for example, in the next few years, and

we're going to need to have more ability to help people who want to get into the workforce enter it.

And so it's an important thing, and I appreciate him raising it. We'll continue to focus on the issue.

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

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Deputy Speaker, our public child-care centres continue to struggle: 19,000 families have kids on the wait-list. The freeze in operating funds has forced them to make very difficult choices. They've been forced to make a choice between whether or not to provide food for the kids in their child-care centres. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: Some of them have been forced to decide whether or not they can continue operations.

Now, these are in west Winnipeg. These are in south Winnipeg. These are right across the province of Manitoba and, instead of helping, the PC Cabinet and the Premier has decided to pursue cuts and funding freezes.

The document that I tabled is very clear. Of the \$22 million that was announced, only 8 per cent has been spent up to now. Seems like the government likes to make announcements but doesn't actually want to follow that up with action.

Will they finally change course?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I don't know if the member's right to try to partisan the issue up, but he's chosen to do it that way.

I think the reality is that we've put millions of dollars towards assisting the child-care centres who were struggling most with their deficits during and as a consequence of the pandemic. We work very closely—our ministers have worked very, very closely with the directors of the child-care centres to assist them by advancing funding, by assuring them as much as we can during a very, very challenging time.

And we appreciate the work of those who run the child-care centres, but we don't see this as a partisan issue.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the facts contained within the documents that I've shared today—I'll table them again, but they're very clear: the government has made announcements, but they have not

followed that up with action. They announced \$22 million in funding, less than 8 per cent of that has actually gone to help kids and child-care centres right across our great province.

You add that lack of action to the continued five-year funding freeze on child-care centres, we've seen the results. We heard them at committee. We heard child-care centres that have been forced to cut back on buying food for their kids. Others are making the decision to close their doors.

Why is the Premier continuing to announce money he has no intention of spending?

Mr. Pallister: Well, actually, the previous NDP government had no equal when it came to not doing what it said it was going to do.

It went so far as to announce that it wasn't going to raise the PST. And this, of course, has an impact on families and the parents of children who need child care as much as it does on the general population. And then, of course, they came forward and did raise the PST thereafter, along with a number of other taxes, including raising taxes on benefits for people at work, which raised—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —the costs, of course, of running a child-care centre, as well. And numerous other taxes were introduced by a government previous to ours who said that it wasn't going to raise them and then went ahead and did.

On the other hand, we've kept our promises in every respect. And so we intend to continue to work with the child-care organizers, operators of this province to facilitate additional child-care spaces.

We're going to be working—we're excited to be working with—the federal government's recently announced that it has the intention of working with provinces in partnership on improving child care. We're excited about these initiatives. I'd encourage the member to get excited as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

Long-Term Care Investment Needed

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Today is a national day of action for long-term-care standards.

We've all been moved throughout the pandemic about the tragedies and heart-wrenching moments that have unfolded in personal-care homes here in Manitoba and at long-term-care facilities right across the country.

Now, it's clear what is needed: we need to invest in seniors care so that every senior living in a long-term-care facility can get the care at the bedside that they need. It's a question of dignity, it's a question of being humane.

Unfortunately, when we look at this government's budget, there was no new money to invest in long-term-care facilities. They froze funding for personal-care homes in Manitoba. That's just wrong, particularly after all the mistakes they made during the second wave.

Will the Premier acknowledge his failure to invest in long-term care and commit to new funding today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, no, because the member's wrong, and he's put false information on the record yet again, because if he put the right information on, it wouldn't look so good for him in a partisan way, but it does look good on our government for the fact that Budget 2021 invests over \$650 million in personal-care homes, which is far more than the previous NDP government ever did.

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

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no new money for personal-care homes in this budget.

After the tragedy at Maples, at Charleswood, at Parkview Place, I thought we all stood together across the country to stand up for seniors and to say, this time it's going to be different.

Fast forward to budget announcement day. What did we see? Well, we saw Manitobans disappointed: no new investment for seniors.

* (13:50)

This is a question of how many nurses are going to be able to deliver care at the bedside. It's a question of how many health-care aides are going to be able to spend four hours a day or more for each senior. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: And the answer is there's going to be no additional bedside care. There's not going to be any

additional human resources to care for those seniors that we value so greatly.

So why is it that the Premier continues to cut and cut and cut after all the terrible mistakes that this government made during the second wave?

Will they finally admit that this is wrong and commit to new investments for long-term care?

Mr. Pallister: The tragedies of seniors passing during this pandemic are undeniable. The attempt to use that for political fodder is undeniably a gross attempt by the member to gain some partisan advantage at the cost of that tragedy and of his own integrity.

I can only say to the member that the 2016-17 funding for seniors was—seniors homes was \$583 million and the 2021-22 PCH funding is \$654 million, not 583—not 583: 654. That's an increase of a significant amount in creating more spaces, more room and better personal-care homes and in making the investments the previous NDP government failed to make.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that the First Minister knows what inflation is. I know that his Cabinet—or at least their advisers—understand the concept of inflation.

The reason that they don't account for inflation when they present their figures, therefore, I can only conclude is being left out of the discussion for political purposes. And in the context of long-term care, where we all gathered together, as a country, to say we wanted improvements for the way that we deliver seniors care in Canada, here in Manitoba, well, that's just wrong.

Let's have a real debate. Let's have a real conversation that begins with the Premier acknowledging that his—the budget delivers no new funding for seniors care in Manitoba. When we have that as a foundational truth that we all agree on, then perhaps we will be able to take those important steps in guaranteeing more care at the bedside for seniors.

So will the Premier tell us today: Can we start on the road to recovery? Can we start on the road to improving seniors care in Manitoba? Or will he continue to misrepresent the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable First Minister's time—the honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: That member's attempt at the truth telling failed miserably. His disingenuous approach in respect of this is clear to all who understand math, and simple math says that an increase of over-over-\$70 million in four fiscal years is hardly failing to exceed inflation.

The member may be trying to take advantage of those who don't understand simple math, but the people on this side of the House do, and more and more children will understand it too as a result of our education reforms going forward.

COVID-19 and Long-Term Care Elimination of For-Profit Facilities

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Canadians are united for long-term-care standards. Today is the national day of action. Their message is simple: improve quality, improve accountability and take profit out of long-term care.

Unfortunately, the Pallister government is doing none of that. They cut funding to personal-care homes not once, but twice. This year's budget for long-term care is frozen.

Our calls to take profit out of long-term care are being ignored, but will the minister listen to families across Canada?

Will she take profit out of the equation in long-term care?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Well, the member opposite is just wrong.

In fact, in this budget there's \$9 million more that's budgeted for personal-care homes, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've also increased the number of beds in the province by more than 510 beds.

So, there's a number of things on the capital side that we're working towards, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we'll continue to work towards ensuring the safety of all those in our personal-care homes. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Canadians are united today. We need a higher standard of care in personal-care homes.

Our Bill 202 before this House would address the staffing shortfalls that befell so many facilities. But it

means spending money on an improved model. It means more care by the bedside, something this government has refused to do. But we believe that this care is necessary and, across the country, Canadians agree.

Why won't the minister reverse her government's cuts to long-term care and support increased staffing levels in all of our personal-care homes?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite is just wrong. Certainly, in this budget, we've budgeted more than \$653 million more and—in this budget, I should say, as that's the total budget. And it is an increase over last year, despite what members opposite say. We've also invested in more than 510 new beds in the province of Manitoba.

We recognize there's more work to do, and we'll continue to work with our partners to ensure that we provide not just long-term care for seniors but more care and access to the kinds of services that they need, whether they're in their homes—we need to look at the whole continuum of care across the spectrum, not just personal-care homes, although that's a very important part of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Asagwara: Geriatric specialists across Canada have found that for-profit facilities shared similar fates during this pandemic. Precarious staffing simply fell apart, and in far too many situations, these for-profit facilities were crowded.

I recall, for the minister, that in the fall for-profit facilities put unwell residents in the same room as those who didn't have COVID, separated only by a nightstand. Nearly 200 Manitobans lost their lives in these for-profit facilities and there still hasn't been an appropriate reckoning in regards to any of that.

Canadians have made up their minds: take profit out of long-term care. Would the minister listen? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's that very ideology that got us into the position that we're in and the mess that we're having to clean up as a result of the inaction to fix up those personal-care homes under the previous NDP government.

We are taking action on that. We are working with our partners to ensure that we do upgrade those facilities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: But I'll also say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that, of course, we did conduct an independent review—doctor—by Lynn—Dr. Lynn Stevenson.

Many of the issues that the member opposite is—has raised were brought up in that report, and we committed to implementing all 17 recommendations of that report.

COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Priority for Child-Care Sector

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Deputy Speaker, this week we're honouring and celebrating early childhood educators across Manitoba. We on this side of the House have a profound sense of gratitude and respect for the work ECEs do in providing child care and quality education for the youngest Manitobans. ECEs are critical to our economic infrastructure.

And to acknowledge the important role they play in the lives of Manitobans, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) could give ECEs and all those working in child-care sector priority in getting the—vaccinated. These are essential front-line workers who risk their own health and safety every single day.

Will the Premier commit to prioritizing Manitobans working in the child-care sector for the COVID-19 vaccine?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member 'opposite' should know that we take our advice of the medical leads of the Vaccine Implementation Task Force. I think they've been doing a very diligent job to ensure that we vaccinate those most at risk in our communities, and so we'll continue to take the advice of the medical leads, not the members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: Right now, ECEs and those working in child-care facilities are eligible for a vaccine only if they live in one of the designated priority zones in Manitoba. This does not go far enough.

ECEs are potentially exposed and at risk every single day they go to work to take care of our children. The work of ECEs and all those working in the child-care sector is essential and incredibly valuable to the children that they educate and the communities they serve.

* (14:00)

Will the Premier commit to including Manitobans working in the child-care sector for the COVID-19 vaccine?

Mrs. Stefanson: Certainly, we want to commend and thank all of those who are working in our child-care facilities and for looking after our children during these very difficult times.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we take the advice of the—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: We take the advice of the medical leads on the Vaccine Implementation Task Force. I think they're very—doing a very good and diligent job, in terms of identifying those most at risk in our community and putting those individuals forward on a priority basis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: I think we can all agree the Premier and each of his Health ministers have failed miserably at this public health crisis and continue to do so in the inoculation of Manitobans.

And let's be clear: the Premier and his failed Health ministers continue to fail those working in the child-care sector on a variety of fronts, but including by freezing operating grants for child-care centres year after year. Instead, his priority is dollars to for-profit centres while not prioritizing paying ECEs and child-care—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —workers a living wage.

Now they won't even acknowledge the risk that these Manitobans take every day by prioritizing them to get the vaccine.

Will the Premier acknowledge this risk and prioritize the vaccination of ECEs today?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Of course, we do value our child-care workers, and we do value the sector, and we're committed to building a robust child-care sector to help us through this recession.

That is why we have committed \$25 million more than the NDP ever committed to the child-care sector. That is why, this year, we committed to building 541 new spaces. That is in addition to the 4,000 spaces that we have already built since we formed government.

We know that there's a lot of work to do, in terms of cleaning up the mess that the NDP made in creating a robust child-care sector, but this government is committed to doing it, and we will not stop until we have affordable, accessible child care for all Manitobans.

COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Priority for Education Sector

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Five Manitoba schools are now learning remotely from home because of COVID-19 infections. École Marie-Anne-Gaboury has 12 cases between students and staff.

There are ways to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 in our schools: do proactive rapid testing on those without symptoms, and get the vaccine to all those front-line teachers and education workers who show up each and every day for our kids.

Will the minister today finally commit to all of this?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): I do appreciate the question and, first of all, I do want to thank our teachers and all of our staff all across Manitoba who have provided safe schools—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: —and, quite frankly, continue to provide safe schools across Manitoba.

You know, listening to Dr. Roussin yesterday, we still have very limited transmission in our schools. I think that's a testament to the work that's being done. I think we still have to be 'viligant'—diligent when it comes to—in terms of exposures outside of schools, so I just urge everyone—Manitobans to be 'cautient' and to be diligent and make sure they follow public health orders.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a secondary question.

Mrs. Smith: École Marie-Anne-Gaboury is not in a so-called hot zone. Neither is Holy Cross, Pilot Mound, Thomas Greenway, École Saint-Norbert, nor R.D. Parker, but they have mounting case counts.

Like the rest of the province, cases and test positivity for young people are accelerating. Teachers and school staff are putting it all on the line for our kids. It's time to prioritize them—all of them—for vaccination. If the minister wants to thank these teachers, he can commit to vaccinating them.

Will the minister finally do that today: commit to vaccinating all of the teachers and school staff today?

Mr. Cullen: Clearly, you know, we've added additional staff to this front from Manitoba Education, but obviously taking the lead front on the public health issues are the folks from public health. We want to make sure that the educators, principals are getting the proper information that they need to make the decisions. Clearly, they are working very closely with our public health officials in respect of the orders, in respect of any closures that may be required.

So, certainly, protocols have been in place since day one. Protocols continue to be place and we're working very closely with public health officials.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Smith: We can mitigate the risk of COVID-19 at schools, but we can't erase it, and the variants are changing the equation.

Rapid tests have been deployed in other provinces as a proactive measure, testing those without symptoms in large numbers; that's not really happening in our province. Manitoba paid \$54 million for this system and these tests. They're nowhere near using that many, even as we mount another—mount into another wave of this pandemic.

Will the minister bring these rapid tests to bear on those without symptoms and will she ensure all educated—education workers in our province get vaccinated immediately?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are working very closely with our public health officials. I know the turnaround time for testing is very quick these days. We do have rapid testing available to teachers that do want to reach out for rapid testing.

We recognize that there's challenges with the variants. That's why we're monitoring the situation very closely with our folks over at public health.

When it comes to the vaccine implementation, clearly we're taking direction from the Vaccine Implementation Task Force. We will listen to the scientists on this.

And, certainly, we're mindful of the situation and that's why we're monitoring very closely.

**Education Modernization Act
Adult Learning Centre Funding**

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Adult learning centres play an important role in Manitoba, as they provide flexible and responsive programming, which provides access for many Manitobans to pursue education.

These centres are being threatened by this government's decision to leave them out of Bill 64 and the fate of adult learning centres is far too uncertain. Manitoba adult educators and adult learners deserve transparency from this government.

Can the minister clarify the intent of Bill 64 vis-à-vis adult learning centres, and will the minister commit to transitional and ongoing funding for all Manitoba adult learning centres?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Can you hear me all right?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, great. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's obvious that the member from Transcona is absolutely discombobulated today in his question. But before I get to his answer, I'd like to take this time to quickly congratulate Dr. Anna Stokke on her 3M National Teaching Fellowship. I know that Dr. Stokke has put in countless years teaching mathematics at the University of Winnipeg, and with her fellowship, she is the—this is going to be her—the first time since 2000 that a Manitoba professor received this fellowship.

I would just like to ask all my colleagues in the Chamber and virtually to give her great—

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

The honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the outcomes of adult learning centres have declined since this government took power. We are seeing less registered learners, less courses complete and less high-school graduates from adult learning centres. However, this government seems to be working only to further weaken these centres.

* (14:10)

Legislation before this House right now seeks to repeal The Adult Learning Centres Act. Now, with no

transitional provisions in Bill 64 that are specific to adult learning centres, it appears that this government is getting ready to undermine them.

Can the minister provide assurance that existing adult learning centres and their funding levels will be secure?

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to thank my honourable colleague from Transcona for the question in regards to adult learning centres and literacy programs across this great province of ours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that Manitobans get the skills that they need to transition to work, participate in training and protect their financial independence. The fact that we're repealing the act is simply to be able to put more flexibility and nimbleness and to allow those centres to continue to provide the high level of service to all those individuals, to all those Manitobans, so we have the right—the people with the right skills at the right time here in this great province of ours.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Transcona, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: Adult learning centres have written the minister, they've written myself, and they're concerned.

They rightly tell me that they play a key role in improving education outcomes. In their words, they transform young learners who would otherwise leave our education system into graduates ready for work or even higher education. That is important, but Bill 64 leaves great uncertainty. There are no transitional provisions in Bill 64 specifically for adult learning centres.

Will the minister address this and commit to transitional and ongoing funding for all of these important Manitoba adult learning centres?

Mr. Ewasko: Again, I thank the member for the question. I know his heart's in the right place; he's just, unfortunately, a little confused today on how the system works.

We all know that adults make the choice to return to school for different reasons. Some people need to get a high school diploma while others need to improve reading or math skills to help them get further training or jobs.

The fact is that we're repealing and replacing by a stand-alone policy. Manitoba's the only province with

a legislative rather than a policy approach. Public reporting under the statute will continue the—in the annual report, and the change will not impact budgeted amounts for literacy centres.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

COVID-19 Third Wave School Closure Inquiry

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): You know, we've been in code red—critical—in Manitoba for months. We know there are over 200 cases in schools and new variants are more infectious and make younger adults and younger people sick.

Now, this government used to talk about the stigma around COVID, but day after day this government also suggests that people getting COVID are somehow bad or misbehaving when all you have to do is be on a bus or in a classroom.

We have a K-to-12 school system with 200,000 students who can't be vaccinated and tens of thousands of education workers who haven't been made a priority. We are in code red—critical, the third wave, but the—and the government's own plan from September says we should be closing schools.

Are schools still in code orange because this government won't step up to keep people safe at home?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): We've just increased, yesterday, restrictions that were already some of the most robust in the country. They've maintained—those restrictions have maintained us as being able, as people here in Manitoba, to bend the second-wave curve better than virtually any other jurisdiction, certainly west of the Atlantic bubble.

And so I would say, again, thank you to our health-care officials for their guidance and direction. And, most importantly, because restrictions don't work unless people abide by them, thank you to Manitobans, the vast majority of whom are abiding by these restrictions.

For those who are not, we are stepping up our enforcement. We need to do that. We need to make sure that those who are behaving irresponsibly face consequences and know that they will, because, of course, that is a danger to all the rest of us.

And so I encourage the member to join team Manitoba for a change, encourage our health officials in these difficult decisions and assist us in making sure

that we fight this third wave as effectively as we did the second one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a supplementary question.

COVID-19 Cases in Schools Department of Education Response

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I think the last thing we want is to fight—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: The last we want is for the third wave fought like the second.

I table a letter sent at two minutes past 5 last Friday, April 23rd, to superintendents and principals, who were told that if they're concerned about cases they should call public health, then send the Department of Education the public health official's name, advice and contact information.

The Department of Education probably needs it because when you click on the link provided, the WRHA public health page has no dedicated COVID contact information, though they do for tobacco, TB and tropical diseases.

Over the last year, superintendents, principals and people in education have protected our schools and students by showing everything this government lacks: creativity, competence, caring and, above all, judgment.

Is the Department of Education going to keep silencing and second-guessing the expertise of the front line in education, or will they let superintendents and principals do their jobs and keep students safe?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I would encourage the member to recognize that the tendency to Monday-morning-quarterback is not anything that appeals to thinking people. The member has just—in attacking the government, he has also attacked senior health officials in the process and, frankly, everyone involved in enforcement, everyone involved in the process of getting vaccines out to Manitobans.

He's thrown everybody under the bus at the same time in an attempt to score some partisan points, but he needs to understand that Monday-morning quarterbacks may have all the answers but they're not really quarterbacks.

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

COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Immunocompromised Individuals

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): We are relieved to find out that people under 40 who are immunocompromised are now able to get their vaccine through a referral from one's physician. With this great news that we've been calling for, there is still an issue with communication.

Mr. Speaker, this information isn't readily available to individuals or physicians or even people booking the appointments over the phone.

Will this government please clarify these conditions to ensure people who are immunocompromised are aware that they are now eligible?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I want to thank the member for the question.

If there is need for better communication, we're certainly open to that and I will certainly talk to our Vaccine Implementation Task Force about that to ensure that all of those Manitobans who are eligible are aware that they're eligible, and we want to ensure that all of them get access to the vaccine in a timely fashion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Lagimodière (Mr. Smith). The member for Lagimodière, to unmute his mic—oh, the honourable member for Selkirk. Sorry about that. Do that all the time.

Mental Health and Wellness Supports for Educators

Mr. Alan Lagimodière (Selkirk): The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the mental health and wellness of Manitobans of all ages and backgrounds. The education community is facing unique pandemic-related situations while continuing the high quality of classroom learning for Manitoba students.

Can the Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery please share with the House how our government is ensuring our school communities have access to services they need to support their mental health and wellness at this time?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): To help protect and assist educators with mental health and wellness concerns, our government recently invested \$170,000 to provide additional supports through the Canadian Mental Health Association.

We also invested \$60,000 to expand the Families and Schools Together program. We are building on previous investments announced, which include: \$400,000 for the Remote Learning Support Centre; \$150,000 for Kids Help Phone and Sources of Strength project; \$207,000 to build on an existing partnership with True North Youth Foundation and its Project 11 program.

These investments in mental health and wellness supports will ensure—

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

* (14:20)

Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce Government Procurement Practices

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Reconciliation requires working together and it requires new ways of doing business in Manitoba.

In a letter dated April 21st, the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce expresses its deep concern that the Pallister government's procurement practices and accountability are leaving too many First Nations behind. I'll table a copy of that letter.

They ask for a meeting with the Premier to find common ground on these issues moving forward.

Will the Premier commit to that today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Really appreciate that—the member raising this question. This is really an important issue because we have Indigenous folks all over the province that want to get to work and they'd like to have jobs, meaningful jobs. Opportunities for work are limited in some of the communities right now and that's for sure, and it's been that way for a—too long.

We just saw a report that was tabled federally that showed that the federal government's procurement commitments were underachieved. They were committing to do a minimum 5 per cent procurement with Indigenous—from Indigenous sources. They failed to hit that target; they weren't at four, they weren't at three, they were barely at two.

So, what we want to do is make sure that we don't follow that example. We're following our own here, and we are actually giving major opportunities—and we'd like to give more—to Indigenous workers in our province to find work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Keewatinook, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Bushie: Indigenous engagement should reach far further than the Indigenous relations department, but this government still defers all Indigenous issues to the Indigenous relations minister. The concerns of the chamber remain unaddressed, which is why they have written this government.

They are concerned that the Pallister government's approach to procurement is exclusionary, and they call into the question a lack of reporting and accountability. In sum, they don't believe actions are matching the words of this government, and they are looking for leadership to improve the situation.

It's a reasonable request, Mr. Deputy Speaker: Will the Premier commit to meeting with them today?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I don't know about today, but I have had meetings on this topic with all the major chiefs, and I'll continue to do that. And I know our Indigenous affairs minister's been working diligently to build relationships to make sure that that ongoing strength of communication together can be achieved and that we can pursue common goals.

We're the only province that—for example, we rolled out our pot strategy, that had—involved—fully involved Indigenous partners in respect of that. And they have the opportunities—Indigenous communities now have the opportunity to invest and own and manage pot stores.

We're looking to get the outlet built and we're looking to have the opportunity for Indigenous construction jobs to be created through that and better the strength of the communities. We've built a tremendous relationship of trust and strength as we've done our vaccine rollout, fully co-operating with Indigenous people during this pandemic response and in the vaccine rollout process itself.

And so, this commitment is real; it's not just words, it's actions. And I think that's what Indigenous people want to see.

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

PETITIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the member from Keewatinook, if he can unmic his—unmute his mic.

Epilepsy Treatment

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer world-wide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoban patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring and an orthopedics ward with orthopedic staff instead of an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental-health issues including depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death in some cases.

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due to dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

(6) Epilepsy surgery is extremely effective, resulting in patients requiring less medication, sometimes becoming seizure-free, enabling them to return to work, drive and live fulfilling lives.

We petition the—to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to open a genuine, four-bed epilepsy unit, similar to the one recently opened in Saskatchewan, at the health sciences centre, with modern equipment and adequate epilepsy neurosurgeons, neurologists, nurses, clerks and technicians.

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In accordance to our rule 133-6, when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Riverdale Aggregate Quarry—Request to Deny Conditional-Use Application

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petitions is as follows:

A conditional-use application has been filed in relation to a proposed gravel pit, or aggregate quarry, located at SW 11-12-21 west of the primary meridian in Riverdale municipality. Many local residents have concerns about the proposed gravel pit, which are not being addressed.

The site has an extensive forest of oak, ash, poplar, saskatoon, chokecherry, pin cherry and two kinds of hazelnut trees. It also has a considerable grassland area with significant unplowed areas of extensive native prairie grasses and flowers, including numerous prairie crocuses, Manitoba's provincial flower.

The site is in the centre of an ecologically sensitive area of approximately 1,500 acres, which is an important habitat for wildlife and may be a significant elk-calving area. Other species include, but are not limited to, white-tailed deer, black bears and many migrating and breeding birds in summer and varied winter-resident species, including bald eagles.

The area also has species listed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada as endangered, red-headed woodpeckers; threatened, loggerhead shrikes and bobolinks; or species of concern, short-haired owls and Baird sparrows.

Local landowners rent the Crown land within this area and have been stewards of the Crown land and their adjacent privately held lands for many years. The forested land has been used for decades by local hunters.

The site is located within an important wildlife corridor, extending from Riding Mountain National Park along the Little Saskatchewan River to the Assiniboine River in the south. Such corridors are absolutely critical to preserving animal species in their natural habitat.

The site has been identified by Manitoba Sport, Culture and Heritage under section 12(2) of The Heritage Resources Act as having potential for both

known archaeological sites and human burials, as well as unknown heritage resource sites.

The proposed pit is located on the edge of a large glacial meltwater channel. Numerous archaeological sites exist in the immediate area, including pre-contact Indigenous settlements with intact teepee rings and other stone features, as well as historical cart trails and human burials.

The drainage from the site is initially west-north-west, and then southwest into a series of springs, small ponds or lakes, in a coulee leading down to the Little Saskatchewan River. This is a pristine waterway and offers habitat to a variety of native plant, bird, animal and invertebrate species.

A quarry would gather water and interrupt this critical water flow with serious implications for the habitat on the 1,000 or more acres downstream, an area that includes grazing land for two cattle herds.

There are existing wells downstream from the quarry location. Quarries often disrupt the existing movement of surface water and ground water, as they interrupt natural water recharge and can lead to reduced quantity and quality of drinking water for residents and wildlife near or downstream from a quarry site.

Many other quarries exist in the southwest Manitoba region, including four existing gravel pits within a few kilometres. These have extensive reserves, reducing and making unnecessary any need for gravel from the proposed aggregate quarry at SW 11-12-21 west of the primary meridian.

The value of property decreases significantly within the immediate vicinity of a quarry. The effects are also felt several miles away. Home values within a quarter mile of the proposed site are expected to drop by approximately 30 per cent.

* (14:30)

The community is concerned about an expected rise in silicosis, an interstitial lung disease caused by breathing in tiny bits of silica, a common mineral found in many types of rock and soil. Over time, exposure to silica particles causes permanent lung scarring called pulmonary fibrosis.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to deny the conditional use application for mining on SW 11-12-21 west of the primary meridian because of

the adverse impact it will have on important ecological and archaeological treasures in this area, and because there are alternative sites for obtaining the gravel and/or rock needed from this site.

To urge the provincial government to protect the habitat on all quarters of 11-12-21 west of the primary meridian and to undertake to develop a shared stewardship approach which preserves traditional uses for the Crown and private lands in this ecologically sensitive area.

Signed by Shelley Foster, Gary Pomeroy and Jana [phonetic] Hubbard and many, many others.

Lead Water Pipes

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) 2,755 homes in the Elmwood-East Kildonan area have lead water pipes connecting their basements to the City-owned water pipes at their property line. Homes built before 1950 are likely to have lead water pipes running to this connection.

(2) New lead level guidelines issued by Health Canada in 2019 are a response to findings that lead concentrations in drinking water should be kept as low as reasonably achievable, as lead exposures are inherently unsafe and have serious health consequences, especially for children and expectant mothers.

(3) 31 per cent of Winnipeg's 23,000 homes with lead water pipes connecting basements to the City-owned water pipes at their property line were found to have lead levels above the new Health Canada lead level guidelines.

(4) The City of Winnipeg has an inventory of which homes and public buildings, including schools and daycares, that have the lead water pipe connection to the City's water main and will only disclose this information to the homeowner or property owner. The cost of replacing the lead water pipe to individual homeowners is over \$4,000.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately contact all home and property owners in Manitoba with lead water pipes connecting to the City water main line and provide full financial support to them for lead water pipe replacement so that their exposure to lead levels is reduced, their health is better

and costs to our provincial health-care system are also reduced.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for debate this afternoon Bill 71, followed by Bill 40.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been called for to read—debate on second reading on Bill 71, the education tax—property tax reduction act, property tax and installation assistance act and the income tax act and—amendment.

And we're also looking at reading—second reading of Bill 40.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 71—The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, the honourable member for Wolseley has—[*interjection*]-pardon me?

Yes, on Bill 71, on the debate of the reasonable amendment, the honourable member for Wolseley has 16 minutes remaining.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Yesterday, during the first half of my debate time on the proposed reasoned amendment to Bill 71, I talked about the importance of a healthy and fair taxation system to support education, health care and other community services.

I noted that education will be paid for by one tax or another and I discussed the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) proposed education property tax rebate, sent out as a cheque with his signature on it, is a desperate attempt to win votes and turn the minds of voters off of what a mess this government has made of the pandemic response.

The Premier thinks that Manitobans can be bought, but I think that voters are smarter than that.

Just before the session ended yesterday, I was beginning to talk about the impact of Bill 71 on small businesses. Small businesses will also lose out from this tax cut, as they won't see any of this money if they're renting. Many small-business owners do rent, rather than own, the property where they conduct business.

What incentive do these landlords have to pass along their savings to renters? Virtually none. And this bill makes that completely okay. Small businesses are also not included in the rent freeze, which means their costs can still go up while landlords reap the benefits.

Small businesses have been hit extremely hard by the pandemic, and this bill provides them with no relief whatsoever. Many businesses have been forced to lay off staff and others have closed their doors permanently. Small businesses have not been supported by the provincial government to offset decreases in revenue, commercial rent costs and costs associated with PPE. Restaurants have been forced to rely heavily on delivery services, which cuts into revenue, as third party delivery service fees can be as high as 30 per cent.

The Province refused to offer any sort of financial assistance to small businesses until there was a large outcry from Manitobans, and when they did finally offer financial support, it was inadequate and many small businesses fell through the cracks.

So just to recap: Bill 71 offers nothing to renters, either those who rent their home or their businesses. It offers little to the average homeowner, who will need to turn around and spend their rebate on their hydro bill and it offers everything to those who are already wealthy enough and who own multiple properties.

So, besides doing nothing to help those who need it most, the bill will significantly impact education and social inequity. School divisions will no longer have an elected school trustee to advocate for them if Bill 64, another bad bill from this government, passes into law next fall. Bill 64 will give communities no say in what happens in their community schools, but Bill 71 means they will continue to pay more, even when having less of a say.

I mentioned during debate yesterday the importance of paying taxes. It's something I consider a privilege because I live in a society that asks everyone to pay their share to take care of the greater good. But fair taxation strategies are important and should take ability to pay into account.

This bill, along with other Pallister government decisions, flips that principle on its head. People with the most ability to pay will get the biggest break, and vice versa. This is shifting the tax burden to people who don't have the ability to pay, low- and middle-income families who have been hardest hit by this pandemic.

These tax changes will increase social inequality in Manitoba to the detriment of all of us and our schools. This government's plan is to cut education for students across the province and to remove any authority from local communities.

* (14:40)

Yesterday, I mentioned some of the ways that property taxes have supplemented education funding in order to pay for nutrition programs, mental health programming, culturally appropriate programming for Indigenous students, adult crossing guards, among other things.

But I've also been thinking about some of the very specific community decision making that will be lost without communities' rights to make those decisions.

In 2018, the Pallister government reversed an earlier government decision to approve a new music room at Gimli High School. This project included a 1,600-square-foot band room and an 860-square-foot engineering space for a total cost of \$1.4 million.

After the provincial government withdrew their approval and support for the project, the Evergreen School Division board voted to self-fundraise a scaled-down version of the renovation. This project was \$1.2 million and it would have corrected existing problems in the room, including issues with heating, wheelchair accessibility, space and acoustics.

The entire community was supportive of this project and set out to raise the money themselves, but the Pallister government does what they do and dug their heels in and said, no, no, to community decision making about this important renovation.

I hope the irony isn't lost on any members of this House. You do know that the \$1.2-million renovation is actually less expensive than the \$1.3 million that's going to cost to mail out tax rebates to Manitobans, when the rebate could have been received in another way.

But you know, the music room renovations weren't a luxury item. Students had to practise while wearing their coats in the winter months, and when there wasn't enough space, they practised in closets and in washrooms. Instruments were damaged by the cold. The only reason that Gimli High School is now partway through their renovations is because of the advocacy of their students and the ability of their school board to advocate to the Province to reduce this—to reverse this very bad decision.

Another example of local decision making funded by property taxes is the nursery program at Winnipeg School Division. This program started in one school in 1965, more than 55 years ago. At that time, WSD introduced nursery in the poorest neighbourhood with the least resources, and bit by bit, nursery schools were added through the division until they were in all division schools by 1999.

Residents who live in this division, who pay taxes in this division and who send their children to these schools have reinforced their decision year after year for 55 years because they believe that nursery school was valuable for the children and the communities this division serves.

And again, just like in Evergreen School Division with the Gimli High School band room, nursery school's not a luxury item. Preschool research data

shows that the early years of development to age six set the base for competence and coping skills that affect learning behaviour—sorry—learning, behaviours and health throughout one's life, and preschool education can produce substantial gains in children's learning and development.

Additional research shows that the investments in nursery school actually save governments money because they invest less in special education and in future criminal justice dollars—\$1 invested now in nursery school saves \$17 in the future, according to one US-based study.

WSD board trustees made responsible choices by investing in nursery school, and to be clear, this budget was commented on and reviewed year after year by parents and community members. The trustees that voted on it year after year for 55 years were elected from local communities to represent the people who live there.

Without this kind of local oversight and decision-making power, there will be no nursery schools in Winnipeg School Division or any other provincial school division, unless the Province goes to a fee-for-service model.

This isn't the first time the Pallister government has manipulated public finances and laws for their own political benefit. Last summer, this government issued \$200 cheques to Manitoban seniors, but that didn't require any legislation, because the government has the authority to send Manitobans rebates without legislative approval. As I mentioned yesterday, that was a rather thoughtless plan that rewarded people who didn't need it and arbitrarily left out people with high needs, simply based on age.

Regardless, the Pallister government is misleading Manitobans about public finances to mask the true scale of the cuts they're making to our public services. Manitobans want to trust their government. They want to trust that the government's being transparent and responsible with taxpayer dollars but that simply isn't happening under the Pallister government.

For the first time in modern history, the Manitoba government has received back-to-back-to-back qualified opinions from the provincial auditor for its Public Accounts, but the Pallister government has continued to defy the auditor's direction about what funds and organizations must count in the summary budget, making the deficit seem worse than it is. This is a serious erosion of the public's ability to trust the accuracy of the Pallister government's books.

It's easy to understand why they're doing this. They need to obscure why they're cutting. Since they came to power, thousands of people have left or been fired from government and Crown corporations. Emergency rooms have closed. Health clinics have closed. School funding has—is not keeping up with the growing population or inflation and they've frozen funding to child-care centres and post-secondary institutions.

This is also not the first time the Pallister government has played fast and loose with financial reporting. In 2018-2019, the Finance Minister removed the detailed Estimates of revenue from the annual budget and this has never happened before. In 2019, the Pallister government refused to release a first quarter financial report, another departure from the long-standing practice, and their quarterly financial reporting has removed virtually all details. This is an aberration compared to the past and compared to every other province.

Even during COVID-19 pandemic, when Manitobans were in dire need of support, the Pallister government's first instinct was to slash and cut funding to public institutions and social services. He made the biggest single-day budget cut in Manitoba's history of \$860 million. And their so-called fiscal update from the pandemic was nothing but a flimsy PowerPoint presentation with no details.

Manitoba scored a grade of C in financial transparency, falling well below several other provinces.

We're committed to responsible government that doesn't make cuts that hurt Manitobans during times of crisis. An NDP government would restore the trust that the Pallister government has lost.

Now, I want to talk about the serious implications that Bill 71 has for funding in our province because the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has no plans to make up for this \$900 million shortfall in funding except through cuts. What the Premier did to health care he's now going to do to our children's education. He's putting education further away from the classroom.

The Pallister government's funding for education has not kept up with inflation, nor the increased need of a growing student population. And as a result, our classroom sizes are getting bigger while supports are going down. Instead of getting our educators and students what they need, this government introduced Bill 64 to consolidate power with the minister and eliminate local voice.

Bill 64 does nothing to improve our children's education and to keep classrooms small. There were no commitments made to provide more supports for teachers in the classroom or hire more teachers or EAs to ensure our students have more one-on-one time and support they need.

Instead, the main intent of Bill 64 is to take control from schools and hand it to unelected appointees of the Pallister government. We see how poorly the Premier and his government managed the health-care transformation; staffing shortages and chaos still remain and now they're about to cause that same chaos and confusion in our children's classrooms.

After taking control of our health-care system, the Premier made such a mess with his cuts that his own consultant said that confidence had been lost in the overhaul. And now they're proposing to do the exact same thing with radical changes to education, dissolving school boards and handing all control over to the minister and his Tory friends he appoints. This'll put decision making further away from the classroom.

Bill 64 is an attack on teachers, on educators and on the ability for parents to have a real say in their kids' education. The minister may claim he wants to hear from teachers but the act only gives parents the abilities to meet and advise, not make any decisions because the minister needs to sign off on everything.

And we know with this government's track record they're more concerned about cuts than our children. How can we trust them to make a decision for over 200,000 children?

* (14:50)

This Premier's decision to dissolve all school divisions eliminates both the democratic system and parents' direct line with trustees to raise concerns. Instead, parents will be forced to take up any issues directly with the Premier, and we have seen how this model has failed as the examples we've been given from Nova Scotia.

This legislation creates all sorts of new bodies that have no power or ability to make change when the real power rests solely with the minister and his political appointees, none of whom are required to have an education background or any experience working in a school.

The bill also—Bill 64 also does not mention any supports for children with additional needs. There is no commitment to hire more EAs or provide more

funding supports. And, in fact, on page 82 of the education review, it says we should use the resources we already have.

We know that in order for children to 'succeed' in the classroom, we have to address the obstacles that exist before they get there. Neither Bill 64 or Bill 71 go anywhere towards addressing child poverty. Manitoba's child poverty rate is among the worst in the country and it's only gotten worse during the pandemic. But nothing in this—in either of these bills pays attention to the issues of poverty, and the minister refuses to pay attention to the issues of poverty.

A simple first step in working towards ending child poverty is implementing the universal breakfast program. Children need nutrition to have success in the classroom, but the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his caucus don't agree and, in fact, now they've cut the opportunity with Bill 71 for independent decision making of school boards to implement nutrition programs in their schools.

And I'm out of time. I'll leave it there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—kinanâskomitin, in my Cree language. It's an absolute honour to provide a few words to be put on record in regards to Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act.

First of all, I'll go straight into what—this bill and its purpose. Basically, it's a levy that—it's imposed in lieu of school taxes on the incremental assessed value of properties designated under The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act as community revitalization properties. So, school taxes include the community revitalization levy.

This bill is designed to reduce school taxes by means of a system of rebates. So, basically this amends The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act to provide for the following rebates beginning in 2021, which is 25 per cent of school taxes on farm and residential properties and 10 per cent of school taxes on other properties. So, after 2021, these percentages may be increased by regulation.

The school tax rebate is payable to a person in whose name the school taxes are imposed. If there are multiple owners of a property, the rebate may be paid to any of them. If a person other than the rebate recipient is responsible for the property tax, the person

may recover their share of the rebate from the rebate 'recipient.' The rebate may be paid before or after the school taxes are due and no application for this rebate is required. So, the following items are also reduced by this same percentage that applies in determining the school tax, which is a rebate for residential and farm properties.

So, with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, furthermore on this bill and its purpose, it's—The Income Tax Act currently provides for the following in respect of a taxpayer's principal residence, so a school tax reduction of \$700 to be credited on the property tax bill for a single-family dwelling.

So Bill 71 amends The Income Tax Act to reduce benefits by 25 per cent for '20-21 and later years. So after 2021, the percentage may be increased by regulation to match the percentage of a school tax rebate or residential properties under The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act. So the Education Property Tax Credit advance is also reduced for 2021 to 75 per cent of the lesser of the \$700 and the school taxes otherwise payable.

So with this, The Municipal Act is amended to require tax notices to include materials supplied by the minister.

The Residential Tenancies Act is amended to provide for rent—for a rent freeze for 2022 and 2023 for properties that are subject to rent regulation under part 9 of that act. So that means the landlord may still apply for rent increase under section 123 of that act, but the landlord school tax rebate under The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act will be taken into account.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Bill 71 is turning the Premier's education property tax rebate into a political ploy that has to be on record; a clause is tucked away under related amendments changes, The Municipal Act is to require tax notices to include materials supplied by the minister. Why is this government trying to legislate the ability to include government propaganda in tax notices?

So if the Premier and his government cared about getting money to Manitobans, it could have—they could do it right now. They could have done it yesterday, last week, last month. He and his government are entirely capable of getting money, of getting this money to Manitobans without any new legislation, but doing it that way doesn't let the Premier sign the cheques or send out flyers with his face on it. So it's

obvious that the Premier is trying to buy back his popularity, dying popularity, I might add.

So they could have introduced this bill earlier so that it could have been—it would have been guaranteed passage, but they chose to wait. So this government previously said that they would be phasing out education taxes over a 10-year period after they balanced the budget, but now they're doing it over an accelerated period where—when we're facing a record deficit—deficits due to this pandemic, during a pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So it's no coincidence that they've introduced a tax break when the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) popularity is at an all-time low, and we're two years away from an election. So there's a lot of concern about how this government will make up the revenue lost in the years to come, nearly \$900 million.

So, currently, the education property tax pays for the education of—that our children receive, so, you know, listen to that closely; listen to that statement closely. That's why I do not understand how this is going to go through. Manitobans are just as concerned as me with this tax cut, and it will come at the expense of funding for education. So with that—there's no reason for why this government had to offer these rebates through legislation.

* (15:00)

The Premier sent out similar rebate cheques to seniors earlier in the pandemic and he did so without legislation. The Premier is also choosing to send Manitobans signed cheques that will cost an additional \$1.3 million, so this is an irresponsible and expensive attempt to buy popularity and the support of Manitobans.

This bill does nothing for renters long term and takes away the rebate they did have. So this tax change benefits the wealthy more and shifts the burden to the lower income Manitobans.

So, Bill 71 does not help regular Manitobans. This is a tax cut for the rich that will hurt regular Manitobans and their families at is—as it fundamentally shifts the future tax burden onto middle class and low-income Manitobans.

This tax rebate was originally supposed to be over 10 years, and after we had balanced the budget, now the Premier's trying to speed the process to save his dying popularity, okay, two years before an election. So, with that, the Premier doesn't want Manitobans to know is that while he touts fiscal responsibility by

sending out cheques with the Premier's signature, that's costing us \$1.3 million.

So it's obvious that this government only cares about helping themselves and their wealthy friends. A 25 per cent rebate across the board means that landlords and wealthy Manitobans will benefit the most.

This bill gives wealthy Manitobans the same 25 per cent rebate on their second property and their third and their fourth, but, meanwhile, the average Manitoban will only get \$375, but most of that will get eaten up by this government's hiking of utility rates.

So I just wanted to talk about the Kelsey School Division. I have a very good relationship with our school board chair, and our conversations with each other have been more frequent because of the budget and bills such as Bill 64 and now we have Bill 71, so it's very important to me to put the school board's words, his voice on record, and I'm honoured to do so as his MLA for The Pas-Kameesak.

So I want to read some very wise words to this government that should be on record: The Kelsey School Division's recent announcements of the Minister of Education's (Mr. Cullen) upcoming plans to move changing the delivery or education needs some scrutiny. It is apparent that decisions have already been made by the government without any contacts, evidence or information to back up some claims that have been made. If changes are, in fact, moving forward, as stated by the minister, then the recent EngageMB survey, along with the task forces, town halls, trips, and tours under which Manitobans were asked for yet more feedback, represent a show designed to lend the appearance of public consultation.

Why ask further questions of Manitobans at all? The K-to-12 education review report has many hundreds of submissions from Manitobans and was basically ignored. Assurances were made that any changes being planned are harmless and painless, but that is even a possibility remains to be seen when small community schools can be closed, bus rides extended, and community voting rights eliminated under Bill 64 education plan.

And projected local job losses among knowledgeable division staff are already being discussed by government, which is a loss to the financial well-being of northern communities and businesses. Some accusations seem intent to state the same tired rationale for these plans.

Without any necessary details or information, what are these accusations? We are told time and again that our students are in last or second place on national tests. In fact, the difference between first and last place finish on national tests is a hair's-width fraction. But this reality is withheld from public consideration by government and is a 'grievous' misstatement given how it entirely dishonours our students.

Also omitted from the record is the reality that the chief predictor that some student's test result has nothing to do with a broken education system and everything to do with property; yet, under Bill 64, we have yet to see this acknowledged or any steps taken towards eradicating this harmful influence upon some students who find themselves impoverished through no fault of their own.

No sound blueprints have been offered to back up, with argument, for why a century and a half of democratically elected local school boards from a cross-section of the community and acting in the best interests of local students, schools and communities must be discontinued and tossed aside by Bill 64. No details are provided about how Manitoba's education system would be strengthened or enhanced when, under Bill 64, those same school boards will be replaced by hand-picked government appointees.

The minister and his colleagues continue to make claims that education in Manitoba is top-heavy, when it is they who set the salary caps for senior administration and divisional leaders; they who control the size of school boards and reduced leadership positions just last spring, amidst a soaring pandemic that, according to the Premier (Mr. Pallister), required all hands on deck.

The minister seems intent to achieve a decapitation of a system that has remained among the world's best education providers and one whose future is at stake without any remaining expert leadership to guide it forward. The government continues to state a target for \$40 million in savings to promote classroom support. Where this money will come from and how such a low per-pupil investment—amounting to \$190 per student—will be effectively used to address any improvements remains elusive. No information has been provided by the minister to answer them.

Another claim is that Manitoba is last and only in Canada to fund schools using property tax. In fact, eight Canadian jurisdictions fund public education through a share of local property tax. For years, school boards have been the 'fearst' and foremost advocates

for lower school taxes. The record on this topic is readily available to anyone who wishes to obtain it.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

What does concern trustees are the government's promises for \$1.6 billion in funding to offset any tax rebates now being offered, with absolutely no details about where this new funding will come from and with a \$2-billion deficit now in view. Our students and schools must be cared for through sound stewardship. Without details as to how any of this is possible, this is—this truly does provoke fear, as it should for anyone who understands what this means.

Manitobans need to consider all the information being made available. Please arrive at your own conclusion about what Bill 64 will mean for our community, students, staffs and schools. Do your research and learn more regarding what the minister himself has admittedly—is already moving forward in communities and neighbourhoods across our province.

Citizens need to be fully aware of every detail and every possibility regarding plans for a future school system that will see the children of our province through the 21st century and beyond. With this greatest resource at stake, now is not the time for citizens to be misinformed, a reality that occurs when no details are provided or when context is purposely withheld that would otherwise provide greater understanding.

* (15:10)

So he ends this important statement to our community to understand—to assist the understanding of this bill. Tonight at 7 o'clock, the Kelsey School Division will be holding a virtual presentation, and the components of Bill 64, and of course with Bill 71, you know, this will have serious implications for education funding in our province.

So that's tonight and I'm looking forward to that. And another thing that—it's very important to me as the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak is to, again, put on record what our school board chair, Mr. Vaughn Wadelius, a former teacher of mine, former principal—we have a little street named Wadelius Drive—so again, please allow me to put on record our concerns, to give you our local and our regional perspective.

In reviewing the government's Bill 64, one is struck by the manner in which 37 Manitoba school divisions are to be abolished and replaced by 15 regional advisory districts, while the French-language school division is left untouched. Even the

region of the former minister of Education's own riding in Hanover will see no change. Trying to make sense of the reasons behind the restructuring still leaves one bewildered.

These new regions will contain student populations that vary in size from about 2,500 to over 100,000 students, while each regional area is to have one government-appointed regional director.

Student population then doesn't seem to be a common denominator. When the new geographical extent of each new region is considered, there are staggering differences among them. One of the most egregious moves is to replace four current northern school jurisdictions with one massive region in an area which covers two thirds of Manitoba, which is greater in area than Great Britain.

Isn't it typical for politicians inside Winnipeg's Perimeter Highway to think of us northern citizens as one homogeneous population?

This clumping together also ignores some very unique organizational features of our northern area. For 50-plus years, Frontier School Division has worked hard to meet the governance, cultural and educational needs of dozens and mainly small communities. Its ability to attract and retain staff in many isolated communities requires the operation of a recruitment and housing program unlike any other in the province.

In doing so successfully, they have accommodated five Indigenous languages and 40 mainly isolated school sites, and yet have been able to instill a sense of pride among students and communities.

These achievements have resulted in numerous First Nations authorities signing education delivery agreements with Frontier School Division, with subsequent improvement in academic, cultural and vocational course access that helps in achieving improved graduation rates. The Frontier school board is diverse, as well, with over half of its members Indigenous. It is unrealistic to expect that First Nations would remain an education partner in a new massive government-controlled political school board structure.

While the school jurisdictions of Kelsey, Flin Flon and Mystery Lake have targeted their students' specific learning needs in ways that address each community priorities and interests—even as separate jurisdictions—these northern school divisions have co-operated with each other when it was their mutual advantage. One begins to wonder how many Frontier School Division's current 42 schools—most being

smaller than those in Winnipeg—could be closed now that the school-closing process is to be government-controlled and focused on expenditures.

And, as one big geographic region encompassing about 55 individual proposed school councils, what chance does that lone parent to be elected from this region to the provincial advisory council and education have to adequately represent such a varying group of parents?

It may be 'inertable' that this loss will be forced upon us, but it seems to make more sense to let the Frontier School Division continue its unique governance of an area of the province that is like no other. The remaining three school divisions, which are more similar in community composition and less spread out over a wide area, could work within a co-operative governance structure needed to continue in addressing their more urban and special student needs.

So again, very important message from our school board chair. If they want to speak virtually in committee, he's encouraging that as well. And as a parent with children attending school in the Kelsey School Division, this tax cut doesn't make sense to me, especially when Kelsey School Division, you know, 80 per cent of its budget is—comes from government, including, you know, that education tax.

I just don't understand it, because I live right next door to a Opasquia School where my children went when they were young. Now they're in high school, still within the Kelsey School Division.

We already have—do—already do without schools where I'm from. For example, Mary Duncan School is a special school to me, it has a special place in my heart. It deals with kids and educates children who—the other schools have given up on them, you know, they were expelled from school or they quit because of mental health issues or they were bullied so they wanted to come somewhere where it's much smaller classrooms and culturally focused programs.

And I've been in there a few times, in the classroom, talking about the role of an MLA and the importance of voting, and, you know, I'm worried about schools like that. You know, with this revenue that's going to disappear and end up in cheques to us—I don't understand, because property owners and commercial owners, you know, we're all going to need health-care aides, you know, including myself.

We're all going to need teachers. We're all going to need these occupations filled by our future generations, and by slicing and—that fundamental part of

their education, their early years, makes no sense at all. It just diminishes, you know, their abilities to reach those—what—those requirements to reach post-secondary school.

And so, with Bill 71 and this tax gone, what's going to happen to our children at Mary Duncan School? You know, again, it's already a struggling school, you know? There are—schools in our division are already dealing with cuts, and now they have to deal with this. And it's—I don't think it's right.

I think this should be rethought, because it's going to be your children, your grandchildren, that's going to be affected by this disappearance of funding into our education system, including mine. And funding such as—disappearing—there was an important program called Roots of Empathy that was at the Mary Duncan School which served our students very well in regards to what that program was all about.

* (15:20)

So, you know, just by attending the K-to-12 education review too as an MLA with my own community at the Wescana Inn in The Pas, it was a sham. And it was a huge letdown, a huge disappointment.

I don't believe, you know, property tax was not No. 1 on our agenda. Governance—changing of governance was not No. 1 on our agenda. The No. 1 item on our agendas were poverty and mental health. And these two bad—very bad bills, 64 and 71—are just going to contribute to that diminishing of our education system and that's why I'm going to keep on and stand on this side of the House, with my colleagues, and continue to put my constituents' concerns on legislation.

And again, it's an honour and a privilege to be here to talk on behalf of my constituents from The Pas-Kameesak 'cosishtuency'.

Stay well, everyone, and ekosi.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, when it comes to the amendment for Bill 71, it really is a very incredibly unjust tax measure that we're talking about. It is incredibly valuable right now to provide people with assistance, but part of the question we have to ask, is this the best or the only way to go about it? And it certainly isn't.

I mean, one of the reasons I know that there's been some discussion about property taxes and education property taxes, and one—and why they are the way—where they are, and part of that is simply because over

many years, not just under this government, that the central funding of the education system has—and the Province's share from general revenues has dropped steadily, so school divisions were basically put between a rock and a hard place. So—they were either given a choice to cut or to close or to raise 'lorcoral' property taxes. So, there's little question about why this has happened.

The—one of the key elements of the—their fairness issue is who actually pays and how much land people own and how the distribution—the burden of these taxes fall. If we are concerned, and we should be concerned, living—worrying about seniors in—living on a fixed income in a small home, then we should absolutely be concerned about making sure that they're able to afford where they—afford their home and not be driven out, either by tax assessments or other measures.

Unfortunately, exactly the opposite happened when this government made an earlier change to property taxes, which resulted in property tax increases happening to seniors on fixed incomes, who lived in a—like Rosburn, as an example. I mentioned this before but it's a place—we have a quarter section near there and 95 per cent of the residents of Rosburn, which is right next to Waywayseecappo First Nation, saw a tax fee increase of over 100 per cent.

And there were over 400 people in Portage la Prairie who experienced the same thing. It didn't happen as much in Winnipeg because our real estate prices are higher. So, in fact, it would—tended to be small rural communities where people are living in homes where they haven't seen massive increases in their equity because of real estate prices, who have borne—bore the brunt of what supposed to be a tax cut, and it didn't work.

So there are things we could be doing because we are running a substantial deficit. So this entire tax measure will be funded through debt; that—we are borrowing money with interest in order to write these cheques.

And if, again, if we were—we could say, well look, if we want to provide people with a relief, we go into—and we're willing to borrow money with interest to do that, we could just say, well look, here are the people who need the money—and it could be seniors, and it could be low-income families, people who really need relief and we could provide that relief, if we were willing to simply, you know, through—it's—I think we all agree that it's okay to borrow money in order to

make these measures work. But it's another thing entirely to say, well, we're going to borrow the money and then we're actually going to make it much, much harder to pay it back because of the way we're going to permanently change the way we bring in revenue.

And, again, there are measures we could take. You could change the way that property tax is calculated to make it progressive. There's been some talk about—in the private member's resolution today about, you know, we keep talking about kitchen tables, but again, this is a measure that will—the—as proposed, cut taxes on pipelines. And I don't know why that is supposed to be a benefit.

I don't know that there are—and look, I will acknowledge that it's been a tough time for the oil industry, but let's not fool ourselves—is that they're also—we're not talking about helping somebody—may not be talking about anybody in Manitoba at all when we're talking about some of the commercial relief, or so-called relief that we're getting. Because it's all going to have to be paid for.

So part of this is that this is not—the entire idea of this is based on the idea that—the—in economics, the Laffer Curve—the idea that if you just cut taxes enough, that it'll come around and that eventually, it'll pay for itself. And that has rarely ever been imperatively shown to be the case. That's been—the Laffer Curve was originally developed on the back of an—quite literally developed on the back of a cocktail napkin in the 1970s as a way of justifying tax cuts and actually giving not just tax cuts, but giving—specifically giving tax cuts to the people who make the most money. And the idea being that, well, if you just cut those taxes, that it will somehow magically pour into the economy of the hands of the people who need it, that doesn't—that is simply not the case.

There's this idea of what you would call supply-side or trickle-down economics—is that if you free up all this money at the top, that it will find its way back down to the bottom—so called, if we use those terms like top and bottom, or at least from high-income people to low-income people.

But the reality is, is that if somebody gets a major windfall who is already fairly well off, they will tend to invest it or they will put it into luxuries or occasionally into real estate or luxury real estate. That's where it goes. It actually doesn't go into—people generally don't drive down to a small store, a small business, and spend a ton of money helping that small business, or they don't, certainly, all say I'm going to

eat twice as many meals at restaurants in my area than I did before.

When people have those windfalls, they tend to invest them, but the investment is not always into job-producing activities or business-creating activities. Sometimes it just goes into the price—increasing the price of the house or increasing the price of real estate or increasing the price of a stock that's already existing. In other words: it goes into speculation. So what it does is that it tends to drive inequality. So you put more hands into the—and it goes into the—increasing asset prices, but not actually productive economic development. And not into putting people to work.

And this is a widespread problem across our economy and you can see it even—because we've heard a lot about, you know, what's good for small business and what isn't and what needs to be done for small business. And I've worked with a number of small businesses, I helped set some rural small businesses get up and running on Facebook and doing their social media. I have helped various small businesses secure—in my previous life—secure capital investment from various—in various ways.

And the major challenging—facing entrepreneurs is often not taxes, because they don't actually make a profit. They don't actually pay taxes on profits, though, of course, they do pay taxes on property. But the challenge is, is that what they really need in order to be able to get up and running is capital. They actually need people who are willing to put money into their business, whether it's to train people or pay people or buy capital equipment or pay for bricks and mortar and pay for manufacturing.

And that's something that both governments and banks have been incredibly reluctant to do over the last 20 and 30 years—is that more and more, it's been seen as being—the easy route has been to say, well, let's speculate on real estate, because that is the easiest way to make money. Or let's speculate on market, because it becomes much easier to speculate and make money from money than it is to make money from work.

And this is a bigger problem for our entire economy, because—and certainly in this Chamber—there seems to be a division between what is seen as a pro-business party and a pro-worker party, or a management party and a labour party, or however you want to see it.

* (15:30)

But there's another way of looking at our economy which is quite different.

One is to say that, yes, you've got labour; the other is to say you have an industrial economy where people make things, you know, people—and they provide all sorts of useful services, including some public services—you know, health care, education, people who make things, people who work in the industrial parks, people who are assembling—there's a place in Tyndall Park where the Canada west—I think it's Canada West Boots, they make boots. There's all sorts of incredible manufacturers across Manitoba, as well as people who—you know, farmers who are doing primary production, people on natural resources who are pulling essential elements out of the ground.

And then you have—'septor' from that, you have the world of finance: finance, insurance and real estate. And there are really three parts to the economy. It's—one is the fire sector, the other is the—you think of as the industrial sector and the third is labour. And what's happened over the last 40 years is not just that things have been bad for business or it's been bad for labour, it's ridden hard on industry.

We can—you can, you know, drive around Winnipeg, you can drive across Manitoba and see where there used to be old—whether it's an old grain elevator or, you know, abandoned buildings where there used to be shops, or there are businesses or empty storefronts on main streets—where that part of the economy, the entrepreneurial 'economy', the economy where people in Manitoba own their own businesses and ran their own businesses and contributed to the community, they've been driven out of business. And I say that it is—they have been driven out of business.

It isn't just a question of saying, well, that's the way the economy goes. It's a deliberate policy choice that's happened over the last 40 years. It's a deliberate policy choice to say, well, we're not going to support small towns or we're not going to support the inner city; we're just going to try to follow—we're just going to chase what we think of being the 20 per cent of the population that's 80 per cent of the income. And it's a choice. And we're going to have policies that actually make sure that 20 per cent of the population gets 80 per cent of the income.

So rather than saying, well, maybe this is going to be a problem for our society because when you have that kind of inequity, it actually means that all sorts of people are losing out on opportunity. And it means what's happened in the last 30 or 40 years is that

finance has done very well, insurance has done very well, real estate has done very well.

But the rest of business has had a hard time. So, businesses have had a hard time, too. And labour has had a hard time. So you actually have a situation where—to the surprise of some—there should be common ground between labour and lots of common ground between workers and business because they've both been done in, often by, you know, huge, huge companies or huge financial institutions that, you know, don't have headquarters in Manitoba. So, the fact is is that we have an opportunity to be—and I think an obligation to be challenging this.

And the reason this all comes back to the question of who benefits from this bill is that it overwhelmingly benefits finance and real estate, and it doesn't actually benefit either—it'll tend not to benefit either individuals or business. Because when you take all that money away, all of a sudden you say, look, when, you know, you were paying this much on—in taxes on this piece of property.

So, if you go to a banker and they say, well, how much—what—they want to determine how much of a loan they're going to give you, which is how much you're going to end up paying. If you tell them they're going to pay—the tax is less, they'll offer you more money, which is the same thing as saying you're going to go into more debt and the price of this piece of property's going to go up. And it's not—it's a pretty basic and elementary proposition of economics that the more you put into an asset up front, the less you're going to get out of it.

So, we have a huge problem. And it's not an easy one to unwind because we have a situation where the price of farmland is ridiculously out of reach and the price of first-time homes is ridiculously out of reach. And we've built a system where it's by the luck of the draw—if you were lucky enough to have been born at a certain time and to have bought a house—and, look, I'm lucky. You know, I bought a house for much less than it's worth—a modest house, but it's much less than it's worth now.

But it's a huge problem because the burden of that—all those extra costs of driving up all those costs are overhead for the entire economy. And so we end up having an economy that is too much based on real estate and on speculation and not enough on innovation, work, trade, exports.

And it makes it harder because if you're a 26–25-year-old worker, if you've just graduated from

college, university or a trade and all of a sudden you have to—you're expected to buy some—you're hoping to buy a home. I've talked with people who are constituents and they'd like to have more children and they can't because they don't think they can possibly afford it. They grew up in the country, loved it out there, would love to be able to work there, but then you also cannot get the kind of work you need.

So we get massive-oversight centralization, as we're seeing; this idea that we have to work—to be efficient, we have to cut off all the little roots and branches and prune away all the—anything that's small so we just have one giant education system or one giant school board for all of Winnipeg.

These are all measures that actually are really negative. They're not good for Winnipeg, but they're not good for the rest of the province either because, ultimately, we all depend on each other for—not just—for our common wealth and for being able to rely on one another, that it doesn't actually—we have to get away from this mentality of thinking that we win if somebody else loses.

And that is basically what this is very much based on, the idea that—and it's a bait and switch, as saying, well, if we—if we're going to take away this—the—we're going to take these funds away and that people are going to automatically be—get relief when the vast majority of Manitobans—actually, the majority of Manitobans are in dire straits and won't actually see a substantial benefit from a tax cut like this while the people who don't need it—that—they or—they're people who are doing extremely well will get—will do very, very well, indeed.

But some of this is that, in the grand scheme of things, we have to stop kicking the ladder away because this is very much—it's not something that's in the interest of future generations, it's not something that's in the interest of the education system. If we want to provide tax relief to people who are paying—who we—who are suffering, that can be done without having to give a tax relief to people who aren't suffering at all. So it's a very broad swath.

And some of this is that—is actually recognizing and dealing with the reality—and this is, of—like—I write this, this is a fundamental difference, but I guess, politically, is that there's a way of looking things and saying, well, we need to—equality and equity, right? The one is saying, well, we're going to treat—if we're going to be fair, we have to treat everybody equally, which means that we'll give the same amount of money to a billionaire as we do to a homeless person.

But the other is to say, well, if we care about equality—and we can all say we care about equality and fairness, so no, no; we just have different conceptions of fairness. But it's extremely important for us to all understand how we feel about this and to recognize that this is where we're coming from.

The other way of thinking about it is to say, well, we want to treat people unfairly because there are some people who—and we should give more to those who don't have it and we should not help out—maybe we don't need to give money to a billionaire and we should help people who are homeless and people who are—other people who are struggling and focus on bringing them up so that there's—so we're a bit closer. We don't have to make everybody a—you know, we're not going to make people billionaires.

But, ultimately, this is something that in the long run is incredibly important for how we work together as a society and how—and the kind of life and the kind of province we want to govern and that we want to live in because even in my discussions with the Business Council of Manitoba, they actually said that after 20 years of the—they started around 1995, '96, after the Jets left town. Basically, there was a lot of concern about the direction of the city and of the province.

This group of major business owners who were—they all live here, they all have—are headquartered here in Manitoba—came together, and at first it was—their focus was economic but most of their focus now is social.

They're concerned about poverty and they're concerned about whether—about unemployment and First Nations. They're concerned about the educational outcomes of First Nations. Their concern is not how much taxes they're paying on their property taxes and their concern isn't blowing up the K-to-12 system. They actually do have—understand that we have both an opportunity and an obligation because there have been so many people in Manitoba who've been neglected for so many years.

And look—First Nations on reserve are the—at the top of that list and it's been—it's a multi-partisan—I've—you know, the—it's been a problem for the province, it's been a problem of the federal government. The neglect of First Nations in Manitoba and across Canada is something we should always been working at; I know—we should not go unmentioned. And there have been hugely important measures that have happened in the last few years, some of it federal and some of it provincial that have made enormous

differences in peoples' lives, especially if you travel to northern First Nations, but—they've been able to bring up funding for education on a par with local communities because that was something that schools on reserve were funded thousands of dollars per student less than students everywhere else.

* (15:40)

So these issues of equity are absolutely critical, and they are issues of equity and not just equality because ultimately they're—we're—we also have to ask, what is—ultimately what is the point of this? Is this—is the bill, is Bill 71 actually going to spur economic growth? No, no it won't.

Will it—is it—we're not in a surplus position, it's not as if the government is—has \$250 million or \$500 million that they have in surplus to give away. We're actually going to be worsening the fiscal position of the government in order to be able to make this cut at a time of absolute crisis. With—and again, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) mentioned this today, he was pointing at, you know, complaining about the NDP's credit downgrades.

Well, this government has had more credit downgrades, and one of those credit downgrades was because this government was planning to move ahead with revenue cuts and no way of paying for them.

So, if we have a situation, I don't—and I don't know what this government's contingency plan is under different circumstances. The fact is the federal government has backed up a fleet of Brink's trucks that is—to the—to this Legislature and unloaded billions—hundreds of millions of dollars year after year after year, more than \$1 billion more than we're getting—than this government is receiving in 2015-2016.

If you were to have the situation, what would happen if a Conservative government, federally, were to return to power, would they return to flatlining our—to flatlining Manitoba's transfer payments? That's a pretty important question I don't think everyone has discussed or even asked, because we would suddenly be in a position where there would be no increases and that this would be a completely unsustainable cut, completely unsustainable.

If they were—and I have no—I don't know, I would like to know actually what the federal Conservative position is on this, about what they plan to do for equalization payments. Because if that were actually to happen, it would completely reshape and crater this

Province's fiscal outlook because of a reliance on federal transfers.

And—but the other thing about Bill 71 in particular is that it is not just a question of saying, well, we're providing relief, is that—and people have said, you know, government should run like a business. Which is funny, actually; Karl Marx actually thought that government should run like a corporation; it was actually the model of—the Soviet Union was the corporation because he thought that you could just dictate from the top and everything would be organized and it would all be centrally planned.

But if you have a situation where you're cutting taxes permanently, it means those individuals who are getting those benefits—the biggest benefits that are borrowed are not going to have to pay it back. They're—so we're going to be borrowing hundreds of millions of dollars, there are certain individuals and corporations who are going to be getting thousands or tens of thousands of dollars in borrowed money, and they will not have to pay it back through those taxes; someone else is going to have to pay it back. So we're shifting the burden somewhere else.

And that's another open question is it—is how and who will have to pay for this? Because there doesn't seem to be an answer to that. And the fact is that—while I like to be an optimist, the idea that we can continue to count on insane real estate prices and speculation to keep going up—which has, to a certain extent, buoyed Manitoba's economy up to this point—while many other parts of the economy have done very poorly is optimistic in the extreme. This is—it is quite a reckless bill to move forward with Bill 71 in terms of Manitoba's fiscal position.

And the other major concern is, again, that because we've seen the growth of—you know, finance, insurance and real estate have done well, and certain other areas have done very well, but we're looking at a tough time for a while, but the other is that there is certain underpinnings to the Manitoba economy, sudden other indicators which are very serious.

One is that prior to the economy—sorry, prior to the pandemic, the number of people on EIA had been growing steadily since 2008. We've added, I think, over 20,000 or 30,000 people more are now on EIA in Manitoba, that's about 73 or 75 thousand people a year ago, as compared with 58,000 people in 2008. And that number has been going up steadily and many of those people are actually people who could work if they had the opportunity but they can't, for a variety of reasons.

And the other is that we have—the number of people who are deep in debt is going up. And that, over the summer, Manitoba was alone, was—it was a complete outlier in terms of businesses filing for insolvency. Every other province was doing much, much better and actually many provinces saw their numbers of businesses filing for insolvency drop—usually only about one other province was up a little bit—but Manitoba's were up by several orders of magnitude.

So, it is critically important not just to look at the good news but to look at the areas where there are risks and weaknesses and unfortunately—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Order. Order. Order. Order.

I know there's very few people in the Chamber, but I can hear the echo a little bit more. So, everybody please just calm down a little bit. I know you're having fun, but let's get to the matter of business.

Thank you.

Order. Order.

Member for St. Boniface, please continue.

Mr. Lamont: And yes, and then there's this—that—these are essentially—it's important when doing a survey of where the economy is. It will not break at the strongest point; if there's a failure, it'll break at the weakest point. And we have a very large number of people who are vulnerable, economically vulnerable.

And it's a bit—if you were to think of having a foundation, if you were shoring up your foundation and your foundation is weak in one spot and strong in the other, you don't shore up—you don't—you could just keep shoring up the strong part over and over and over again and ignore the weak part, but you have to do the opposite. What you want to do is balance it out.

And it isn't—it is—politics is more than just an engineering exercise, but it is incredibly important to be able to provide those people with the supports that they need. Which has not happened—that very often, that this government has designed programs which are very difficult to access. You have big promises but when it actually comes down to actually getting access to those funds, it's a completely different story.

But that, essentially, is what this government is doing and that's what Bill 71 does as well, is that it gives much more money to people who are in—who may already have an excess of property or an excess of money, if they're lucky enough. Some may need it

but many—there are many people who have done very well out of this—in this pandemic as well. But it—just as a—and it's something that's worth doing, especially in a crisis like this. It—for many people, it makes the difference of whether they can make it to the next month or not, so, at \$200 a month away from insolvency.

The average measure for many of these—for the—for many of these measures will only be two months. So, we need to be a bit more serious about what it is actually take to get people through the rest of this pandemic because too many people have been—had no choice but to survive on debt because that's been their only option.

And that includes seniors, that includes students and it certainly includes many working and middle-class Manitobans, who've been struggling for many years where the only choice they have or the only avenue they have, in order to be able to pay their bills, is to take out more debt.

And that is something that is going to—that is a continuing risk, it is the single biggest risk and it is not something that is going to be addressed by this bill. And in fact, the very—the people who are going to be helped the least by this bill are still going to end up having to pay for it because we are racking up debt and—in a bill that will also increase property prices.

So, it's very—it's a really unfortunate bill. We've been very clear about why we're opposed to it. The NDP's proposals and recommendations about holding back on it so that it is more equitable are critical. And frankly, there is—there are better ways to provide temporary relief then—which is needed—emergency relief—than having a measure which overwhelmingly benefits the largest property owners, people who don't necessarily live in Manitoba, businesses that don't live in Manitoba, and then put money on board tables instead of kitchen tables.

* (15:50)

So with that, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The member from Flin Flon.

An Honourable Member: Only one member of your caucus clapped for you.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): But he clapped voraciously.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my pleasure to actually be able to stand in the House and put a few words on the record, as opposed to sitting at my kitchen table and doing it, because, you know, I've got this big pile of money on my kitchen table now. Oh, no—wait, that's an illusion—an illusion foisted on Manitobans by the bunch opposite that they have this pile of money on their table.

And maybe the members opposite do, you know? They seem to have this funny, bad habit of looking after themselves and their friends, but not all of Manitoba.

An Honourable Member: I have no friends. You know that.

Mr. Lindsey: And the member from Steinbach says he has no friends, and I believe him.

So, you know, all kidding aside, this bill that they've introduced—you know, a lot of folks are going to be swayed to get a cheque in the mail, and they're going to think, oh, wow, what a good idea.

But then, all of a sudden, they're going to say, hey, wait a minute, how come education has gone the way of health care? We've seen what these bunch—this Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his—what's the correct term—caucus, I guess—I was going to call them something—I was going to call them something else, but I'll try and use parliamentary language that's acceptable.

You know, they've destroyed health care in the province, completely and absolutely, if you come to the North. Now I realize these members don't often venture outside of their own constituencies or the city of Winnipeg so, you know, it's very unfortunate that they have no idea what's going on in northern Manitoba.

We've heard from previous members that spoke about how the PCs tend to think all of northern Manitoba is just all exactly the same, so let's all just lump them in together. But we're not; we're not all the same.

When you look at this proposed school division—

An Honourable Member: Did you write this speech?

Mr. Lindsey: I didn't write a speech because I don't have to write a speech to respond to the foolishness that has been foisted on Manitoba by this government.

Manitobans recognize that they don't need somebody reading a speech written by their Premier to stand up and say what they really think because we,

on this side of the House, actually have a little bit of free thought and are able to think for ourselves.

We don't have to have somebody think for us, which seems to be the problem across the way, is free thought has died. There is no free thought. They sit with their prepared notes and read verbatim without realizing that, really, when their Premier turns tail and runs back to Costa Rica, they're going to be left holding the bag.

You know, this Premier has destroyed so many things in this province and he's bullied his caucus and continues to bully his caucus. But then, at some point, he's going to do what all bullies do when people stand up to him—he's going to run away and hide.

Now, will he run away and hide when he's down in the polls because of things like this bill that he's brought in or other bills that are just as bad or worse? Will he run and hide because he's down in the polls? Will he run and hide after he loses the next election? That's the only question that really needs to be answered is when will he run and hide? But we know he's going to.

So, does he quit a loser or lose as a loser? Huh, it's quite a conundrum to think about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but make no mistake about it, the Premier is not going to completely survive all the massive damage he's done to this province.

Now, it's unfortunate that he's not going to leave sooner rather than later before he does more damage to the province. He likes to talk about leaving money on the kitchen table—the trained monkeys can clap on cue, you know. He's got them well trained, so—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Order. I just want to remind the member to, when he's referring to other people, there's a proper terminology to be used in that instead of making up names and calling them names, if you wouldn't mind.

So, the member from Flin Flon, please continue.

Mr. Lindsey: I apologize, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not wish to, just, call them names.

I just want to point out that with this particular piece of legislation that the Premier has brought forward and his caucus apparently supports, although we haven't really heard any of them talk about it. So maybe they don't support it quite as much as one would think. They seem to be awfully quiet. Well, other than chirping in the background.

So, what does this particular piece of legislation do for us? [*interjection*] Well—there they go. Maybe if they were—quiet down for a minute and listen, they'd learn something. Maybe not.

Anyway, so, what they are pretending this bill will do is give money back to all Manitobans. And they'd like to think that, you know, all Manitobans are going to get the same amount back, but they're not. This bill helps to create the two-tiered system that this bunch has been after all along, the them and the us. They want to make sure that most Manitobans are worse off. Their corporate friends will have more money on their boardroom table. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) may have more money on his kitchen table, whether it's his kitchen table here or his kitchen table in Costa Rica or his kitchen table on whichever property it is he happens to be at.

You know, that's one of the other things about this bill is it gives people that have multiple properties multiple tax breaks. So, you know, we could get behind and support them; we could, if somewhere in this vast cavern of useless legislation that they've introduced, there was some mention of how they're going to fund education going forward. How are they going to fund health care going forward? How are they going to fund anything going forward?

We know that they're taking millions and millions of dollars of revenue out of the system, but not once have we heard how they're going to adequately fund any of these services that are vital to Manitoba going forward.

Now, they're—we've seen what they've done with health care. Their little catchphrase that I'm sure will get them all clapping again: health care closer to home. Of course, we all know that's not true. We all know that that's not true. Because if you travel to northern Manitoba, again, you'll know that the hospital at Flin Flon has basically no services left.

* (16:00)

You'll know that, if you lived in Snow Lake, if a doctor has an emergency and has to leave, there's no such thing as a contingency plan. They just say, well, good luck, folks. You don't have a doctor at your emergency room. I wish you well.

You know, if a nurse phones in sick at the Leaf Rapids health complex, do you know what happens? They shut it down for two weeks. Thank you for the MKO for stepping up and making sure that they supplied health care where this government refused.

So that's really the essence of this bill and the essence of our amendment to the bill. It's about fairness. It's about fairness for all Manitobans—excuse me for one moment—and, really, that's what's been missing with this government since the day they first got elected, is fairness.

This bill leaves our tax system even more patently unfair to Manitobans—to the average Manitoban. You see, some of my constituents, they'll look at this and say, well, I'm going to get the \$200 back. That'll be a good thing. But then when they realize that, well, maybe their kid doesn't have a teacher, or maybe there's 40 kids stuffed in a classroom because this government's mindset is, well, let's destroy public education like we've destroyed public health care.

We don't know what they're going to cut but we know, based on their history, that services will be cut. You know, there was a time earlier when the Premier said, well, you know, we've made a bunch of cuts and nobody's noticed. But the sad reality is he didn't notice because it didn't affect him. But there's a multitude of people out there that tried to access a service that wasn't there anymore, tried to talk to a human that wasn't there anymore.

Do you know, Mr. Deputy—Acting Deputy Speaker, that Manitoba Housing used to have a manager in Flin Flon: not there anymore. So they had someone in The Pas who was the manager for Flin Flon: not there anymore. They've been talking about hiring a local maintenance person for—I think it's two years now: can't seem to find anybody. Of course, they never advertised locally, so how would they?

So it's those little cuts that the Premier is so proud of that are destroying the very fabric of Manitoba. Those are things that people notice every day, and we see more and more of that. If you wanted to take a drive in January in northern Manitoba in particular, you better hope it's not snowing because there's a whole lot less snowplows out there. Why is that? Well, because this government have cut those services down to the bare bones. In fact, they've cut into the bones in a lot of cases.

So now we see—with what they've proposed here—that they're going to take all this money out of the system and give it to their friends. The corporate farms are going to get all this money back. People that live way down on Wellington Crescent are going to get all this money back for their first house, their second house, their third house. People that live in a \$30,000 house in Flin Flon, in Snow Lake, in Leaf

Rapids: they're going to get next to nothing back. All they're going to get is more cuts and less service.

You know, if this Premier was so set that he wanted to reduce the property tax—it's a lofty idea—wanted to cut the education portion of the property tax, then there's multitudes of different ways he could've done it. The way he's chosen to do it is pork-barrel politics at its worst. Boss Hogg comes to mind where—looked out for his friends but not for anybody else, and really that's what we see here is the tax system being further skewed away from helping Manitobans.

You know, even if he hadn't come up with a plan of what was going to replace the lost revenue, he could've just reduced people's taxes. He could've passed that into legislation rather than saying, well, you pay and I'll send you a cheque with my name on it. You'll get a cheque after you've tried to figure out how to scrape enough money together when probably so many people have been laid off because of the pandemic and because of this Premier's (Mr. Pallister) mindset that if one worker gets laid off, everybody should get laid off.

How many of those workers, how many of those folks are going to be able to pay their tax bill? Wouldn't it have made more sense to just take it off the bill in the first place if they're going to do it rather than say, well, you pay it and then we'll pay you some back?

I have to say that's trying to buy an election. That's really what it is. So, the Premier's going to send you a cheque with his name on it to reimburse you for what you've already paid him. Makes no sense. None whatsoever.

Plus, he's made sure that in the legislation that it says he'll be able to put a letter in telling you what a wonderful person he is, what a wonderful thing that his government has done. You know, he knows that right now he's the most disliked premier—although Ford's giving him a run for his money in Ontario at the moment—because of the disaster that pandemic planning has been in this province. And that disaster has really been brought about because of this Premier's refusal to spend money properly to protect Manitobans.

Now, if this bill passes, there'll be that much less money available to help Manitobans weather the pandemic storm. The Premier and his caucus—because make no mistake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're all

guilty of this—if nothing else they're guilty of saying nothing.

The people, even people that they represent, some of them are saying wait, wait, this is not right, stop, we can't have our Province cutting all the services. Educators across the province have said what they're proposing with Bill 64 is wrong.

Imagine a school division—I think it was referenced earlier—the size of the country of England with absolutely nothing in common with different parts of it. I mean, Frontier School Division exists today to cover a goodly portion of northern Manitoba. But within that division there's multiple subdivisions. So now, with the stroke of a pen, the Premier hopes to do away with all of that and combine all the communities in the North because, again, he has no concept of the North—still just looking.

And that should be their catchphrase, really: he's still just looking.

* (16:10)

So, we've talked a little bit about what's the point of this Premier sending a cheque rather than just taking it off the top like he could do, reducing the tax bill upfront. In his mind, he sees no political gain in that. In his mind, sending you a cheque with his name on it will remind you what a wonderful person he did—what a wonderful thing he did. And he hopes you won't notice all the other bad things that he did: health care, education, infrastructure, the list just goes on and on and on. And with that much less revenue coming in and no plan to replace it, we'll see more cuts. You can bet on that.

So, are we opposed to reducing or essentially eliminating the school tax portion of your tax bill? Not really. But then there needs to be plan of how that gets replaced. How does our tax system not just remain fair but become fair so that people that have the ability to pay do pay?

I don't like paying taxes any more than the next person, but I understand what my tax dollars do for me and I understand what my tax dollars do for my neighbour and I understand what my tax dollars do for someone not as fortunate as me.

But that's where this Premier and his friends fail Manitobans, because all they care about is themselves. They don't want to pay their taxes, they don't want to support a system of education or health care or anything else that would help someone other than themselves.

It's really the ideological divide between parties in Manitoba and parties in general. We've seen, south of us, the right-wing ideology that has led to such disastrous outcomes—the rise of racism, the rise of everything bad—brought about because of the right-wing mentality that we now see in our province.

We're going to see the same outcomes, where we're left pitted against each other fighting for scraps while the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his pals take their money and run to Costa Rica—or perhaps the Isle of Man; I understand that's the latest tax haven.

And I have no doubt that there's so many dollars that now are not going in the tax system to help us, that this piece of legislation will just mean more money out of the system, less able to help our fellow Manitobans that need help, that need education, that need health care, that need transportation, that need all the things that a government should be responsible for. But this bunch doesn't want to be responsible for any of that.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

This Premier wants to leave a legacy that says I slayed the deficit at any cost. And it's a cost to each and every Manitoban, and this is just one more underhanded attempt for him to build himself a legacy. But Mr. Deputy Speaker, his legacy won't be the one that he wants it to be, because time will show that he's worse than the one-term Sterling Lyon, that he's done more damage than Gary Filmon, that he's destroyed a province that had so much potential and was growing and was on the right path of caring for each other.

You know, one of the things I've heard said, is well, when you guys get elected next time, will you be able to fix everything. And the answer is, it'll take us years to fix the damage that's been done by this government because they've destroyed so much of the fabric of Manitoba. They've destroyed the very heart. We see this in their pandemic response. Don't put the proper things in place to protect us but turn your neighbour in. That'll save us. They pitted Manitoban against Manitoban rather than stepping up and showing true leadership at a time when leadership was required.

The Premier has been focused solely on how not to spend money, how not to help Manitobans that have lost their jobs. He's accused them of being too lazy to go to work. And yet, throughout question period today, we heard any number of pleas for different groups of Manitobans to be included in the vaccine, so that they could go to work safely. But this Premier

and his caucus kind of fumbled that ball, too. That it's only now that we see the third wave really starting, that we're actually starting to see some vaccines getting out there and getting into people's arms.

Their initial plan for the vaccine rollout in the North was a disaster. It actually created some commonality between communities, between the Northern Health Region leadership, between the NDP MLAs that represent the North, that we're all on the same page trying to convince this government and the various health ministers to do the right thing. They may finally be getting there. Time will tell.

So, when it comes to Bill 71 and the reasoned amendment, which is what we're debating today, making a tax system fair for everyone, making a tax system that's equitable for everyone, should be a drive of this government—should be the drive of every government, to make sure that they are actually a government that's representing all people in Manitoba, all sectors of Manitoba; not just the few and not just the rich; not just their friends. But that's really what's wrong with this Bill 71.

I heard one of the members, I think it was—I think he's from Portage la Prairie, talk earlier today about fixing the finances, when really, what we've seen from this government is fixing the books, which isn't a positive term. It generally means that a government or someone is trying to hide something from Manitobans. We've seen that with the release of the Estimates books that have a complete lack of information, as should be included in there.

* (16:20)

How do we ask reasonable questions of a government that won't give reasonable access to information? They've introduced legislation to make it harder to get freedom of information requests because they know that sooner or later those requests have to be answered and we find out exactly what it is that they're doing.

They talked lots in the budget about how many millions they're spending on this and how many millions they're going to spend on that, but then when it comes to the Estimates process and the freedom-of-information request we find out that they didn't spend anywhere near that amount of money.

The Premier in particular always likes to stand up and 'pro' these big announcements. And this piece of legislation is just another kick at Manitobans to make sure the Premier looks after his friends, tries to build himself a legacy based on fantasy, not on reality.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I thank you for the opportunity to speak to the reasoned amendment to Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended).

Let's understand this bill before speaking to the reasoned amendment we proposed. This bill, Bill 71, reduces education property taxes on Manitoban properties. While we are in favour of reducing school taxes on Manitobans, we strongly oppose Bill 71.

You would think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why? Why? Because this bill has a faulty design; because the way this government is reducing school taxes is unfair; because it does not address the rich/poor divide in this society; because it favours the wealthier Manitobans to a great extent; because the government's intention is to ignore common people who are fed up with PC policies; because it offers nothing for the tenants. These are the reasons that provide basis for the reasoned amendment put forward by my colleague, the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine).

This bill clearly fails to ensure an equitable distribution across income groups. We all know that inequitable distribution of wealth is a problem that needs to be addressed. And it's not just in Manitoba. This is a problem in the wider communities, most parts of this world. So the responsible governments should take this matter seriously.

There's a big economic divide between common Manitobans who don't even own a home and the owners of mansions. My question to all elected officials in Manitoba is: do you want to see this divide widened or narrowed?

Those who want to see this gap widened are clearly supporting this bill. Those who want to narrow this gap are opposing this bill, and they stand in favour of the amendment that is put forward by my colleague.

And these people are called progressive leaders. These people advocate social justice. These people advocate the less fortunate in our society.

What should be the role of government in this society, actually? We need to think about this. What should be the role of us, the legislators, sitting right here in this Chamber?

It is to protect common people. Governments are here to protect people. Governments are here to stand

up against exploitation and unfair treatment of common people. Governments are here to stand up against injustices towards common people.

Now, this government should look into the mirror and ask themselves, are they doing what's the right thing to do? Obviously not. This is the reason this society was built and this is the reason our political system, our justice system, was built. That's why we are called social animals. The word social is important here.

Let's stop and think. Let's stop and think about humans back then when they used to live in unstructured social environments. What was the culture? What was it like? There were no premiers; there were no chiefs, no police, no social support programs. Survival of the fittest or, I would say, survival of the powerful. That was the rule. And the stronger individuals, they will kill or dominate the weaker ones.

Unfortunately, the governments, like our PC government, they are promoting that culture again. They're sending us back to where we started from, the unstructured, unprotected society. That's not the role of the government.

Again, I'm reminding everybody that the role of the government is to stand with people, those are not that powerful, that stronger, that fortunate. The role of the government is to stand with them and protect them.

It's no more about the physical strength of people; rather, it's financial strength now. A government that's offering more rebate to the rich and wealthy people and less to the poor is actually standing against common people, is failing to defend those who cannot defend themselves. They're not standing up to the expectations of the common people who need government support to even survive, to put even food on their table.

I think half of the Manitobans, they own properties. Not everybody in Manitoba owns properties. That means no property, no tax rebate, when we talk about this bill, and less property, less rebate; more property, more tax rebate.

* (16:30)

I'm sure there are Manitobans who own three, four, five, six, even 10 or 20 properties. Let's guess how much those kind of people—wealthier Manitobans—how much would they be benefitting out of this legislation? And I think it's being done on

purpose because this government, they want to widen the gap between the rich and the poor; and this government does not care about common people.

My question here is: how urgent is it to offer them rebates on taxes, the ones who are wealthier, as compared to the families who struggle to pay their monthly rent? Do we think a flat tax rebate for everyone is a fair taxation system? It's not.

I remember my economics class when I was doing my masters in extension education. We were taught about the law of diminishing marginal utility and many of the listeners, they already know about this law. The professor shared a wonderful example about our dinner plate. He said that we draw maximum satisfaction from our first bite but, as we eat, marginal utility; our satisfaction on consecutive bites keeps going down.

Same applies with money. A single dollar rebate to poor holds more value than it does to a wealthy person. Why is that so? That's because of the scarcity or excess of wealth ownership, with these people, respectively.

So we're talking about this bill and why we brought forward this amendment: because this bill intends to widen the gap between rich and poor while we should be trying to do the opposite. I wish our Premier (Mr. Pallister) either knew this important law of economics or he wouldn't have deliberately ignored this knowledge if he did.

We all know that Manitobans own mansions, including the Premier. They own residential multi-plexes; big pieces of land worth billions of dollars. Why did the Premier and Finance Minister not think of putting any limit on number of properties one can claim tax rebates on? Or why they didn't think of putting a limit to the value of the property and mention in this bill that people having this much of wealth, or more than this much of wealth, won't be getting the same tax rebate as the common people do?

Because they did not intend to do so. They didn't forget about it; they did it on purpose because they did not want to support common people.

When you take millions of dollars out from the budget and gift a major part to millionaires and pennies to common people, provincial revenue goes down.

What that means? That means less money available for our public schools. And who does this

cut affect most? The common people. When the revenue goes down we have less resources to put into our health system, to our social system, support system. So what's the deal here? The deal is to try to make people happy by bringing in legislations like Bill 71 and securing your own position rather than doing the right thing, helping common people, supporting the people who need support.

The tax rebate money that the Premier is putting back in deeper pockets will be spent for sure, but where? As I said the other day, it would be spent somewhere near Nicaragua. One might spend on cruises, vacation in Vegas or costly real-gold watches or imported jewellery from somewhere far away. The Premier's decisions encourage the money being siphoned out from our provincial economy; that's the threat.

This bill is doing nothing. Once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this bill is doing nothing to narrow the divide between rich and poor. This government is doing the wrong thing, exactly opposite to what people expect from them.

And during my debate I've been mentioning common people throughout my debate. Who are these common people?

These are our small homeowners. These common people are those who rent apartments. These are new Canadians who are not economically well off. These are grocery store workers. These are health-care workers who are our brave members of this society who sacrificed a lot more than all of us to protect us during this pandemic. These are our small-business owners and our international students. These are the common people I'm talking about. How does this bill support child-care workers, educators, educational assistants, custodians, transit workers, taxi professionals, truck drivers, factory workers, receptionists, small ranchers, Crown land lease holders?

And, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this opens another front of discussion. Let's compare the tax rebate to a corporate farm versus a livestock rancher who is surviving on a piece of marginal land that's only good for pastures. Who is being benefited more here? Of course, the large corporations.

* (16:40)

Our ranchers are already under stress. They're looking at this government to see some relief for months and months, especially during this pandemic when the supply chains were disrupted, when there

were COVID infections at abattoirs—at big slaughterhouses. They had to keep their cows, their livestock, on farm longer than what they used to do and feed them. At the end, they had to sell those cows at a cheaper price; that was a punishment to them.

Why did this government not think about those ranchers, those livestock producers, while structuring this bill? They were offered no support to keep them in business during the pandemic. However, this government affords hundreds of millions of dollars revenue loss by passing this bill.

It's not a question of affordability; it's a question of intentions; it's a question of your 'biasness' against common people and towards the rich corporations. Why did the government not spare a few hundred dollars for business-risk programs? Because they didn't want to support our ranchers.

As I said in the Chamber yesterday, there is a reason—not a single reason; there are multiple reasons—that our ranchers are demanding resignation from our Ag Minister. Because, they know their intentions. They're upset with the policies like Bill 71.

Let me tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government is on a wrong path. Their policies—they are encouraging inequality. These policies are failing small businesses, and these policies for sure are stressing tenants and renters, ignoring new Canadians—clearly—and ignoring middle-class people.

This approach will ultimately end up offering the lion's share of wealth in a few hands they often shake with each other. Supporting your own friends—this is not an honest political approach. This is, rather, abuse of power. This a failed effort to save their own jobs. This is an effort to put money on boardroom tables, not the kitchen tables.

And let me remind everyone: we have hundreds of thousands of Manitobans having kitchens even smaller than our Premier's (Mr. Pallister) kitchen table, and they eat while sitting on ground. They do not even have a kitchen table. And where are you trying to put those dollars on, that you falsely claim?

It's time to think about these Manitobans. It's time for a change. It's time to send this Premier to a warmer place and retire, and the rest of the 35 of his friends join him for picnic.

I strongly oppose this bill and support the amendment that my colleague, member from St. Johns, brought forward. And when we refer to the

researchers, economists, they tell us how we should frame our financial policies.

I would like to share this, that Canada's tax system needs fairness. According to a new study by CCPA economists Marc Lee and Iglia Ivanova, Canada's tax system is in dire need of fairness by design. A Framework for Tax Reform in Canada finds that ad hoc tax changes over the last two decades have seriously weakened the redistributive role of Canada's tax system at a time when market inequalities call for more, not less, redistribution.

The study also presents a framework for a progressive tax reform strategy and recommends the establishment of a fair tax commission to examine how federal taxes and transfers work together as a system and make recommendations for changes.

Another example is that in his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas Piketty made the connection between inequality and tax policy explicit. The resurgence of inequality after 1980—when I was in grade 1, by the way—is due largely to the political shifts of the past several decades, especially in regard to taxation and finance.

In Manitoba since then those shifts took two main forms. We need to know this. The first was the shift of the tax bill from business to families through large reductions of corporate income taxes and a proliferation of business subsidies and tax credits. And the second was a shift of the tax bill from higher-income to middle- and modest-income families.

In general, there is a need for tax reform to ensure that our communities are supported by a fair, equitable tax system, but unfortunately this is not the case in Manitoba. This government, the PC government, has failed to ensure that their flat tax rebate is fair to all Manitobans. The wealthiest Manitobans will make significant, significant gains, and those with lowest incomes and middle incomes will either see their existing rebates clawed back or will receive small amounts.

Those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic will not see gains from this regressive tax rebate. And this flat tax rebate will create more income equality in Manitoba. And that is not good for a number of reasons, and we all know that, including the PC caucus and our Premier. They know it, but they are purposely ignoring this fact and going the wrong direction due to their own selfish reasons, due to the intention of saving their own jobs.

* (16:50)

And for the reasons I just discussed, on this side of the House we cannot support this set of tax reforms because this bill, Bill 71, it fails to ensure an equitable distribution across income groups and makes life less affordable for renters in Manitoba.

There are hundreds of thousands of renters who can't even afford to manage their needs for food and their monthly rent and this government is not thinking about them. Bill 71, as it stands, will put money on the kitchen tables of the wealthiest Manitobans but we need to think about those families who have kitchens smaller than the kitchen table of our Premier (Mr. Pallister). We need to know that.

Thank you so much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'm very pleased today to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 71 and some of the issues that come up under that bill and that subject, and this is the education property tax reduction.

And the Premier's and the government's current plan is to send out rebate cheques to people at this time of year, I guess, rebating 25 per cent of the school taxes on farm and residential properties and 10 per cent of school taxes on all other properties. But the global budget here is about \$900 million. So what he's talking about doing is rebating over, I think the first two years, a portion of the school taxes with the overall plan to be reducing them to zero over a 10-year period.

Now, you know, this is something that has been discussed for a number of years and there have been observations made that areas—divisions that have a very large amount of industrial businesses and bigger homes are more able to generate tax revenue and therefore, provide better service to their people.

So, for example, City of Winnipeg, back in 1971, was a bunch of little cities, and with St. James being one of the very successful ones with a very high amount of industrial businesses and expensive homes. And so they had no problems running a Cadillac-type of school system in a Cadillac city operation there. And other areas of the city that didn't have the luxury of all of these businesses and expensive homes had a much poorer tax base on which to operate.

So the argument was made at that time before city was amalgamated into one, was that we had to even out the inequities and provide city services on an equal

basis to all of the areas of the city and so, therefore, St. James how—ended up subsidizing or sharing its revenues with all other parts of the city.

So this argument is also been made with regard to the school boards, as well. And that was the arguments that we should be funding education out of the general revenues. So what we have here is a lot of theatre on the part of the government, right? They're taking advantage of a situation where they have actually come up with a pretty—I'm—pretty hair-brained, I think, but certainly ambitious plan to not only get rid of all the school boards but also change the education funding at the same time.

And you would—we would think that they would separate those issues. I mean, in past governments, we've changed the school boards and, generally speaking, reduced them over the years and I presume there've been some advantages of that.

For example, New Brunswick, a number of years ago, maybe—I think probably 25, 30 years ago now—eliminated their school boards completely, but by 1999 they realized that it was a mistake and then New Brunswick returned to a system of elected school boards. And it was Premier Bernard Lord, he was looking for a more effective structure to govern public education and one that would involve a return to elected representatives.

So, you know, the Premier, if he wants to see the future, just simply has to look at the past. You know, Frank McKenna came into power. He won, I think, every seat in the province in New Brunswick and proceed to scrap all the elected school boards in favour of a—get this—a complex system of parent advisory groups: exactly what is going on in Nova Scotia right now in the last couple years and exactly what this Premier is talking about doing here in Manitoba.

And so we've been there. We've been there. All you have to do is look at the Canadian experience of New Brunswick to see that one premier got rid of the school boards and then another premier, maybe 10 years later, has brought them all back.

And now Nova Scotia has embarked on its restructuring plan and here we have the Manitoba government basically trying to follow Nova Scotia. And I can tell you that this is—government has bitten off, in this issue, more than it can chew because there's a lot of very upset people in this province right now in the teaching profession.

And I can tell you that, you know, when they attempted—this government attempted to close the ERs, the emergency rooms, for example, at Concordia Hospital, you know their plan was not, in the beginning, to end up with an urgent care like they have now. They did not anticipate the outrage and the uproar that they were going to face from the residents and the voters in northeast Winnipeg.

And the original plan was the Premier (Mr. Pallister) made an announcement that we're closing down Concordia ER and we're closing down Seven Oaks ER, and guess what? Within a year, he had backed off on a complete closure and he decided to put a pharmacy in there and, of course, that didn't go over well, either.

At the end of the day he kept backtracking until we finally hit the election—the last election, and he was basically running for cover. He basically accepted an urgent care, which seemed to be acceptable, and the residents actually won their battle.

So he only has to look at that battle to see that he's going to be looking at the same battle here on this whole education restructuring plan. You know, Bill 71 is only one component of this, but he's also got Bill 64 and the elimination of the school boards as an issue.

And, you know, I think he thinks that, well, we're dealing with the pandemic right now, so he's got some cover—he's got some cover to proceed with these issues. But I can tell him that sometimes the opposition takes a little while to mount, and even as far

back as MTS I can recall that the opposition of the day had some early difficulties in getting people, you know, active in the fight against the selling off of the telephone system.

But guess what? At the end of the day, it just all blew up in the government's face at the end of the day, and I think the same thing is going to happen here. I haven't found a teacher yet who sees any merit in what the government is doing with this—with these education reforms.

And he may think that sending rebate cheques—I mean, look, a year ago the Premier sent out rebate cheques to retired people. Well, his popularity didn't go up but he did all of that. As a matter of fact, a lot of people were wondering what was this cheque doing in my mailbox, you know. So, obviously, didn't sell the place. Certainly hasn't sold this argument on Bill 71 to the public.

So what is he going to do? Send out all these cheques and people are going to be wondering what—why did I get this—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) will have 21 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 27, 2021

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