

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

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Third Legislature**

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 3, 2024

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

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

Please be seated.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 209—The Provincial Court Amendment Act  
(Expanded Training for Judges  
and Judicial Justices of the Peace)**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I move, seconded by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen), that Bill 209, The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace), be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**MLA Lamoureux:** I bring forward this bill to put into law continuing education topics of intimate partner violence and coercive control for judicial justices of the peace and Provincial Court judges.

Manitoba continues to have some of the highest rates of intimate partner violence across the country, nearly double the national average.

Honourable Speaker, this change would support survivors of intimate partner violence throughout their involvement with the justice system and help them feel safer during a very challenging process.

**The Speaker:** Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Committee reports?

## TABLING OF REPORTS

**The Speaker:** And I have a report to table. In accordance with section 52.6.1 of The Legislative Assembly Act, I am pleased to table the Members Allowances Compliant Report for the period April 1, 2019, to March 31, 2023.

## Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Before I proceed any further, I just want to acknowledge we have seated in the public gallery, from Roving Campus, 30 grade 10 to 12 students under the correction of Brett Greisel *[phonetic]*. The honourable—and they're guests of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza).

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Could you please canvass the House for leave to allow the Indigenous text of this statement to be included in Hansard following the statement made by the Premier in that language but before the English text.

**The Speaker:** Is there leave to allow the Indigenous text of this statement to be included in Hansard following the statement made in that language but before the English text? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

## Indigenous Languages Day

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** *Anishinaabemowin spoken. Translation unavailable.*

*Anishinaabemowin text:*

*Boozhoo ndinawemaaganiidog.*

*Waabanakwad ndigo.*

*Pizhiw gosha ndoodem.*

*Onigaming ndonjii.*

*Njiibay-midew, ningiibakweshim.*

*Ndanishinaabew miinawaa ndikid.*

*Apijii njiikendam noongom. Gaa-izhi-giizhweyaang giizhigan noongom aaniish.*

*Njiikendam ndanishinaabem noongom.*

*Njiikendam ndanishinaabem omaa inakonigewigamigong miinawaa ndikid. Eya geget.*

*Gawiin niin eta. Gii-ayaawag geyaabi miinawaa Gaa-nitaa-Anishinaabemo-waad omaa inakonigewigamigong.*

*Apijii mewinzhaa gii-ayaa omaa Ogimaa. John Norquay-iban gii-izhinikaazo awe bezhig. Premier of Manitoba gaa-inaad. Mii awe gewiin gii-nitaa-Anishinaabemo. Mii dash miinawaa gii-nitaa-Zhaagaanishimo, gii-nitaa-Moniasimo, gii-nitaa-Omashkiigomo Gaye dash miinawaa gii-nitaa-Anishinaabemo. Gii-gichi-nibwaakaa iinzan ganabaj.*

*Mii shago dash noongom omaa ayaawag niibowa Anishinaabeg, Anishinaabekweg, Gaye Omashkiigoog, Omashkiigokweg, Gaye dash abitaagozisag, abitaadawnisag Omaa inakonigewigamigong. Gewiinawaa nitaa-giizhweying.*

*Nashke awe bezhig Nijii-kiiwenzi. The member for Thompson Gaa-Inaad. Wiin nitaa-Omaashkiigomo. Shamattawa gaa-wenjiibaad aanish. Gichi-minotaagozi giishpin Wemaashkiigomod ganabaj. Ningiipizindawaa iwedi waasa Giiwedining. Ahow, geget.*

*Aapiji njiikendam miinawaa noongom geyaabi ganawendamang gidinwewininaan.*

*Giishpin wenjiibaayaang "Winipik", "Mni Waste" zaaga'iganing, Asini-pwaan ziibing, Oodenaang, Manito Abing gemaa gaye "Kanata", gidaabajitoomin gidinwewininaan*

*Mii dash gaa-oshki'ayaawaad ge-onji-mino-ayaawaad giishpin geyaabi gii-Anishinaabemowaapan, gii-Bwaanimowaapan, gii-Omashkiigomowaapan, gii-Anishininimowaapan, gii-Michif-imowaapan, gii-Inuit-imowaapan, gii-Dene-mowaapan gaye.*

*Bizaan igo Anishinaabemonodaadidaa!*

*Mii shigwaa dash geyaabi miinawaa abiding ninoonde-ikid jibwaa-ishkwaa-giigidowaan. Ndede-iban Gaa-ikidod iwe. Daga bi-bizindawishin.*

*Ndede-iban gii-ikido...*

*Giishpin ganawendamang gidinwewininaan, giga-ganawenimig aadizookaan gaa-ganawendamang anishinaabemowin.*

*Giishpin ganawendamang gidinwewininaan, giga-ganawenimig aadizookaan gaa-ganawendamang anishinaabemowin.*

*Tobasonakwut-iban gii-izhinikaazo.*

*Ahow nijii-Anishinaabedog, ndinawemaaganiidog gigagwejiminim Bizindaw Ndede-iban.*

*Miigwech bizindawiiyeg.*

*Miigwech ndikid.*

**English translation text:**

*Hello to all I assume to be my relatives.*

*I am known as Grey Cloud.*

*My clan is the Lynx.*

*I am from the Portage.*

*I am a part of the Spirit Lodge Midewin, I am a Sundancer.*

*I am an Anishinaabe person I say also.*

*I am overjoyed today. The reason being that it is National Indigenous Languages Day.*

*I am happy to speak the Anishinaabe language today.*

*I am happy to speak the Anishinaabe language in the Legislature I say also. Yes, indeed.*

*It is not only me. There were also others who spoke Indigenous languages in the Legislature.*

*Long ago there was a great leader. The late John Norquay was the name of him. They called him the Premier of Manitoba. This one too he spoke the Anishinaabe language. This one too also spoke English, French, Cree and of course, again, the Anishinaabe language. He must have been really smart, I think.*

*And so today here there are many Anishinaabe and Anishinaabe women, Cree and Cree women, Métis and Métis women in the Legislature. And they too know how to speak the way we do.*

*Take, for example, this one my fellow colleague. The member for Thompson they call him. He knows how to speak Cree. That's because he's from Shamattawa. He sounds really good when he speaks Cree, I think. I've listened to him way up north. Indeed.*

*I am filled with joy again today that we continue to look after our Indigenous languages.*

*If we come from places like Winnipeg, Lake Minnewasta, the Assiniboine River, Odanah Colony, Manitoba or Canada, to name but a few, we are people who use Indigenous languages.*

*And so it is that our youth will be healthy if they continue to speak the languages of the Anishinaabemowin, Dakota, Cree, Anishinew, Métis, Inuit and Dene peoples.*

*Let's speak Indigenous languages to one another!*

*And so there is one additional thing I would like to say before I conclude my speech. My late father said this. Please listen to me.*

*My late father said...*

*If we take care of our language, then the spirit helper of our language will take care of us.*

*If we take care of our language, then the spirit helper of our language will take care of us.*

*Tobasonakwut was my late father's name.*

*Alright, my fellow Indigenous people, all of our relations I am asking you to listen to my late father.*

*Thank you for listening to me.*

*Thank you, I say.*

**Mr. Kinew:** I want to table the Anishinaabemowin text along with the bilingual English translation for Hansard to include in the permanent record.

\* (13:40)

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Today I rise to recognize Indigenous Languages Day, which took place on March 31, Indigenous Languages Day, which had been marked by Indigenous peoples across the country since 1993.

It's an important opportunity for all Manitobans to learn about and reflect on the many different languages that are spoken by Indigenous peoples in Canada. I think that this day is doubly important too, in light of the fact that these languages are in a state of decline according to experts.

That was disheartening to learn, but I'm thankful for days like Indigenous Languages Day, which bring more attention to this fact, and for the different organizations throughout Manitoba that teach others about Indigenous culture and history. It's also very important—I don't know if the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) standing up to speak again, or—it's also very important, Honourable Speaker, to know that languages in general, with different—various different cultures and groups, are declining as well within this great country of ours. And I'd strongly encourage everyone to look back into their cultural backgrounds and definitely try to revive their languages.

And I have to commend the Premier on doing his speech in his language. An interesting fact that I learned from Stats Canada is that as of 2021, one in eight Indigenous people can speak one of 70 distinct

Indigenous languages well enough to conduct a conversation. Although that is an impressive number of distinct languages, the sad reality is that this statistic is lower than the 2016 numbers. There is a hope for the revitalization of these important languages, though, since more and more Indigenous peoples are learning at least one of these languages as their secondary language. This rise has been showcased by the percentile difference from 2016 to 2021, with the number increasing from 24.8 per cent to 27.7 per cent.

And although two thirds of First Nations people who speak an Indigenous language live on a reserve, Winnipeg is home to the largest community of people who can speak an Indigenous language, something that this city can be proud of. In fact, many locations within Manitoba are derived from Indigenous languages. For example, our province's name can be traced back to both Cree and Assiniboina words. Winnipeg is derived from the Cree language; Asessippi is derived from the Dene language; and Neepawa is derived from Ojibwe.

There are many other locations across Manitoba, as well, in which their names can be traced back to an Indigenous language. It is to the credit of the different nations for keeping these languages alive and for making strides in their revitalization. More work still needs to be done, though, if these languages are to become strong again.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Guru Nanak Mission Centre

**MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond):** Honourable Speaker, today we gather here with gratitude and joy as we celebrate the realization of a long-cherished dream, the establishment of the Guru Nanak Mission Centre.

The centre is located at 3511 Pembina Highway, and is a place where many people from Fort Richmond go for prayer, worship and community gatherings.

Guru Nanak Mission Centre was created out of a shared vision between three esteemed community leaders: Mewa Bedi, Harinder Ghuman and my good friend Meetu Sidhu's late husband, Muninder Singh Sidhu. Muninder's spirit lives on through the tireless efforts of his beloved wife, Meetu Sidhu, and other dedicated members of the board. Their ambition, passion and care for the community are reflected throughout this place of worship.

In 2017, the group bought a garage to renovate with a long-term vision of creating a gurdwara for communities in south Winnipeg. There were many challenges for the gurdwara along the way, including renovations that began in 2021. As they worked on the centre through the pandemic, collective action and community investment persevered and the facility now has a sewa and langar kitchen and the capacity for extensive programming.

South Winnipeg's future generations will be diverse, educated and empowered thanks to the centre's youth programming about Sikh cultural heritage. Let us remember the founders and the volunteers who have dedicated many long hours to their faith and community. This is just the beginning for a strong cultural hub in south Winnipeg for the Sikh community.

May the Guru Nanak Mission Centre guide us towards a future filled with love, compassion and unity.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.  
*[The Khalsa belongs to God, victory belongs to God.]*

I would like to invite my colleagues to joining me in thanking our guests in the gallery.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Fort Richmond.

**MLA Chen:** I would like to add my guests' names to Hansard: Mewa Bedi; Meetu Sidhu; Sajjan Sidhu; Baljinder Sandhwalia; Manjit Gill; Balwinder Mathode; Harinder Ghuman; Dalip Bedi; Baldev Bedi; Eknoor Sidhu; and Gurpreet Kaur.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

### Roving Campus

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** Honourable Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today to recognize an innovative high school program called the Roving Campus.

The Roving Campus was started in 2020 by three teachers from the Portage la Prairie School Division. The mission of the Roving Campus is to make learning engaging and relevant to students who weren't succeeding in the mainstream school system and were at risk of not graduating.

The Roving Campus has three goals for students: improved attendance; development of citizenship skills; and graduating from high school. The students are encouraged to participate in the Roving Campus face many barriers to attending and succeeding in school. The Roving Campus addressed these barriers by ensuring students had transportation, meals, gym clothes, helping students obtain ID. It also works with students to create graduation plans and provide resume skills.

The Roving Campus curriculum team designed their program using a unique approach. Every day is a new experience for the students, who don't know where their classroom, which consists of the entire community, will be.

There's a long list of local partners who have contributed to the Roving Campus. Thanks to the Roving Campus, most students have—sorry. There is a long list of local partners who have contributed to the Roving Campus by opening up their facilities, making donations. It really does take a village to raise a child.

Thanks to the Roving Campus, many students have improved attendance, are on track to graduate, and some have expressed interest in post-secondary programs.

Congratulations to the Portage school division for their dedication to this amazing program. And congratulations to the real heroes, the kids who have participated and demonstrated to all of us they can thrive when given the right opportunities—

**The Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**The Speaker:** Is there leave for the member to finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

**MLA Bereza:** Please join me in welcoming the Roving Campus from Portage la Prairie institute today.

**The Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness.

\* (13:50)

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

**MLA Bereza:** Honourable Speaker, I'd like the names of all the kids—or all the students and teachers—put into Hansard, please.

*Grade 10 Students: JoDeen Bone, Alicia Daniels, Harley Flett, Bernadette Garnham, Brett Geisel, Precious Gladue-Peters, Taylor Goulsbra, Colin James, Nie Lavineway, Shelise Malcolm, Hannah Murdock, Hayley Myran-Peeace, Mina Ouellette, Joy Peters, Benjamin Roulette, Bridget Roulette, Edwina Smoke-Kabestra, TJ Taylor*

*Grade 12 Students: Jordan Beardy, Kyrell Beardy, Percy Bugg-Gabriel, Kenneth Egachie, Lizzy Fosseneuve, Lelend Gabriel, Jason Houle, Adrian James-Staff, Brooklynn Lyall, Darnell Meeches, Dillon Meeches, Phoenix Myran, Mitchell Pashe, Brent Prince, Carson Pruden-Starr, Darius Richard, Lois Shorting, Adrian Skoropata, Leah Spence, Drake Williams, Toby Wooley*

*Teachers: Andrea Kalinowich and Alex Zebrun*

### **Point Douglas Community Organizations**

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** I'm honoured to rise in the House today to acknowledge three organizations in my constituency.

First, CEDA Pathways to Education. They reflect the needs of learners and empower students to reach their full potential in their academic and personal lives. Housed in Merchants Corner, CEDA hosts peer-helper programs, student conferences, clothing drives and community clean-ups. CEDA uplifts students to foster strong community relationships across our great city.

Secondly, Whistling Wind action therapy. They provide community-based therapeutic intervention for our youth. Participating in lateral kindness and empathy, they provide young people the chance to create good while participating in land-based and cultural teachings.

Under the seven sacred teachings in action program, youth distribute warm meals to unsheltered relatives and participate in community patrols and groups, art workshops and homework clubs.

Third, but certainly not least, Willow Tree Action Therapy Youth Services based its care on four pillars: community, land-based teachings, positive activism and volunteerism. Willow Tree recognizes the importance of giving our young people a place in community. Under their leadership, young people serve dinner at N'Dinawemak four nights a week and will soon be supporting mothers in providing child care while parents participate in group activities.

Both action therapy centres provide youth with an opportunity to learn social justice issues, participate in initiatives like Drag the Red and MMIWG2S rallies and marches.

It's an honour to highlight these organizations, who wholeheartedly support youth to reach their fullest potential. These organizations support our relatives in their daily journeys and help them chart a good path into the future.

Please join me in thanking these three organizations for their amazing work. To the youth, we uplift you and honour you for your heart work. You are the leaders of today. You—we—you make us incredibly proud and we love you. Shine bright.

*Willow Place: Shae Dillabough, Deanna Lamirande, Katie Owens, Kaylie Taylor, Jill Willson*

*Whistling Wind Counseling and Therapy Services, Inc.: Mitch Bourbonniere, Billy Dubery, Grace Laing, Doug Park, Jeremy Raven, Courtney Smith*

*CEDA Pathways to Education: Donna Beyer, Jordan Bighorn, Kat Brass, Elaine Dukuly, Raymond Ngarbou, Alana Ollinger, Alysha Thomas*

### **Lockport Community Development Group**

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** I'm very proud to rise once again and showcase another fantastic organization in the Selkirk riding. Located in Lockport, Manitoba, is the Lockport Community Development Group, a non-profit organization that encourages trade and tourism in the Lockport area. The corporation is made up of local business leaders who joined forces to promote the area they love so much: Lockport.

They have developed amazing attractions for the area, including the Lockport Ice Fishing Village, located on the north side of the lock and dam of the Red River. This fantastic village on the frozen river has cleared streets and organized fishing locations that allows for ice fishers to place their shacks in a safe manner, promoting the sport like no others.

During the summer months the corporation attracts shoppers and visitors from all over Manitoba to enjoy the offerings at the local farmers market on the east side of the Lockport bridge.

Whether you're planning a day of sightseeing, fishing or just exploring this fantastic area, make sure you stop in at the local businesses, buy a drink, enjoy a meal, purchase a unique item at the market or cast a line and see what small-town hospitality is all about.

They're also looking to the Province to develop a provincial park at—and campground where the floodway meets the Red River. Years of planning have gone into this great opportunity and I can't wait for the Province to jump on board. This new proposed campground will give the province another great attraction for visitors to the province and provide another destination for Manitobans to bring their families. With so much rich heritage in this Lockport area, it's a natural destination for all.

Today in the gallery we have: Michael Faires, Eric Stone, Dr. Rupinder Diocee and Gurb [*phonetic*] Diocee.

Thank you very much.

\* \* \*

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** I ask for my guests—of my honoured guests' names to be added to Hansard.

#### Keira's Law

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I rise this afternoon to speak briefly about the bill I introduced earlier today. Bill 209, The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace), is otherwise known as Keira's Law.

Honourable Speaker, I want to begin by recognizing and honouring the memory of Keira Kagan. Keira was just four years old when she was caught in the midst of deadly intimate partner violence. Keira's mother Jennifer had sought an emergency motion in court to suspend her ex-husband's access to their four-year-old daughter.

There were 53 court orders in three years between Jennifer and her ex-husband. His abuse was described as erratic and escalating behaviour. The judge found the evidence against her ex-husband compelling, but not urgent, and adjourned the motion. Just before they were scheduled to return to court, Keira and her father were found dead in an apparent murder-suicide.

Honourable Speaker, I bring forward this bill to put into law continuing education topics for judicial justices of the peace and provincial court judges. This important piece of legislation is a major step forward for victims of intimate partner violence and children. By enhancing education on issues like coercive control and intimate partner violence, we can help judges to make decisions with safety at the forefront.

Honourable Speaker, this legislation is following the footsteps of a number of other jurisdictions across the country, which have expanded judicial education to include topics of intimate partner violence and coercive control. This change would support survivors of intimate partner violence throughout their involvement with the justice system and help them feel safer during a very challenging process.

I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to consult with me on this legislation, and I'm looking forward to expanding more at second reading on April 16.

Thank you.

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Budget 2024 NDP Election Platform

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Honourable Speaker, yesterday I listened to the NDP budget speech attentively along with tens of other people in the gallery. And what did I hear? Many things that this NDP government did not even discuss during the election campaign.

Higher costs for Manitoba families, cuts to 'infrastructure,' cuts to education, cuts to provincial parks and so much more, Honourable Speaker. The NDP is picking winners and losers, and it's ironic that this government says that it promotes one Manitoba, but its intent is on dividing them.

So I ask the Premier, if he's so proud of these changes, why did he not run on them?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Well, the one area where the Leader of the Opposition and myself agree is that we were listening intently to the amazing budget brought by our Finance Minister.

I can't wait to listen to the great budget debate brought forward by this side of the House, because it's going to give us more opportunity to hear the good news about investments in health care and lowering costs for you and your family. A billion new dollars for the health-care system, a three-month extension to the gas tax holiday and a \$1,500 homeowner affordability tax credit.

No wonder the cover of the Winnipeg Sun today says that we kept our word: NDP keeps promises on rebates and tax cuts in first budget.

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



**Mr. Ewasko:**—Speaker, I've taken a good look at this NDP budget, and what's missing? Many, many promises that were just made six months ago, but were—so far have been omitted.

The budget neglected critical areas of investment such as economic growth, urgent surgical needs, new school construction, infrastructure requirements, public safety and the list goes on and on and on.

My question for the Premier is simple: Why did the NDP run on things that they had no intention of delivering?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, if the member opposite doesn't want to listen to the Winnipeg Sun who said that we kept our word, perhaps he'll listen to the experts.

\* (14:00)

Earlier today the Laurentian Bank called our Manitoba 2024 budget, quote, a realistic deficit reduction plan. And I quote further: the fiscal house in Manitoba was not in order when the NDP took office after winning the general elections of last fall, but—here's another quote—Budget 2024 paints a reasonable balancing act including plenty of targeted measures to ease the cost-of-living pain for individuals and a credible path to a balanced budget in the medium term. End quote.

Again, we're very proud to stand up to invest in health care, we're very proud to lower costs for you and your family and we're proud that the economists and experts support our plan.

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** I'll look forward to the Premier tabling that document that he just quoted from.

Honourable Speaker, Sunrise School Division, for an example, under this NDP government just recently for the '24-25 school year has received just under 25—\$250,000 in operating. From 2019 'til 2024, Sunrise School Division received almost \$7 million from this former PC government.

This lack of investment in education is coming from an NDP government that has confirmed recently that education is not a priority. The NDP bait-and-switch is complete with this budget and they put forward one thing to Manitobans and now they're delivering something else entirely.

Can the Premier explain why when it comes to education, infrastructure and more, why he is failing

to live up to his promises? It's all switch and no bait, Honourable Speaker.

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, let's go turn to the experts once again. Perhaps my colleague across the way doesn't bank with Laurentian; maybe he's a customer of Scotia or TD Bank.

Scotiabank, what did they say? Quote: New tax measures introduced in the budget are incremental and targeted with a focus on affordability. Growth assumptions underpinning the budget appear realistic and well supported by the Province's diversified economy and the Province continues to ramp up program spending in priority areas like health-care and education, but keeps the pace within the bonds of revenue growth. End quote.

Let's turn now to TD Bank. Quote: Bottom line, tax measures are on balance, expected to generate savings for Manitobans this fiscal year largely through the extension of the gas tax. End quote.

I invite the member opposite to keep asking questions. We'll keep sharing the good news about Budget 2024.

#### **Surgical and Diagnostic Capacity Update on Service Agreements**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Can the minister please update the House on the status of dozens of requests for service agreements that increased surgical and diagnostic capacity in Manitoba?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Yesterday's budget has a \$50-million investment in clearing the surgical waits that ballooned under the Progressive Conservative government for two terms.

We also know that Manitobans are looking for more support in all aspects of the health-care system.

Gone are the days of a government that closed emergency rooms, disrespected physicians and fired front-line nurses. Instead, under the plan unveiled yesterday by our Finance Minister and being spearheaded by our Minister of Health, we're seeing more physicians, more nurses, more health-care professionals, more paramedics and more health-care aides all joining the front lines of this great province, with more news to come on the good side.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Roblin, on a supplementary question.

**Mrs. Cook:** Several physicians have reached out to me to share their concerns regarding an agreement set to expire at the end of March for additional orthopedic

surgery at Maples Surgical Centre. No word from this NDP government on an extension. Another direct hit to surgical capacity right here in Winnipeg.

This is one of many agreements signed under the task force. All had a direct impact on getting patients care faster right here in Manitoba.

First they stopped patients from going out of province for care. Now they're stopping patients from getting care right here in Manitoba.

Why is the NDP so bent on prioritizing its politics over patients?

**Mr. Kinew:** The thing that I'm most proud of about the plan that our Finance Minister unveiled yesterday is that it's not about politics. It's about the people of Manitoba and the priorities that you need to see your health care repaired and to see the costs lowered for you and your family.

Again, the previous government was intent on cutting the health-care system. They closed the biggest emergency rooms in the province. They cut nurses and physicians in the times leading up to the pandemic when we should have been investing in health care.

So here's the thing: Manitobans are smart. They made a solid choice last October to move forward with priority investments in the health-care system, and that's why we're so proud to be bringing \$50 million in new initiatives to clear the PC backlogs on surgeries as part of \$1 billion in new investments for health care for you, the people of Manitoba.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Roblin, on a final supplementary question.

**Mrs. Cook:** I'll table an op-ed for the House from Dr. Peter MacDonald. It seems the Premier (Mr. Kinew) missed it. As Dr. MacDonald lays out, these agreements supported cataract, endoscopy, outpatient orthopedic surgeries, gynecology surgeries, men's urology, ear, nose and throat cases, echocardiography, among many others.

Over 80,000 Manitobans received their care faster and were out of pain sooner, thanks to the work of Dr. MacDonald and others on the task force. Nothing in Budget 2024 addresses short-term wait times for patients in pain today.

I ask again: Why is this NDP government choosing to put politics over patients?

**Mr. Kinew:** There's \$50 million from the budget that we introduced yesterday to clear the waits that ballooned under the PCs when it came to surgeries and diagnostic procedures. We welcome the opportunity

to work with Dr. MacDonald and others who are active in the health-care system, and if they quote him today, I hope that they'll also quote him later on this week.

When it comes to the needs of people in Manitoba, we also know that one of the really important priorities that Manitobans have is starting a family, or deciding to bring another child into a loving home. And that's why I was so honoured to join the Minister of Health and several of our colleagues here today to say that we are doubling the fertility tax credit. That brings the claimable amount to \$40,000, meaning Manitobans who want and welcome another child into their family will get another \$16,000 in support.

On this side of the House, when we say every child matters, we—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

### **Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns—Budget 2024**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte):** Honourable Speaker, this budget was an attack on all Manitobans' affordability, but especially middle-class, hard-working Manitobans, no matter how you slice it and dice it.

For starters, this NDP government is increasing your education taxes to as high as 17 per cent. No matter what you say, this NDP government have increased your property taxes. This minister should know what the average cost of houses are in Waverley, McPhillips, Lagimodière. He's increased the education tax in all of those ridings.

Why is this minister putting up smoke and mirrors to confuse Manitobans, when in reality, his NDP government is increasing property taxes on hard-working, middle-class Manitobans?

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** Honourable Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand up in this House and talk about affordability.

When we came into government, we made a clear commitment to improve affordability of living in Manitoba, and this budget delivers on that in a big way. We're very proud of the \$1,500 homeowner affordability tax credit that is going to put more money in the pockets of over 83 per cent of Manitoban homeowners.

That's not all. We've got a long list of affordability measures. I cannot wait to share more in my next answer, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Fort Whyte, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Khan:** Honourable Speaker, another non-answer by the minister.

This budget made it clear that the NDP will increase taxes on hard-working, middle-class Manitobans. The Premier simply said doctors, CEOs, engineers, union workers and most Manitobans will simply pay more taxes.

How much more taxes? Honourable Speaker, \$148 million Manitobans will pay—more taxes to this NDP government. It is clear that this minister is misleading Manitobans. I table, from their own budget, where they lower the mill rate for education taxes.

The question is simple: Why does the minister think it's fair to increase taxes on all Manitobans to the tune of \$148 million?

\* (14:10)

**MLA Sala:** Honourable Speaker, for years Manitobans had a government that was not focused on the affordability challenges they were facing, for seven long years.

What did we do? Within the first hundred days of coming in to government, we gave Manitobans a holiday on their fuel tax. That's putting more money in the pockets of Manitobans in every corner of this province.

This budget brings forward 21 new ways for Manitobans to save. That's going to create huge savings for Manitobans all across the province. We've got a long list. I don't even know where to start, but I'm going to start in my next response.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Fort Whyte, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Khan:** Honourable Speaker, no answer; \$148 million this NDP government is charging.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** The average middle-class Manitoba family will be paying more this year than every other year before this. There are—these are the facts. The NDP have increased education and property taxes on your bill.

Manitobans deserve transparency. Homeowners in Manitoba school divisions Seven Oaks, Winkler-Morden, Seine River, Pembina Trails and every other school division will see an increase. How much of an

increase? Honourable Speaker, 15 to 25 per cent higher than what this minister quoted in his budget.

It's a simple yes or no: Does this minister think it's right to increase taxes on hard-working, middle-class Manitobans?

**MLA Sala:** We don't, Honourable Speaker, and that's why we lowered taxes for Manitobans.

We know the members opposite are worried. We know they're feeling scared. We know they're very nervous about what we brought forward yesterday because they know that these measures are going to bring savings to folks living in every single one of their communities.

Let's start to read the list of how Manitobans are going to save: extending the gas tax holiday; new \$1,500 homeowner tax credit; broad middle tax cut coming your way; increasing renters tax credit; free prescription birth control and more, Honourable Speaker.

### Infrastructure and Capital Spending Funding Concerns—Budget 2024

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** We, unfortunately, know the NDP's history on infrastructure spending: underfunding road, highway, water upgrades and stealing the funding to pay for their tax-and-spend agenda.

This NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) is no different. He's copied his budget out of Selinger's playbook. Budget 2024 has over \$163 million in cuts to the Infrastructure budget. What does that mean for Manitobans? Fewer road projects, more potholes and dirty water.

Why is this NDP government underfunding much-needed repairs to infrastructure for Manitobans that they rely on?

**Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** Well, I thank the member opposite for that question, and I would recommend that he goes back and takes a closer look at the budget. We're really excited about our infrastructure plan for the year ahead.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for La Vérendrye, on a—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The honourable member for La Vérendrye, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Narth:** Fresh off a massive sewage spill that impacted tens of thousands of residents in Winnipeg, the NDP have cut the water infrastructure budget. Over \$100 million is now missing from the budget to keep our water clean in Manitoba. Under the Selinger government, Lake Winnipeg was one of the most threatened lakes in the entire world. Seems like the NDP government is trying to live up to that legacy.

Every single Manitoban relies on the safety and cleanliness of our waterways.

Can the minister please explain to the House why is clean water not a priority for this NDP government?

**MLA Naylor:** Again I thank the member for that question. Clean water is absolutely a priority for our government. Clean water is a priority for our government all across the province, and we are continuing to make record investments in infrastructure.

If the member looks back at the history of his party, he will see the cuts to infrastructure over subsequent years between '20-21, 2021-22 and '22-23 for the lowest infrastructure investments in history.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for La Vérendrye, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Narth:** I'll try to clarify that under this minister's watch, the NDP government is cutting capital projects by half a billion dollars. And they're announcing it during pothole season to boot.

Just like roads under the NDP, there are a lot of holes in this budget. Within my constituency and across Manitoba communities, they've identified necessary projects, but this minister just isn't interested. By cutting the funding, they're cutting the opportunities for growth in our communities. This Premier's (Mr. Kinew) economic horse is going to break its leg under their watch.

Why is this minister refusing to invest in our community—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

**MLA Naylor:** There's a lot of metaphors I'm going to have to work with in that question. Just to be really clear, our government is investing in infrastructure; we're really excited about our infrastructure budget. We are working to not only fix the potholes—you know, I just looked at a list today of all the winners in—from CAA in '22–2022 and 2023 under this—the past government, of all the provincial highways that were the worst roads in the province.

But we're already fixing those roads, and we will continue to make those investments.

### **School Construction and Class Sizes Priority Concerns-Budget 2024**

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods):** Manitoba's population is growing. Despite this, planning for future generations took a back seat on the bus in yesterday's budget.

The NDP ran on lowering class sizes, but cut seven new schools, recycled two previously announced schools and reduced the new schools budget by \$100 million.

Where do they expect these smaller class sizes to go? The back of the social cart we've heard so much about, or is a new set of portable classrooms already on the way?

**Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I want to thank the member for that very important question. It's an important one because Manitobans really care about their schools, Honourable Speaker.

So much so that they elected an NDP government to undo all of the harm that they did when they were in government. We're going to get to work.

As a matter of fact, Honourable Speaker, we got to work in the very first week that we were sworn into office. We eliminated the wait-list at Child Nutrition Council, and here's the other thing that we did: When we budgeted for schools, we actually take it to Treasury Board. We do not just say and play on people's emotions.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Jackson:** Ste. Anne, Neepawa, Prairie Point, Bridgwater Lakes, West St. Paul and two new schools in Brandon, all on the chopping block in this budget. In the budget speech, no mention of reducing class sizes, no mentioning of hiring more teachers, but this shouldn't be a surprise.

We already heard it straight from the horse's mouth when the deputy minister stated that education wasn't in the top five priorities for the government in this year's budget. I guess that bit came true.

Why hasn't this NDP government prioritized school construction to ensure Manitoba students have the space they need to get ahead?

**MLA Altomare:** Again, I do want to thank the member for that question, because it does give us an opportunity to really shed some light on what really happens when it comes to building of schools. You actually have to budget for them, Honourable Speaker. You can't just say you're going to do it.

The other really important piece to remember about the class-size initiative is simply this: we're going to allow school divisions to ensure they have the resources and more discretionary powers over the money that they've received from the Province. Whereas before, they had all kinds of conditions put on these dollars that they were getting from over there, we have then 'increased' the discretionary pieces that they really appreciate.

And here's the other thing: we're getting—not only did we get to work on the first day, we're continuing to work—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a final supplementary question.

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Jackson:** Brandon East, Lagimodière, Point Douglas, Riel, River Heights, Seine River, St. Boniface, Transcona, Fort Garry, Fort Richmond, McPhillips, Radisson and Wolseley—all NDP MLAs involved in the broader education sector, and yet it couldn't crack the top five priorities in this Premier's first budget. That's a rough go for all of those members.

Will the minister get up and apologize for this oversight, or will he admit to the residents in these constituencies that they will only have advocates for education at the caucus table again in three and a half years when those seats are returned back to the Progressive Conservatives?

**MLA Altomare:** I can just say this gives us even more of an opportunity to inform that member from Spruce Woods that we're not going to play on people's emotions here.

We got to work right away on ensuring that schools were a priority, got to work on nutrition, got to work on class size, got to work on ensuring that they could get predictable, stable funding from a government that really cares, just like Manitobans, about their public schools.

What did they get before? A government that wanted to get rid of their school divisions and get rid

of their local choice. Not with us; they're always going to have a choice. With them, they never did.

### **Small Business in Manitoba Support for Non-Unionized Workers**

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** Until yesterday, we were fortunate to live in a great province where there is an abundance of opportunity for small business to grow, entrepreneurship to develop, locally owned businesses and large industrial companies who continue to grow and expand much broader. Many of these are not union-based, but offer very competitive wages, pension plans and benefits.

Can the Minister of Labour and Immigration (MLA Marcelino) tell us why there was nothing in yesterday's budget for non-unionized workforce in Manitoba?

**Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources):** Honourable Speaker, we're so proud about what our budget has told and signalled Manitobans and our economy. We're on the right track here in Manitoba.

We are proud about the economic growth that we're signalling in this budget; we're proud of how we support our small businesses in Manitoba. And that starts with how we cut the fuel tax that all businesses can benefit from, that started on January 1 and will continue for an additional three months in 2024.

**Ms. Byram:** This government has made it clear there is only one worker that they care about and only one worker that this Minister of Labour is looking out for: those that have been forced to be a part of a union.

We heard it multiple times in the budget speech: the only workers this government cares about pay union dues, and there is no considerations for small shops or open-shop contractors.

Does this Minister of Labour understand the uncertainty this NDP government's comments are giving Manitoba small businesses?

**Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** Thank you, member opposite, for your question.

You know, it's just that type of question from members opposite that show the kind of division that they've been trying to sow for the last seven and a half years.

All workers deserve safe places to work. All of them deserve health protection, and every single worker deserves the right to dignity and all their protections.

So, members opposite continue to sow that division. On this side of the House we stand for all workers across Manitoba, who are building this great province.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Agassiz, on a final supplementary question.

### Bids on Government Contracts

**Ms. Byram:** Manitobans want to work and they want to build our province. Instead, this government is deciding that it is their role to marginalize the workforce. Big surprise: the winners this minister is picking just happen to be the union leaders that have almost a third of the voting seats at the NDP's convention.

Manitobans deserve to know how this minister will change their employment relations. Manitobans want to know whether this government is going to allow their small business to bid on government contracts.

What is this minister going to do for Manitoba small business?

**Mr. Moses:** Honourable Speaker, first of all, on this side of the House, we always love Manitoba.

Second of all, Honourable Speaker, I want to say that small businesses will absolutely benefit from our cut to this fuel tax that started on January 1 and to get extended for an additional three months.

On top of that, we've got more news—more good news to share with small businesses being able to get the \$300 credit for security systems. These are tangible differences that small businesses will 'ceive' in Manitoba.

We're very proud of that. We're proud of this budget, and we'll keep on working hard for small businesses in Manitoba.

### Community Correctional Services Program Funding Concerns

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Community correctional services cover community-based programs with a special emphasis on youth justice committees, gang diversion, Indigenous culture and employment preparation for past offenders.

Does this minister believe that these programs are important, and if so, can he explain why nearly \$4 million was cut from these programs?

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Well, I thank the member opposite for the question, and it is an important question.

And that's why it was a major focus not only during the campaign for us to talk about a comprehensive public safety strategy, but to also now be able to put those dollars into use to actually start addressing crime, start addressing specifically with regards to youth crime and to really focus on how we can support all people in our community.

We know that we need to do more and we're going to and that's what Budget 2024 is all about.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question.

### Public Safety Division Program Funding Concerns

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** There were several cuts to the Public Safety Division of Manitoba Justice, which included cuts to the Manitoba Criminal Intelligence Centre, the Security & Intelligence Branch and crime prevention.

Can the minister explain the reason why funds were cut from all of these programs?

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Again, I thank the member opposite for the question, and it is an important one.

I think she may have missed the additional funding that's been provided, because in fact we're increasing funding within the department to support those important areas, along with so many others.

That's why it's important that we come together. This budget has—you know, is aptly titled One Manitoba—and One People, One Future, because I do think that there's a role for all parties to play, to come together to enhance public safety in our province and continue these great investments that we announced and that we'll have plenty of time in Estimates and throughout the legislative process to continue to pull apart and help the member understand where those investments are going.

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

### **Intimate Partner Violence Rates Request for Strategy to Combat**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** For over a decade, Manitoba continues to have some of the highest rates of intimate partner violence across the country. It was shocking to see that this government cut over half a million to Family Resolution Service and did not include any funds for a comprehensive strategy to address intimate partner violence.

The last strategy came out over a decade ago, and intimate partner violence continues to grow rapidly.

Will this government commit to supporting a comprehensive strategy to address intimate partner violence today?

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Again, the member opposite raises an important issue and one that I look forward to seeing her bill move through the legislative process and opportunity for us to debate it here at second reading.

What I do want to note that, specifically with regards to funds supporting missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and 2S folks in our province, this budget specifically earmarked over \$20 million specifically that will be worked, you know, in the committee of Cabinet to support people in community and support those most vulnerable.

It's an important first step, and it's one that we look forward to working with the member opposite to continue to invest in.

### **Social Housing Investments Government Announcement**

**MLA Mintu Sandhu (The Maples):** Honourable Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) unveiled our government's first budget. Our budget tackled the housing deficit left by the failed PC government.

\* (14:30)

Unlike our predecessor who sold more social housing units than they built, our NDP government is dedicated to investing in housing for Manitobans.

Would the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness tell us more about the good news in the budget to tackle the housing crisis caused by seven years of PC mismanagement?

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** Our government is committing—committed to ending chronic homelessness. This starts with building and supporting Manitobans along their housing journey.

We are investing over \$116 million over the next year on social and affordable housing, including \$70 million in capital for Manitoba Housing.

We are working with all stakeholders to address the housing crisis. We're building 350 units of social and affordable housing, and we'll fix and maintain over 3,000 units across the province.

Our government is building and our government is investing. In our first budget, we are committed to building more housing than the members opposite did in their entire whole term in government. On—

**The Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

### **Prosecution Services Funding Concerns**

**Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West):** Well, Honourable Speaker, it's no wonder this Minister of Justice and the minister responsible for CFS refuse to talk about public safety in this House. No surprise at all that they hide behind this Premier (Mr. Kinew) because both are 'poliloral' staff lacking in real-world experience.

We come from totally different backgrounds; I've walked the walk, and he talks.

Now we see this NDP anti-police agenda is alive and well, and we see it in this budget. Their only bail reform measure was a redundant directive to Crown prosecutors, yet they failed to give the prosecution services any inflationary increase.

Why is this minister expecting Crown prosecutors to do more with less?

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Well, it seems, Honourable Speaker, that the member opposite still doesn't get it.

We are one Manitoba and we are united across this province in coming together to make our communities safer, and that's why we're partnering with municipalities across the province. We're partnering with law enforcement. We're supporting them with real dollars, \$4.5 million to actually take concrete steps on bail and bail enforcement in this province, something the members opposite just never did.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Brandon West, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Balcaen:** Honourable Speaker, inflation hurts. Inflation hurts employers and institutions just like Manitoba families.

When this minister was in opposition, he seemed to understand this and often remarked alongside his colleagues that anything that is not an increase above inflation is a cut.

So, why is this minister cutting prosecution services when we need them most?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, the member opposite is just wrong, and he hasn't obviously seen the budget or taken the time to look closely at the numbers because what we're doing, in fact, is we're investing. We're investing across the justice system. We're investing in our courts. We're actually dealing with some of the systematic problems left to us by these members opposite, including in courts, including with our important court clerks and other support staff.

These are problems that the members opposite, they would beak off about, they would—they pull out words and rhetoric but they would never actually take steps to deal with the issues.

This budget, this government, together with all Manitobans, we're going to make a difference.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Brandon West, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Balcaen:** I actually spent a considerable amount of time looking through this budget. This government has no plan for public safety because they have no interest in protecting the hard-working Manitobans.

This minister is cutting legal aid, protection services, legal services, correctional services, court operations, provincial policing, the police commission, LERA; and top of all of that, victim services and the Independent Investigation Unit of Manitoba.

The Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) rallied against criminal property forfeiture when she called for defunding the police, and guess what? It's cut, too.

Why is this minister giving up on public safety just six months into his job?

**Mr. Wiebe:** Honourable Speaker, the member opposite doesn't have to take my word for it. He can listen to folks like Bobby Baker, who talked about the important investments we're making when it comes to bail and bail reform. He says the National Police

Federation sees this as a strategic investment that goes beyond ensuring public safety. In fact, this is a step towards the root causes of potential criminal behaviour.

Maybe he wants to listen instead to Dave Dalal. Maybe he'll take his word when he says today's announcement represents a continued commitment to make our community safer through investments and investments by provincial government to aid police in critical moving the dial on the issue of chronic and repeat offenders.

We're partnering with all Manitobans. We're standing with all Manitobans. It's only the members opposite—

**The Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

### Conservation Officers Funding Concerns

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** In the 129 pages of the budget, this government mentions the hard-working men and women that serve as conservation officers once in a single bullet point because they are not a priority for this government and to many members opposite, COs are the enemy.

They said as much over the recent years when members opposite spoke badly about the security officers that work in this building and the conservation officers that supplemented that when needed.

Why is this minister refusing to properly fund these important officers?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** The difference between us and the PCs is that we're going to hire conservation officers, we're going to pay them better and we're going to treat them with respect.

Now, earlier, I read a number of expert commentary from leading economists from some of the banks across the country, including the Laurentian Bank, which said the fiscal house in Manitoba was not in order when the NDP took office after winning the general election last fall; that Budget 2024 paints a reasonable balancing act, including plenty of measures to ease the cost-of-living pain.

And then, of course, also Scotiabank, who said that the Province continues to ramp up program spending in priorities like health care and education.

I encourage the members opposite to review the expert comments on Budget 2024. I'll table these now for them to read, and we're going to keep sharing the good news with the people of Manitoba.



**The Speaker:** The time for question period has expired.

Petitions? No petitions?

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Could you please call to resume debate on the budget.

**The Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader.

#### House Business

**MLA Fontaine:** Before we do that, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet Friday, April 26, 2024, at 10 a.m. to consider The Advocate for Children and Youth Act review.

I would also like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet Friday, May 3, 2024, at 8 a.m. to consider The Advocate for Children and Youth Act public presentations.

**The Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Friday, April 26, 2024, at 10 a.m. to consider The Advocate for Children and Youth Act review.

Further, it's been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet Friday, May 3, 2024, at 8 a.m. to consider The Advocate for Children and Youth Act public presentations.

#### BUDGET DEBATE (Second Day of Debate)

**The Speaker:** We will now resume debate on the budget, standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Let me begin by saying what an honour it is to rise in this incredible House to respond to the budget as interim Leader of the Official Opposition.

All partisanship aside, this process is a very important one. Manitobans sent all of us here to this Chamber to represent them at all times but especially during moments such as budget debate.

As His Majesty's official opposition, we take our role seriously when it comes to holding this government to account.

\* (14:40)

I want to preface my comments today by saying I recognize and respect the work that I know and the

rest of our team on this side of the House knows, the amount of work that the department officials have put into this budget, especially Finance and Treasury Board officials. Of course, they work with what they're given when it comes to direction. And, unfortunately, the direction this NDP government wants to take is sadly and obviously in the wrong direction.

At a time when Manitobans are struggling to make ends meet, the NDP are moving towards higher spending and higher taxes. That is the wrong direction.

Honourable Speaker, this budget is not what was promised by the NDP six months ago. The NDP government is, as we've known in the past, not as advertised.

Ironically, the NDP promote this as a budget for one Manitoba, but it divides Manitobans. Division is the wrong direction. But division is to be expected from an NDP government that has, so far, been more about distraction than it has been about taking real action.

The NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) has proven he's more showman than statesman, and yesterday the Finance Minister joined him on the stage and fell a little flat. I'm not sure which one is trying to sell more records or CDs or albums.

Let's talk about division, distraction, and things that this NDP government did not run on. Again, the NDP want to claim this budget is about one Manitoba, but they took a policy like our education property tax—*[interjection]* I appreciate the members opposite for clapping for my response to the budget—the property tax rebate, which was fair. And they're now using it to, once again, divide Manitobans.

The budget introduces a complete overhaul of the rebate structure that was not spelled out whatsoever in the election campaign. The change will see all Manitobans who own property paying more. Many homeowners are looking at increases of hundreds of dollars. No one can afford it right now, Honourable Speaker.

But the NDP think that some Manitobans can afford higher taxes. The NDP thinks it's okay to look at two families and pick winners and losers. Families across Manitoba, from north to south, east to west, will be worse off with the NDP property tax changes, and many families will, again, be paying more. We are talking about middle-class workers, but I guess the NDP didn't—don't believe they need affordability help during this cost-of-living crisis.

The NDP also thinks that businesses can afford to pay more, inexplicitly, despite the cost pressures that they are facing. Commercial property owners are losing their rebates and will not get the tax credit offered to homeowners.

What does the NDP think will happen when they hike taxes on community grocery stores, butcher shops and gas stations? Costs are going to increase in Manitoba because the NDP government is making up tax policy on the fly, desperate to distract from reality.

We saw it just last week, a couple weeks ago, when we were talking about the pipeline shutdown. The Economic Development Minister stood up, went and spoke to media and said, don't worry, there's nothing to see here, we've got it under control, prices are not going to go up.

I don't know what type of electric aircraft he's driving in nowadays, Honourable Speaker, but fuel prices have gone up. Gas prices have gone up since January 1st by over 40 cents—43 cents a litre; sad, sad. But it's unfortunate that the government—the NDP government that says on a day-to-day basis that they're a listening government, are not listening to Manitobans. They are going down their own road, as the Selinger government and the Doer government before the Selinger government did many years ago.

Between Manitoba families and commercial property owners, the NDP plans on reaching into their pockets for an additional \$148 million annually. This is on top of opening the floodgates to school tax increases all across Manitoba. All these move everything into the wrong direction.

I know that the Education Minister is waiting for me to mention him, and I will, I promise. So we've established that the NDP is dividing Manitobans into winners and losers, and that they're raising taxes after promising not to do so just six months ago. We've established that the NDP government is not as advertised, but why? Why is the NDP picking winners and losers during a cost-of-living crisis?

They say it's to fund health care, but increased transfers prove that's simply not necessary. Why? Because of the Trudeau, Singh and Kinew government coalition. Why is the NDP rising taxes? I know that the member from Keewatinook wants to get up and talk about fuel prices. I know he wants to talk about it, but I'm not going to talk about fuel prices to the member from Keewatinook right now.

So back to the question, why is the NDP raising taxes on Manitoba families and businesses? It's

because their borrowing and spending is out of control already, Honourable Speaker. The NDP are adding \$1.9 billion to the net debt next year and are planning to reach a net debt of \$35.4 billion.

You know what's upsetting, Honourable Speaker, is that the NDP want to distract from this fact. Why do they want to distract? They're hoping to distract and hoping that their NDP math will sink into Manitobans and they will not comprehend that their lives, their pocketbooks and everything are going to be stretched thinner and thinner and thinner over the next three, three and a half years until we form the next provincial government.

That means, Honourable Speaker, that after health and education, debt servicing is now the third largest spending line at 9 per cent at the provincial budget and \$2.264 billion. I know that the member from Point Douglas wants me to take a sip of water, and I am taking a sip of water because it's nice, clean drinking water found here in the city of Winnipeg from Shoal Lake First Nation, which I have the honour of serving.

That being said, it's unfortunate that we've seen in the—in—within this 2024 Budget, that they've cut the infrastructure spending by \$164 million.

**An Honourable Member:** It's an odd place to cut.

**Mr. Ewasko:** And it is odd place to cut considering we've just heard from the mayor of Winnipeg, and a few weeks ago of course we've got the largest sewage leak in the history of Manitoba.

There's been two large sewage leaks in the history of Manitoba, in the city of Winnipeg—

**An Honourable Member:** When did they happen? When did they happen?

**Mr. Ewasko:** —both under—thanks for the question. Like to commend my friend and colleague from Fort Whyte for asking when did that happen? Who was in government? The NDP were in government, Honourable Speaker.

Debt servicing is more expensive than the Department of Families and the Departments of Justice, Housing, Addictions and Homelessness. With debt servicing now consuming—hold on to your hats, hold on to your wallets, Manitobans—10 per cent. That means, to use some NDP math, that means 10 cents of every dollar is going to service the debt.

\* (14:50)

Taxpayers have to be very concerned and wary of what is planned down that road. This is what happened the last time the NDP were in government, as well as we see history repeating itself in 2024.

The NDP have increased spending by almost \$1.4 billion over Budget 2023, after making, Honourable Speaker, \$3 billion worth of promises and borrowing over \$9 billion in just the last six months. Again, these are moves that are in the wrong direction.

I know that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Altomare) is still waiting for me to mention him, but he can hang on tight. I'll get to him in a little bit.

But this is all nothing new from the NDP and you-know-who. They believe—the NDP believes that they know best on what to do with Manitobans' money. I know that the member from Waverley is nodding his head. He sees it within his caucus. I know there's members on the government side that are skeptical of their new leader's vision, and they know that they're going to be paying more with this NDP government.

So, as I was saying, the NDP feel philosophically that they know better on what to do with Manitobans' hard-working dollars better than Manitobans do. And this brings back—and I know that the Leader of the NDP wants to hear this. I know he wants to hear this, so I'm going to say it: just like Greg Selinger did, Honourable Speaker.

They've been going down the wrong direction since they took office. It's been—only been six months. And I'm hoping that they're not going to redesign too many of those government offices yet, Honourable Speaker, because we—this side of the House, with the re-elected MLAs and the elected class of 2023, are fired up and we're ready to do the job in a short, clean three and a half years from now.

What else has this NDP government been doing? Well, not a whole lot. They've been doing a lot of listening, so they say. But they've had seven years to do that.

And what are we seeing in this budget? We're not seeing any plans. There's no plans. There's—oh, wait, there is a plan—there's a couple plans. They said that they've got some money in the budget for something that they're going to study, that they might put a shovel in the ground in two years from now.

And the mandate letter to the Finance Minister, we heard him yesterday at—I don't know how long that

budget speech took, maybe 12 minutes. I don't know, was it that long? I'm not quite sure. It was pretty thin, anyways, with not a whole lot of substance.

So they got no plan. They've got no plan.

But the Finance Minister did get a mandate letter saying, hey, you know what? It's Manitobans' money—and he got this from the Leader of the NDP—hey, it's Manitobans' money. Sit back and coast for a few years. You don't have to balance the books for four years, possibly. Like the Trudeau-Singh-Kinew government coalition, the books balance themselves.

So they have been more concerned—

**The Speaker:** Honourable—honour, please. I would remind the member that he can't use someone's name, he can only use their constituency when referring to other members in the Chamber, or their ministerial title.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I apologize, Honourable Speaker, if—I wasn't sure if there was Trudeau or a Singh in here, but I believe—and I'm not challenging, I'm just asking for clarification—I do believe I'm allowed to ask the Kinew—say Kinew government. I said Kinew government. So I'm going to wait for your direction, Honourable Speaker. *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

You are allowed to say the Kinew government. My apologies.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for that direction and thank you for that clarification as well.

So we know that they've been moving in the wrong direction. They've been violating the trust of Manitobans that they've been—that have been placed in them already. They've been more concerned with their TikToks, Instagrams, X posts—or Twitter for those of you that have not fully converted to the word X yet, the letter X—than they have been doing the difficult work of government.

They're not worried about it. Again, Finance Minister received the mandate letter saying, hey, you don't have to balance the books yet; take your time, take your time.

And we know that they brought in, at the end of March of—March 31 of 2024, this NDP government has to wear that \$2-billion deficit, Honourable Speaker, and they're going to have to figure out how to move forward on that.

They ran on promises of \$3 billion and they jumped to that pump rather quick, Honourable Speaker, on trying to spend those dollars. And I mean, we haven't seen the audited financials yet. Again, like I mentioned in the start of my speech, is that some of the information, again, isn't necessarily on the Finance Department and the Treasury Board, it's on the fact that they are receiving information from this NDP government. Doesn't matter how interesting those numbers are that the NDP government are putting forward to Manitobans.

In fact, we know that they really haven't been working at all. Don't take it from me; they said it themselves. More distraction than action. And I'm going to be blunt, so I know that some of the NDP members on that side are going to cringe a little bit, but that's okay because they know it's true. They know it's true.

The NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his ministers are not doing their jobs and I know for a fact, some of them are not doing their homework, Honourable Speaker. The Families Minister admits she's too busy to do the work. She said it here in this very Chamber: Too busy. She said it. *[interjection]* I know the member from Point Douglas is trying to shout me down right now, Honourable Speaker, but you can check back in Hansard. I—she—maybe she's not busy either. Maybe she can check Hansard, do a search; it's easy.

Then she failed as a House leader, as minister, when she took a trip to New York and neglected her duties right here in Manitoba. Now, Honourable Speaker, to be fair—to be fair—no matter how important or well meaning—or well meaning—the trip was, a situation unfolded here at home that she should have been here for. And I don't know who their shadow minister is over there, but unfortunately, they missed the memo as well, Honourable Speaker.

But she still has not taken that accountability. And my good friend and colleague, the MLA for Midland and the member—the Liberal leader and the children's advocate had asked for the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) to call an inquiry. But again, Honourable Speaker, she said it herself that she's just too busy—and I better use the air quotes—too busy to do the work.

\* (15:00)

Meanwhile, the Education Minister—I know it's the moment he's been waiting for—regrets not doing the work as well. I'm not putting words in his mouth.

He's saying this himself. Honestly, he said it in the Winnipeg Free Press. After he cancelled provincial assessments, experts and parents told him that written exams are critical tools.

How many educators do we have on the NDP's side, fourteenish? Whether they're teachers or they were trustees or somebody within the educational world—13 or 14—and they couldn't figure out that that's a critical tool? What? And they're leading our education department?

But I guess that is why, Honourable Speaker, that is why the deputy minister decided to get out and say in the community of Virden, that—nothing to see here. Education isn't even in the top five priorities for this government.

But you know what? I have to say, Honourable Speaker, here comes a little bit of story time, and it's not even a story. This is fact. It's—this is non-fiction. Truth. Here we go. So education, and now it's in the hands of the NDP again. We know what happened the last time education got into the NDP for 17 years.

Luckily 75 per cent of Manitobans who did not elect an—this NDP government are going to see the light within the next three, three and a half years, and they're going to re-elect a strong PC government to make sure that education is top of priority once again, Honourable Speaker.

The NDP, when they formed government in the early 2000s, the students in Manitoba were sitting at third and fourth in the great country of Canada in numeracy and literacy. By the time the 2011 election came in, and this is part of the reason why I ran—

**An Honourable Member:** Don't blame kids. Don't blame kids.

**Mr. Ewasko:** The Education Minister is saying don't blame kids. I'm not blaming kids, Honourable Speaker. I'm blaming the former NDP government, and we are seeing a repeat today by the NDP government.

So back to it. When the NDP took over, we were third and fourth in Canada. Manitoba was third and fourth in Canada on literacy and numeracy. Honourable Speaker, 2011 election rolled around, and I figured, you know what? I'm going to run to become an MLA because this needs to stop. Somebody needs to stop the destruction that the NDP are doing to our education world.

Honourable Speaker, I know you're waiting for this, but I'm going to inform you on this. Manitoba,

in 2011, was sitting at ninth and 10th—and 10th—in numeracy, literacy and science. You know what happened in 2014? They were 10th all across the board and further behind ninth. What did the recent, after seven years of a PC government, what did the recent polls show? Where was Manitoba sitting? This most recent, after seven years of PC government, we were sitting sixth and seventh.

Moving on up, but according to the Education Minister, results don't matter. And he, for some reason, is talking about blaming kids. I'm blaming the NDP machine that has now taken education and pushed it to lower than fifth on the priority list. And shame, shame on the 13 or 14 educators on that side.

And I know that that's not how they feel, because I have spoken to many of them. I've spoken to many of them, and they know that they really should not be following—they should not be following the NDP way of doing things, the NDP leader way of doing things. But they're six months in so they haven't found their voice yet, but they will. They will.

So what did the Education Minister do in the Free Press after parents, professionals, other teachers—maybe not the Manitoba Teachers' Society; they're working on some other things right now. He flip-flopped—didn't take very long, but he flip-flopped, luckily, and reinstated the exams, saying he was, I quote, was regretful about not having spent more time working on the file before cancelling system-wide exams. End quote. Simply not doing the work, Honourable Speaker.

The Finance Minister followed suit. He actually takes credit for our work. He told CBC News that he thinks advertising PC tax savings are, and I quote, an important way for us to ensure Manitobans know about the work that we are doing. End quote.

What work was that, Honourable Speaker, you may ask, about Budget 2024 and everything else? Spending \$200,000 on advertisements touting Tory tax savings. Congratulations to—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

*Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

**Mr. Ewasko:** Instead of doing the work—I know the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), he's having fun over there—instead of doing the work, this NDP government is so far just taking credit for the work of others.

And I know that we've spoken in this Chamber over the last few years about various different sports—

hockey, curling, lacrosse, football, lots of different things. And I know that the Leader of the NDP mentioned—he mentioned at times about coaching hockey. From what I've read in various different things and quotes, he prefers wrestling, but I don't know what he meant by that.

But I would say that in this vein of—part of my speech about taking credit for what others do, I will bring it to a hockey analogy. And we've all seen it. We've all seen it. There's these individuals that have played in minor hockey. These are individuals that have played in major hockey, NHL, college hockey. It's called a floater. Anybody know what a floater is? Well, I'm going to educate you on this.

The floater, which ends up sort of skating around the middle of the ice. Meanwhile there's the forwards, they're forechecking into the corner, digging for that puck. The defencemen are skating back as fast as they can to help defend with the goalie. And that floater, sitting at the red line waiting for a pass and hoping that there's going to be a breakaway.

That's the Leader of the NDP. He's floating. He's floating and taking credit for what we've done.

That's why we've seen some things in this year's Budget 2024 on many things that we've announced.

**An Honourable Member:** Take credit for the mess you left behind.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So the member from Brandon East, he's saying that he's finally going to also take credit for the mess that they've created with a \$2-billion deficit. That's good to hear. I'm glad that he is at least one voice in that caucus that is going to stand up and actually put some truth on the—or put some factual things on the record.

So I don't want to leave him out, so here we go—Justice Minister's work. Well, what have we heard about the Justice Minister's work? That's he's late—*[interjection]* Oh, oh, the member for St. Boniface (MLA Loiselle) is talking about the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home. I will be talking about that as well.

**An Honourable Member:** Point Douglas.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I just—or from Point Douglas, sorry. Where did I say she was from?

**An Honourable Member:** St. Boniface.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Oh, not from St. Boniface, no. I think she's visited there, though. Definitely. Maybe, maybe

not. Maybe done some door knocking, but I don't think so.

\* (15:10)

The Justice Minister's work is late and the quality he's delivering is poor. The NDP made very specific time-bound promises with regard to bail reform. You might have heard this because we've mentioned it a couple times in question period. Significant steps within 100 days they said, but they fell short. They were more than 34 days late with a bail plan that has been panned as ineffectual.

Another broken promise from the NDP. Late and not good enough, and typical of many of the NDP ministers. The Health Minister hasn't even handed in any work. They have no plan for staffing the health-care system. And they go even further than failing to plan. They're ripping up job offers to health-care workers interested in actually coming to this great province of ours.

The NDP government is not working for Manitobans because the NDP government is not working at all, which brings us to the topic that I've been speaking about: this budget. It is now time for this Cabinet, which has delivered nothing but tardy, incomplete, haphazard work since the first ring of the bell, to deliver.

The time for distraction has passed and the time for deflection and casting blame is way past over. It's not a new day for Manitoba; it's a bad day for Manitoba. And this budget fails to live up to expectations. It falls short in each and every way.

I wish the Finance Minister knew that he didn't have to read the ChatGPT-generated speech that is paid—that his paid staff put in front of him yesterday. The budget seems as though it was slapped together over the Easter long weekend. And the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has said he likes to put it in the work—he likes to put in the work first-hand and put out press releases after.

But, of course, he couldn't resist making announcements in this budget that aren't quite ready, almost like, maybe, you know, checking on some spelling and grammatical errors in his news releases. I think he sort of showed us a picture, a quick glimpse into the future of the leader of the NDP. His aspirations are to become the leader of the federal NDP, because he named himself the Prime Minister in his news release, which was interesting.

But, you know what? It'll go with the, I don't know, the hundreds of more staff that this NDP government have hired. But we will get into all of that in Estimates when we start asking questions about the budget.

The announcements in his budget that were not quite ready because we know he just can't help himself, because he's more showman than statesman. The signature policy announcement in this budget is the hike to property taxes by changing the rebates. But this is a 2025 policy.

Health-care recruitment and other health-care promises will take years to materialize and public safety is 'conspicuously' absent from the budget entirely.

When we talk about—in the budget, the Finance Minister stood up, talked about the increase in health-care professionals. Yes, no kidding; 20-plus years health-care professionals have been calling on governments to act. And we did act. Under the direction of the first female premier, we did act.

We did act. We increased seats for physicians, health-care aides, nurses. Last spring was the record number of physicians to graduate in the province of Manitoba of all time.

And so when the Premier (Mr. Kinew), the NDP leader, talks about increasing staff, again, we're going to have to look to the definition of floater and he's going to have to give some credit where credit is due. He's going to have to, because with those—without those increased seats, without those increased spending to our wonderful post-secondary partners in this great province of ours, he wouldn't be able to take that low-hanging fruit and feast upon it.

But it's our job as the opposition to make sure that we're pointing that out to Manitobans. And that's what we're going to continue to do in the next few months and few years until he decides to call an election or until he decides to go ahead and run for the leader of the federal NDP.

Reactions to this budget include partners of this government saying that they're confused. They don't know what some of these announcements mean yet, and there's lots of questions. They're sort of tippy toeing around some of the comments that they are making, these friends of the NDP.

You know why? Because this leader will take it out on them. And if he doesn't, he'll send some of his right- and left-handed people to go do his dirty work.

It was actually evident that this Premier's budget included surprises for some of his ministers. The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce called this a wait-and-see budget. To me, that doesn't sound like glowing praise, Deputy Speaker.

The Heavy Construction Association said they have to wait and see. Doctors Manitoba said they're anxious to see more details, or in other words, wait and see. Doctors Manitoba said that they were anxious and they're happy to be at the table, but obviously, over the seven years plus in opposition, the NDP weren't doing their work, because they've got no plan. No plan.

Doctors Manitoba said they want to be at the table. I don't understand, what do you mean? They're not at the table? They're not at the table. Stakeholders of this government want to see more specifics.

The AMM said that there's certainly, and I quote, more work that needs to be done. And it sounds like this government is operating in isolation. There's a lack of consultation, and that's definitely the wrong direction, Honourable Deputy Speaker. The blame game is over. No more pointing fingers back at a previous PC government, a favourite tactic of the members opposite who love to deflect blame, dodge accountability and distract from their ongoing failures.

Now that this budget has—is tabled, it's the NDP's spending plan, the NDP's tax plan and the NDP's tax cuts. Let's talk about a few of those cuts and other shortcomings, since we've got some time, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

\* (15:20)

Failing to outline a plan to grow the economy and grow public revenues to help fund social services and assist Manitobans with affordability while eliminating the Manitoba economic development board and firing the Métis secretary for economic development, stifling economic growth and prosperity through excessive red tape and unwarranted taxation while repealing legislation to reduce the regulatory burdens and cancelling the Regulatory Accountability Secretariat.

I know that some of the members on the NDP, they'll be able to get a chance to look at this in Hansard tomorrow, reread what I just said. I'll sign it for you tomorrow. And ignoring—and whilst ignoring Manitoba families' health-care needs by delaying surgeries, pausing the construction of a—new personal-care homes and failing in the recruitment of new nurses and health-care workers.

This, Honourable Deputy Speaker, gives me the opportunity to bring up the point that the member for Point Douglas (Ms. Smith) wants me to bring up: the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home. Another topic that this NDP government—and again, we'd have to look at that definition of floater—taking credit for things that we've done.

In their budget, I'm assuming, Honourable Deputy Speaker, is six to 10 million dollars, which is going to be the excessive costs to the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home. Why? Because this government and the NDP leader and the NDP member for Point Douglas, all of them put the personal-care home on pause. They put it on pause.

So it's going to cost eight to 10 million dollars more, and this is something that the Leader of the NDP should have known what was happening in 2024. Like building costs, building codes changing, excessive costs. So it's unfortunate, but you know what? The NDP leader doesn't care. Because you know why, Honourable Deputy Speaker? It's not their money, it's taxpayer money. And the NDP have never met a dollar of taxpayer dollars that they've never felt that they wouldn't just love to spend.

So I am looking forward to the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home being built and opened. *[interjection]* Absolutely, absolutely, all members in the House are clapping, I think that's great. It's actually, now, because of their pause and from what I had heard at their announcement, it's actually opening a year and a half to two years later than would have if they would not have lifted that pause in the fall.

So on top of those—that Lac du Bonnet personal-care home, there's five others, Honourable Deputy Speaker. Not much mentioned in the budget. Not much mentioned. I mean, we already know they cut the seniors minister department, they got rid of it, they axed it. It's unfortunate.

They paused and cancelled—I know the Education Minister should be concerned about this. They paused and cancelled the construction of the new schools for our growing communities in Manitoba. And on top of that, they reduced the education capital budget by \$100 million.

And again, I'm going to repeat this, and I'm going to repeat this, and I'm going to repeat this, that this NDP government put education somewhere lower than the top five on their priority list. And this showed again in this year's budget, Honourable Deputy Speaker. Nine schools; nine schools they put on the

chopping block, no mention of them. They did mention the two recycled ones that we had announced. *[interjection]*

Now, the member for Point Douglas is asking me how many daycare spaces did that include. Well, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the member for Point Douglas raises a great question, and she's still asking the question, she wants the answer. So out of those nine schools that we had promised, 660 new childcare spaces were going to be built with that as well.

So now, yes, now they're talking to schools, and of those two there'll be somewhere between 70 to 90 daycare spaces per, but that'll be flushed out, I guess, as it goes—continues on. It's unfortunate, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

Well, so now, infrastructure. They cut more than 10 per cent of the highway infrastructure budget, reducing it from—to the tune of—well, reducing it from \$557 million to \$500 million. Sounds like a cut. That's a cut.

And reducing the transportation and infrastructure budget for water projects and other infrastructure. And you've heard it today in question period, and you will hear this again and again and again. Why? Because it's a massive cut. And the NDP need to be forthright to Manitobans: \$163-million cut.

They just had—the City of Winnipeg just had a—as I mentioned earlier, one of the two largest sewage leaks in the history of Manitoba. Anything in the budget? No. Nada. Zilch.

Reducing the emergency contingency fund. Uh-oh. That means that fund where, you know, like, if you have an emergency? You know, like that rainy day fund where, you know, we tell—I used to tell the students that I taught, and of course, my own children that, hey, you know what? Put some money aside into a savings account. You never know.

So, what has the NDP done in this year's budget? Because I guess they don't have enough of the taxpayers dollars that are going to be coming in, I guess. They're reducing the emergency contingency fund from \$100 million to \$50 million during a dry year. When we are at higher risk for what? For forest fires, Honourable Deputy Speaker, for forest fires.

And I know, I have the pleasure of representing over 21,000—almost 23,000 Manitobans in the great constituency of Lac du Bonnet. But I know between April 1 and the end of October, October 31—and some of the members on the NDP side have cottages out in

the great Lac du Bonnet constituency. They're going to have to be careful with the forest fires. They're going to have to be careful. They know that they're going to be paying more on their property taxes due to the education tax going up.

So, again, reducing that rainy day fund makes no sense. But this is nothing new with you know who.

Failure to invest in EV charging infrastructure necessary for the transition to cleaner electric vehicles. So, they're giving them a bit of a—they're giving people a bit of a rebate, but how in the world are you going to charge those vehicles? I don't know. That infrastructure is necessary.

And what happens to those homes? You know, and I know that there's a few people on the NDP side that are—have a good handle on the trades, and they know that their homes at times, when you go to that panel that's down in the basement, you know when your lights flicker or something, and—or, you put—plug in too many things into the socket? The panel. Electrical panel. Or if you accidentally plug in the wrong something into the socket. It blows a breaker.

Well, many of those homes are 100 amp. Probably not going to handle some of those EVs. It's going to cost people a lot of money. So it is.

Hey, I drive a hybrid. I enjoy driving the hybrid. It's great on fuel. It's great on fuel because we know that this NDP government have never seen a taxpayer dollar or cent that they don't hate to spend. They love to spend it, right?

\* (15:30)

And so we know that their carbon tax—they want a large carbon tax. The Leader of the NDP said himself back a little bit ago, that he was applauding the Trudeau-Singh coalition and he was on track. He was on board and he was saying that he needed probably about a \$300-a-metric-ton carbon tax—\$300.

So, all of your fuel is going to be going up. And why? Because this Premier (Mr. Kinew) of Manitoba, this Leader of the NDP, would not stand up against his buddies in Ottawa. They will not say no to Trudeau. Shame on this government. They are not governing for Manitobans.

Now I'm going to talk about a bit of a topic that we've spoken about here for a few weeks: failing to create a real bail reform plan with the federal government, failure to address the root causes of crime, and a failure to take serious action to fund policing to keep our streets and homes safer.



We know that some of their members on the government side were big fans of the defund-the-police rallies. They were out protesting and they're almost professional activists, lobbyists. It's unfortunate.

Failing to protect Manitobans in their homes from criminals and instead offering them \$300 security system tax credits and failing to increase funding for the Downtown Safety Partnerships in the cities of Brandon and Winnipeg, and cutting funding—oh, the member from Point Douglas was clapping—I don't quite understand that strategy here, Honourable Deputy Speaker. Maybe you can enlighten me on another time in the future when you can, you know, let me know what the heck is going on over there. They're just not singing from the same songbook.

Cutting funding to courts, legal aid, correctional services, crime prevention and victim services. Failing to fund adequately addictions treatment and a strategy for housing and homelessness. Failing to adequately plan and fund a provincial nominee program to help recruit the health-care workers and industrial workers we need to keep our health-care system and economy going right here in this great province of ours.

They're underfunding school divisions so that the school divisions have to raise the taxes on Manitoba ratepayers and increasing the tax burden on Manitoba families with higher school taxes while ending education tax credits and seniors tax credits and ending the full phase-out of the education property tax on families and small businesses while plotting future tax increases on Manitoba families.

The members on the government side know it's true. They've seen this story before, and that's why the Leader of the NDP was the star candidate for the previous NDP premier, Greg Selinger. We're going to see it again.

Increasing education taxes on middle-income families, nurses, teachers and police officers when you eliminate the full planned rebate in 2025. They would have done it earlier if they could have. It's like the Finance Minister went out in the fall and said that he was going to hold on to the education rebate. Do you know why he had to say that at the beginning—at the end of October, he had to say that? Because it was too late anyway; it was too late to cut it.

Failing to freeze Manitoba Hydro rates as promised in the 2023 election campaign—didn't hear anything on that. Failing to remove the carbon tax for

Manitoba home heating bills and failure of removing the longest serving Manitoba Hydro CEO and interfering in the management of Manitoba Hydro.

This is what Manitobans' NDP government does and are going to do, and they're going to continue to do.

They interfere with the rate of applications at the Manitoba Public Insurance and the Public Utilities Board by setting the rates for MPI and refusing to address the federal carbon tax impacts on families and allowing the federal government to raise the carbon tax on Manitoba families while flip-flopping multiple times on this issue.

And failing to adequately address the current pipeline shutdown and fuel shortage while announcing an increase of fuel taxes on October 1, 2024. That's when it's happening. Major increases to our fuel taxes, October 1, 2024.

They're failing to protect taxpayers with a realistic plan to reach balance and borrowing billions more to fund \$3 billion in election promises while burdening Manitobans with higher interest costs for generations to come, and choosing to run billions of dollars of deficits for the next three years that—as I've said before, and we will continue to repeat that and repeat that and repeat that.

And then promising—go figure, typical NDP, typical spend—promising to reach balance after the next election without any accountability. They fail to provide a plan to get value for taxpayers' dollars through competitive procurement and smart shopping, and instead driving up the cost of government capital projects.

All of that is the wrong direction. Practically none of it was even discussed during the election campaign.

This NDP government is not as advertised. Honourable Speaker, the budget is not what was promised by the NDP six months ago. I apologize—Honourable Deputy Speaker.

I'll repeat that, because I've got time. Honourable Deputy Speaker, this budget is not what was promised by the NDP six months ago. Ironically, the NDP promotes this as a budget for one Manitoba, but it divides Manitobans. Division is the wrong direction.

I know that the members opposite want me to continue going, because I've got more.

So, Mr. Honourable Speaker—Honourable Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Roblin,

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

regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by:

- (a) introducing measures that were not raised during the recent election campaign just six months ago; and
- (b) dividing Manitobans into winners and losers through taxation, thereby creating two Manitobas; and
- (c) neglecting critical areas of investment such as economic growth; urgent medical capacity; the construction of new educational and child-care infrastructure as well as roads, highways, bridges, waterways and other critical infrastructure; environmental conservation and protection and public safety; and
- (d) inadequately addressing the current cost-of-living crisis, the rising provincial debt load and effect of increased interest costs; and
- (e) not fully accounting for all the costs of government decision making and spending since October 3, 2023; and

\* (15:40)

- (f) violating the trust that Manitobans have placed in this new provincial government for all of the above reasons.

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

Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar):** It has been moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition, seconded by the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook),

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

regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by:

- (a) introducing measures that were not raised during the recent election campaign just six months ago; and

- (b) dividing Manitobans into winners and losers through taxation, thereby creating two Manitobas; and

- (c) neglecting critical areas—

**An Honourable Member:** Dispense.

**The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar):** Dispense?

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar):** I hear a no.

- (c) neglecting critical areas of investment, such as economic growth; urgent medical capacity; the construction of new educational and child-care infrastructure as well as roads, highways, bridges, waterways and other critical infrastructure; environmental conservation and protection and public safety; and
- (d) inadequately addressing the current cost-of-living crisis, the rising provincial debt load and effect of increased interest costs; and
- (e) not fully accounting for all the costs of government decision making and spending since October 3, 2023; and
- (f) violating the trust that Manitobans have placed in this new provincial government for all of the above reasons.

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

The amendment is in order.

**MLA Mike Moroz (River Heights):** Honourable Speaker, I'm proud to rise in this Chamber today in support of our government's first budget. And I want to thank the member from Lac du Bonnet for cutting his speech short in order to allow me to get to my speech today. Thank you; I really appreciate that.

I also want to begin by extending my personal congratulations to our own Finance Minister, the member from St. James, for keeping his focus exactly where it needed to be, on the needs of those amongst us who, after seven years of an unrelenting austerity government, have fallen the furthest behind: the young families struggling to find their place in the world, an affordable place to call home, and daycare spaces for their children, the front-line health-care workers ground down while providing essential care to patients in a purposefully hobbled system that too often viewed them as disposable.

The students, the teachers and the educational workers and underfunded classrooms without the resources and supports necessary to ensure that every child reaches their full potential.

And our relatives, friends and neighbours who find themselves struggling with food insecurity, homelessness, mental health or addictions issues, whose needs are rarely prioritized when balance sheets and maintaining privilege matter more than people.

I wanted to begin with that because I strongly believe that budgets are the clearest insights one can get into the motivations: the soul, if you will, of a government, what it really cares about, who and what it values. More than any other government document, budgets tell you who your government really is, what kind of province they want to build and the path they intend to travel to get there.

So, what kind of province does our budget set us on a path to build? Well, it's spelled out very clearly right on the front cover: One Future. One People. One Manitoba. Not like the winners and losers of past budgets, or the us-versus-them of past campaigns.

No; instead, it's focused on ensuring that all Manitobans, working together, can build a secure, stable and inclusive future for all those who come to call our communities home. That's what our government wants, and that's what Manitobans want. And that's the path this budget begins to chart for us.

And that's exactly what the people of my constituency of River Heights expect from their government. On their doorsteps, at our schools, businesses and places of worship, over and over again, they've told me they want a government that lifts people up instead of pushing them down, one that pulls the community a little closer together, 'rathan' apart, creating division and anger.

What's more, River Heights understands the role it must play in shaping that government, recognizing that with privilege comes the responsibility to help bring about progressive change. Democracy is never a spectator sport. At some point, advocacy must become action.

This gives me a nice opportunity, Honourable Speaker, to raise a topic that I've talked about before in this Chamber, and that's the recent development of the River Heights council of faith leaders that was started to do exactly that: take action in our community to improve things.

I'm lucky to have in my constituency 14 churches and three synagogues who, on a daily basis, do untold numbers of progressive acts to support people in the community around issues like food insecurity, like poverty, like reconciliation and like work to support the elderly.

On February 12, we had our first meeting as a faith council, and we came together to talk about our shared challenges as a community and to explore how, together, we might work to address them. And during the course of that meeting I was deeply impressed by their shared concern for those in need, their commitment to social justice and their keen interest in working together to find innovative approaches to problem solving.

This group is already hard at work on a number of key areas that really symbolize what we're talking about with our budget, bringing Manitobans together from diverse areas and backgrounds to work together to build our province in a meaningful way.

We're already working on housing, finding transitional housing, creating new transitional housing for seniors. Right now, if you're a senior in River Heights and you want to downsize, you actually have to move out of the community you've been a part of for a very long time, out to a different community. That transition alone as a senior is challenging enough, let alone without giving the community that you love—giving up the community you love and you've been in for the past 30 or more years. So, we're working on that housing.

We're working on the idea of extending daycare. How do we find more capacity for child care within our community?

We're looking at—also at things like returning to community health, trying to find ways to support the work that we're doing and bringing health care closer to the community itself.

\* (15:50)

And this budget, Honourable Speaker, helps us do all of those things. It charts a path forward to allow that grassroots community action to be successful. So this budget is most helpful as we continue to do that work in River Heights.

This budget, Honourable Speaker, is built on exactly—it's built exactly on the advice and insights of countless thousands of Manitobans, just like those in River Heights. And, as a result, it focuses on five key policy areas: rebuilding health care, lowering costs,

healthy families and safer communities, and growing our economy.

I want to start the core of my commitment—comments, Honourable Speaker, with our efforts to rebuild health care. No issue dominated the doorstep more than the state of health care under the previous government. What took seven years to tear down will not be repaired in a single budget. But this budget is a significant beginning.

We're investing a record \$8.2 billion in Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care programming. That represents a 13.5 per cent increase in funding, with much of it targeted at closing the systemic gaps and ending the inefficiencies brought on by years of relentless philosophical cuts.

We're doing something else, Honourable Speaker, something the previous government never did. We're ensuring that every single nickel of the federal health transfer payments are actually invested in the support to front-line workers and in improving our health-care system and not spent somewhere else.

Honourable Speaker, while there's a range of interconnected issues driving the health-care challenges we face, at the very core is a critical staffing shortage. While it will take time, Budget 2024 is taking the necessary steps to address that shortage. We've allocated \$310 million for the retention, recruitment and training of front line health-care professionals, a commitment that sets us on a pace to hire 1,000 more health-care workers over the next year: 100 doctors, 210 nurses, 90 paramedics and 600 health-care aides to work in home care, personal-care homes, hospitals and community health settings.

To make that an achievable goal, significant investments are also being made at the post-secondary level to increase training opportunities in key areas. For example, we're expanding Manitoba's undergraduate medical education program. We're training more specialists by expanding post-graduate medical education by increasing medical residency spaces. We're training more nurses by investing in six post-secondary institutions and funding year 2 of the nurse diploma program of the Neepawa Training Centre, and we're training more practical nurses.

But there's more: advanced paramedic training at Red River College; creating a pathway to train doctors at Brandon University; expanding the Bannatyne campus, where we'll train more health-care professionals; and we're fast-tracking the accreditation of foreign-trained health workers.

In time, these programs, along with others outlined in our budget, will ensure that the health-care workers we all count on to be there for us when we need them most will, in fact, be there.

And again, I can't stress this enough, Honourable Speaker: it's critical to understand that this plan—that the members opposite said didn't exist—it didn't come out of thin air. It was built on the solid foundation of months of direct consultation with Manitobans, with health-care professionals, post-secondary institutions and experts in the future of health.

And I am incredibly proud to be part of a government team whose focus is working with and engaging with Manitobans to build a better province for everyone.

In the time I have left, Honourable Speaker, I also want to touch on a couple of other key areas which will relate directly back to insights I've gotten for my constituents and which the minister himself got during his prebudget consultation.

The first is in relation to public education, a critically important issue to my community, which is home to excellent schools and countless people who have dedicated their lives to nurturing young learners.

As I've mentioned in this Chamber before, my own career as a theatre, history and psychology teacher not only enabled me to understand the potential dangers of bill 64, which pushed me to serve as a member of this Chamber, but it gave me front-line insights into the impacts of chronic underfunding of the public education system.

For too long, we've asked teachers and educational workers to do more with less in classrooms that were too large and without the full range of critical supports necessary to ensure that all of our province's children reach their full potential.

This budget puts a stop to that. In addition to an increase in the overall Education budget, significant progress is being made with a \$104.2-million investment specifically to help every child reach that potential, including \$30 million for a universal school nutrition program.

With the recent news that the federal government is now also ready to step up to help feed hungry children, we can look forward to students thriving in our public education system in a way that food insecurity and poverty prevented in previous years. And I am incredibly proud of that, and I know my constituents are thrilled by that news.

I want to take a moment, as well, Honourable Speaker, to highlight our commitment to expanding the \$10-a-day child-care initiative to ensure that it's year-round, providing families with access to affordable, quality child care on professional development days and throughout the summer. This change will make a significant difference to the lives of families in River Heights.

But there's so much more to celebrate: \$22.3 million going to providing more direct-care hours for seniors in personal-care homes; funding a new independent seniors advocate; \$116 million in funding to build and maintain social and affordable housing; removing the PST on all new housing builds to get projects started faster; and on the environment, ten million—a \$10-million investment in New Flyer Industries to build more electric buses, strengthening Manitoba Hydro and Efficiency Manitoba as they aggressively pursue paths to a greener economy and rebates on EV purchases to encourage more Manitobans to make the transition.

Again, Honourable Speaker, our budget reflects the priorities of Manitobans and has been built on a foundation of careful and ongoing consultation, exactly how all public policy should be developed. And that approach has been noticed and welcomed by Manitobans.

By way of illustration, I had the great privilege to attend a breakfast meeting this morning with the minister and members of this Chamber hosted by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. Honourable Speaker, the positive energy in that room from people who had been part of a legitimate conversation about the future of this province, after years of being on the outside, was real. From the speakers at the podium to participants at the tables, people warmly welcomed the budget and this minister and expressed great excitement at working with this government in the years to come.

I want to conclude, Honourable Speaker, by saying that our budget is an ambitious outline of the critical work we must do together to serve Manitobans.

\* (16:00)

While the members of this Chamber won't always agree with the route we take to get there, the destination itself must never be in question. And I again want to remind members that we must always keep in mind the words of United States Senator Elizabeth Warren, who said: We didn't come here to talk about things we can't do.

This budget sets in place the building blocks to begin to do great things for all Manitobans. And I look forward to sharing that work with you.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** I am very pleased to rise today and put a few words on the record in support of our amendment to the budget, put forward by our leader, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), and I'd like to thank him for all of the great comments he put on the record today. I really enjoyed listening to that; I know all of my colleagues did. It was a breath of fresh air after yesterday.

I want to start my comments on what—the No. 1 issue that I hear about when I talk to Manitobans in my constituency, and that is affordability and the cost of living, and the fact that nothing in this budget provides meaningful long-term cost relief for Manitobans who are struggling. The only measures in this budget that are really effective are tax measures that were put forward by the previous PC government, even though they've altered them so they'll be less effective now, but we'll get into that later.

The only other measures in this budget around affordability are either temporary or they don't take effect for quite some time in order to be of any use to Manitobans today. And not only is there no real meaningful long-term cost relief, the cost of living is actually going to go up now in Manitoba under this budget. And we'll talk about that in a little bit.

But as the MLA for Roblin, and representing the great communities of Charleswood and Headingley, I want to put a few words on the record about the issues that matter to people in my constituency. Foremost among those is education and early childhood learning. Now, we already know that by their own admission, that education doesn't even crack the top five priorities of this government, and that was evident in the budget. I got to spend my evening last night, like many of us, I'm sure, going through the budget and the Estimates of Expenditure.

And on page 63 of the Estimates of Expenditure, we noticed a \$100-million cut to capital funding in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. And that's a big concern, not only for the constituents of Roblin but, in fact, for all Manitobans. There's a pending capital project at Phoenix School in Headingley. It is a much-needed expansion and renovation. Headingley is one of the fastest growing communities in southern Manitoba, and Phoenix School, it's bursting at the seams. I've been in there.

And since 2013, the St. James-Assiniboia School Division has submitted capital requests for funding for this project. It is the No. 1 priority for that school division. In 2022 the project was approved by the previous PC government. But I'm very concerned—and my constituents are very concerned—that the NDP's cut to capital projects is going to negatively impact this project. There's a lot of uncertainty now. We don't know if this project's going to be able to go ahead.

Not only this project at Phoenix School, but other needed improvements to schools throughout Roblin. And not just schools. Daycares. Daycare is a huge concern in my constituency. I know, I'm a working parent; I get it. I rely on child care in order to come here to the Legislature and do my job every day. And my office receives inquiries extremely frequently from families who are desperate to find child care.

And this budget provides no assurance to those families that help is on the way. I mean, \$10-a-day daycare is great; in fact, it was the previous PC government that made it a reality here in Manitoba. But it also drives up demand. And the fact is, we need more daycare spaces and more daycare staff to ensure people can go to work to support their families.

And the previous PC government was well on its way to an ambitious goal of adding 23,000 new child-care spaces in Manitoba. And we saw the tangible benefits of that in the constituency I am so privileged to represent with the opening of a ready-to-move child-care facility in Headingley.

I was in the facility in February for I Love to Read Month. I read to seven daycare rooms in there. It is a beautiful facility. We need more of that in Manitoba, not less. But they cut the capital budget, so I don't know where those spaces are going to come from, Manitobans don't know. And I think, you know, my constituents are right to be concerned.

I also want to talk about an issue that's near and dear to my constituents and also to me, and that's small businesses who were left out in the cold by this budget yesterday. We all know about the payroll tax. It was brought in by an NDP government. It's a job-killing, punitive tax. It penalizes growth.

Under the previous PC government, we saw incremental improvements to that tax, increases to the threshold that took many small businesses off those tax rolls altogether. And if the election had gone the way we wanted, we'd see the elimination of the payroll tax. But under the current government, the payroll tax? No, not touching it. Going to leave it just

the way it is. *[interjection]* Yes, you know, I think they will increase it and we'll watch for that.

But it's not the only way that they've—that they're causing grief for small businesses. They've removed the education property tax rebate from commercial properties. And this isn't just—despite what the NDP will tell you, this wasn't just for big businesses, this was for small businesses who own their property. And now, they're going to have a much higher property tax bill, thanks to the NDP.

There is nothing in this budget to help small businesses that are still struggling with high costs and labour shortages. Small businesses are the major economic driver in our province and one of the top employers in Manitoba. And during their campaign, one of the only things the NDP promised to small businesses was help to deal with increasing crime that small businesses have been facing. But what they got was a \$300 rebate. It's like pulling—putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound.

For reference, as a new MLA, I just set up my constituency office. Now, my constituency office is a very tiny office. It's one room in a strip mall. It has very minimal security needs and the security system that we just installed cost over \$2,000 just for the system. That's not even including the monthly monitoring fees. So—and if I had more than one entrance or more than one window, it would be even higher. Three hundred dollars is a drop in the bucket. Yes.

And all of this led me to ponder the NDP's comments during the election and it led me to wonder, what happened to that economic horse that's supposed to pull the social cart? I know, the horse has broken its legs and is doomed for slaughter, headed to the glue factory.

Because this budget does nothing to spur economic growth. The only way to pay for all of the services that Manitobans expect from their government is grow the economy. And how do we grow the economy? You have to work with the private sector and allow them to do what they do best, and that's invest in our province and create jobs. Instead, this NDP government is ideologically bent on growing the public sector, and only the public sector, and stifling the private sector.

They've cut infrastructure funding, which is going to have a direct impact on the businesses that rely on our roads to get their goods to market.

\* (16:10)

And whether it's the legislative and regulatory changes that we're starting to see that are going to negatively impact the construction industry, the cuts to infrastructure or the way they've completely ignored the financial reality for many small businesses, the economy is going to suffer under this NDP government and under Budget 2024.

They're going to increase the debt to \$35.4 billion.

**An Honourable Member:** Don't worry, the kids will pay for it.

**Mrs. Cook:** My kids, your kids, they'll all be paying for it.

The cost of servicing that debt is now 10 cents of every dollar. Debt servicing costs are the third highest line item in this budget.

So we've got no economic growth, and we've got skyrocketing debt. That is bad news for our children, who will have to pay for all of this down the road. And that's if they stay here. In conditions like this, they couldn't be blamed—the U-Haul is backing up to go off to Alberta, to Saskatchewan, to greener pastures where taxes are lower, where they can keep more of their income and where they're not going to be paying off years and years of NDP debt.

The fact is that this budget provides no incentives for growth and creates an environment that is not competitive for businesses, that's going to drive businesses out of this province.

And not to mention the fact that the government has just been blatant in this budget in its preference for unions and unionized workplaces over all other types of employers. What message does that send to the business community in Manitoba? It creates incredible uncertainty about whether they're even going to be allowed to bid on government contracts.

But it's funny, you know, one of my colleagues pointed out to me this morning—

**An Honourable Member:** Not ha ha.

**Mrs. Cook:** Not ha ha funny.

In his speech to the chamber of commerce this morning, the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) curiously forgot to mention unions. I wonder why? I don't know. It's interesting.

So I want to talk a little bit about the changes to property taxes that were imposed in yesterday's budget. And make no mistake: despite the NDP's spin, any way you slice it, Manitoba homeowners are facing a

property tax increase. It's particularly true in Winnipeg, where properties are typically valued higher.

When you factor in the mill rate increases now being imposed by the school divisions, there is no way people are saving money under Budget 2024. They've eliminated property tax rebates for multi-family dwellings, for apartment blocks, which is going to drive up rents and reduce housing stock in Winnipeg, where there's already a critical shortage of rental properties.

And the numbers put forward in this budget are a farce. The NDP is trying to say that 83 per cent of homeowners somehow benefit, but that's false. That number came out of thin air. You read the fine print in the budget, those numbers are based on a fictional mill rate that no longer exists now that school divisions are increasing property taxes, and it ignores the fact that under the previous PC plan that they're scrapping, homeowners would have gone to a 75 per cent rebate and then a 100 per cent rebate, paying no education property taxes. Anything is higher than zero. Any way you slice it, this is a tax increase.

In Roblin, we have a lot of people who are privileged to own cottages. Their property taxes have now just doubled. We've already talked about commercial property owners—

**An Honourable Member:** Yes. Taxed on a cottage in my constituency, almost.

**Mrs. Cook:** Well, we can all look forward to those property tax increases.

And assessments only go up. I've been a homeowner for a long time, and I have never had a property assessment come in that lowered my property tax value. So with every assessment increase now, you'll be paying more. Honourable Speaker, \$148 million more this year alone in property taxes out of Manitobans' pockets.

And I want to talk a little bit about health care. And I was so surprised by this budget coming from a government that campaigned almost exclusively on health care. I remain genuinely astonished by the lack of a detailed staffing plan in their budget. I don't know where they think they're going to find 1,000 health-care workers, because they didn't say. There's no timeline, there's no details, there's just magical targets thrown out in thin air—

**An Honourable Member:** What about those 64 Filipino nurses that were here?

**Mrs. Cook:** Yes, if you're a Filipino nurse trying to come to Manitoba, this government will rip up your job offer.

And let's talk about making Manitoba a more competitive environment for health-care workers, given that we are competing with every other jurisdiction in Canada for the same pool of health-care workers. We are in a nationwide health-care worker shortage, and the NDP are taking a huge step backwards with this budget.

You want to come to Manitoba for the affordable homes, maybe buy a cottage? We've got cottages in Manitoba. Well, now your property taxes are going up on your primary residence, and if you want a cottage your property taxes are going to double.

And if you're a doctor—a doctor who we desperately need in this province—and a lot of doctors make good money, as they should. They've worked hard; they've gone to school a long time. A lot of them are cracking that \$200,000-a-year income mark. But now, in their new doctor tax, the NDP are going to start clawing back their income, and once they hit \$400,000 a year, they're going to be paying income tax on all of their income. It's unreal. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Six months after getting elected, still no comprehensive plan to increase staff. They're promising beds here, beds there, but beds don't staff themselves. We don't know where these people are going to come from. What incentives will draw them here?

In the media, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) mentioned all of the new graduates that they hope to hire, and that's thanks to the work of the previous PC government that added those training seats, that was thinking ahead beyond the next election cycle to future generations. But how will the NDP keep these people here? Nobody knows.

The lack of staffing plan isn't the only oversight when it comes to health care. There is nothing for wait times in the short term. I talked about this a little bit today in question period, but first they prevented Manitobans from going out of province for surgery with no plan to increase surgical capacity here. Now they're preventing Manitobans from getting surgery in the province. It doesn't make any sense.

And then there are significant gaps in terms of health-care capital. The HSC bed tower, in desperate need of replacement—no mention of that in the budget. The Bannatyne campus expansion—well, that started

under the previous PC government, so that's a re-announcement. And then PCHs that they paused and then re-announced, so that's interesting.

There was nothing in the budget about ongoing care for seniors, and this is a very serious issue. Seniors are the fastest growing demographic in our province. The silver tsunami is coming and we are not ready. We need investments in self- and family-managed care, in home care. We need incentives for non-profits and developers to add assisted living facilities in communities across the province.

There's nothing in this budget. They got rid of the department of seniors, folded it into Health and shelved the seniors strategy that was put together by experts external to this building. They just shelved it.

#### *The Speaker in the Chair*

And furthermore, the NDP has abandoned our communities. I'm talking specifically about our community centres, rinks, curling clubs, baseball diamonds and football fields. I was lucky to serve on a community centre board at one of our great community centres in Charleswood, and I know how much we relied on funding from the Building Sustainable Communities program. We used it to replace rink lights, to replace the boards on our rinks and that was just our community club.

And then the Arts, Culture and Sport in Community Fund, that provided funding to organizations in my constituency like the Canadian Palestinian Association of Manitoba for cultural programming. And now that funding is just gone. That was funding that directly improved our communities. I cannot fathom why this has been cut. That is a real shame for communities in our province.

\* (16:20)

And, finally, because I can't believe I'm running out of time—I could go all day—I would be remiss if I didn't mention some of the broken promises in this budget.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) promised he wouldn't raise taxes. Broken promise. He claimed that he could somehow lower grocery prices. I go to the grocery store pretty frequently; I've got four kids, a lot of mouths to feed. My grocery bill has skyrocketed, and that is the case for most Manitobans in this province. He said he was going to get tough on grocery stores. He didn't, and there's nothing in this budget to lower grocery prices for Manitobans.



And then, you know what else was curiously absent? What about that freeze on hydro rates? He didn't say anything about that. That was curious too.

My time is coming to a close. Again, I want to thank my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Ewasko), for putting forward such a good amendment. Pleased to speak in favour of it.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

**MLA David Pankratz (Waverley):** Thank you to this amazing team. So, I am so pleased to have this opportunity to stand up and speak on this incredible budget put forward by our very hard-working and talented Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), the honourable—[interjection] Thank you, yes.

You know, it's really the result of just countless hours, countless hours of work, dedication and real listening to Manitobans, and just to the betterment of life across this province.

And, you know, waxing a little bit poetic, it's also sort of the result of a beautiful coalescing of so much varied life experience here in Manitoba. It's something that we've committed to as a government and I know that we'll continue to do for Manitobans everywhere in this beautiful province.

So, you know, I've spent a lot of time reflecting on what impresses me so deeply about this team, about the Minister of Finance, about this budget, our Premier, and I think I've landed on something and I'd like to get to it through a short story, a personal story, which is kind of the way I like to do things up here.

You know, I've been incredibly fortunate in my life to have a number of different jobs over my lifetime. So I've been a musician, I got to travel the world, I got to meet some incredible people, I got to see some incredible things. I've been a firefighter, you know, and that—it taught me a lot; it taught me to not take anything for granted in my life and it taught me to really live in the moment and appreciate the people that are surrounding me, the teams that I work with.

And now, I'm really honoured to serve as the MLA for Waverley, and that's allowed me to connect with so many new remarkable people all across the constituency. And I really appreciate everyone for welcoming me into the community as your MLA.

So, yes, I've been very fortunate to have all these different jobs, but I can truly say that being a dad is No. 1 for me. It's been the most rewarding, the most challenging, the most fulfilling role that I've every

had. You know, my kids are incredible and I do my best to give my best to them every day.

You know—and so I'm getting to a point here. I am getting there. I hope you can trust me. But, you know, there are challenges, and when we inevitably have one of those challenging moments in our house, what I try to rely on and what I try to teach my kids is curiosity. I know that may sound a little bit simple, but, genuinely, it's curiosity. I'm curious about why they're saying the things that they're saying. I am wondering, you know, why did they throw that bowl of spaghetti on the floor, curious about their behaviour. I'm curious about why they replace the T and the R in fire truck with an F and say it loudly in public, because, I mean, that can be a challenge sometimes as a father.

Anyway, what I'm trying to get here is that developing a true sense of curiosity for this world and for the people who live in it is really, really important. It's deeply important. Maybe you understand now what—the trouble I was having with fire truck; it took a minute for everything to clue in.

So it's something I've worked very hard to instill in my children is just this sense of curiosity. And, you know, our team here, with our government, I know for a fact has a deep sense of curiosity and care for what Manitobans want from their government. And so, fittingly, we created a budget that's informed by the experiences of so many different people: firefighters, multi-generational farmers, new Manitobans, the experience of business owners, union members, teachers, health-care aides, environmentalists, dads just trying to get by and do the right thing by their family and just about any other Manitoban you can think of. And that's because we are genuinely curious and listening to what Manitobans are experiencing.

You know, we are a listening government—we've talked to that a lot, here in the Chamber—but I think it's important to also say that when we listen, we're actually taking that in. We're curious about those experiences, and we're following through on what we're hearing. And yet what we saw from members opposite this past summer and throughout their time in government—and, frankly, this was one of the reasons why I threw my hat in the ring—was, in my opinion, a complete lack of that curiosity.

And I think I'm being extraordinarily generous, to be honest, to describe last summer's divisive campaign as simply incurious. There was this sort of myopic view of the world, a focus on wedge issues and a seeming inability to sort of course correct when information that ran counter to their very narrow

beliefs of things came across their desk. But this team, this budget, sets us on a new course, and I'm very pleased to be a part of it.

You know, Honourable Speaker, a few weeks ago I was fortunate enough to join our Premier (Mr. Kinew), the First Minister, and the Minister of Health, as well as the hard-working member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen), in a listening tour stop at the Victoria—oh, there she is. And it was an incredible experience.

You know, I worked as a firefighter over the last decade, and I worked on the front lines of health care. But what I saw there was a room full of folks who were deeply passionate about their work in the community and just wanted to know that we had their backs.

They shared a lot of really important information, and that is reflected in this budget. You know, and specifically what I would like to speak to is something that affects the residents of Waverley that I spoke to quite a bit when I went door to door, who were frankly scared; they were upset when the Victoria hospital ER was closed. We have set aside a significant amount of money—\$635 million, I believe—in this budget for health capital investments. And part of that will be going directly towards working towards a new Victoria emergency room.

You know, this is a very exciting investment. And as I said, we heard over and over and over again from community members that they were just deeply disappointed, upset, scared, even, when the Victoria emergency room was closed, and why—we even heard from some of the health-care workers that we spoke to on that listening tour was that people were still coming to that hospital because it's their community hospital, even when it wasn't an emergency room anymore.

And so those employees, those—that staff, those front-care—front-line care workers were trying to deal with people dealing with emergency medical situations in an urgent care, with reduced resources and funding from the cuts that we saw from the previous government, unfortunately.

So we have changed that. We are now investing in getting another thousand health-care workers to get back into the system.

**An Honourable Member:** Hear, hear.

**MLA Pankratz:** That's right. It is much, much needed help that people on the front line are looking for, and we are going to deliver thanks to our hard-working Finance Minister, this hard-working team and our prime—our Premier.

I also want to talk quickly—like, there are a lot of things that affect folks in Waverley, and I really want to make sure that we're touching on all of those.

I've heard a lot when I go to Costco, Superstore, when I get out into the community, just how excited folks are about the tax holiday that we've given, the fuel tax holiday. Since January 1, people have been saving 14 cents a litre, and it has made a significant difference. And now they are absolutely thrilled that we are extending that for at least another three months.

\* (16:30)

In fact, I actually—you know, we do a lot of reading on this side of the House; we like to see what other members are up to. And I came across an article from 2022, from the CBC, that actually features the former police chief of Brandon Police Service. And he spoke about this idea that at the time there were some real challenges, budgetary challenges, for the City of Brandon, because fuel prices were going up.

Imagine if the provincial, federal—or provincial Progressive Conservative Party had cut that fuel tax in 2022, think about the money you could've saved for your police department. It would be fantastic. I think it could've been a really important action that you could've taken. And we made sure to do that. January 1st, we brought it in. We're saving money for folks in Waverley and across the province.

So I also think that something that's very exciting from this budget is our new homeowner's affordability tax credit. It's a \$1,500 tax credit that will go to every homeowner in Manitoba. It is so important. We're saving Manitobans money. We're also going to remove the—or we'll be providing a \$575 renters tax credit.

And they were speaking a lot about how we're not doing enough for seniors, we're also providing a \$328 top-up for seniors because we know seniors have worked very hard to grow our province and they shouldn't have to choose—they should not have to choose in their retirement age between rent and groceries. That's unacceptable. So we're making sure that we're going to take care of them.

We're also bringing in broad middle-class tax cuts by increasing personal income tax bracket thresholds and the basic personal amounts, and these measures are going to mean more take-home pay for Manitobans across the board, something that we can all be very proud of.

I've also heard from a lot of Waverley constituents about child care in Manitoba. You know, we're investing to make sure we have true \$10-a-day

daycare all year round, and we're also investing almost \$21 million for new child-care spaces and increasing the wages for child-care workers. You know, and I've heard that first-hand when I drop my kids off at daycare from the workers there that they really appreciate—I heard it already today—what we're doing in this new budget.

And something else that I heard a lot over the past summer and then in the last few months specifically has to do with our MPNP program and the fact that we increased our numbers, and, you know, I appreciate that. That was a good action by the former government. But unfortunately, what happened when those numbers got increased is that the staff got decreased and we weren't able to process those increased numbers.

In this budget, we've set aside funds to make sure that we can hire new employees, new staff to process those incredibly, incredibly important applications to make sure that we can get newcomers into Manitoba working and supporting our economy. So I'm very proud of that.

I would also like to say that, you know, that as a City of Winnipeg firefighter, and—you know, I'm also looking to the member from Brandon West here, who was a police officer for many years and was a part of a union for a number of years, where all of this disdain for union members is coming from. I don't understand it. Is—I—so as part of UFFW, as a firefighter, I know for a fact that we donated to incredible organizations in the community. We volunteered our time. We spent time with folks all across Manitoba, and we kept people safe.

And we were also part of a union. You don't have to be scared of it; it's okay. It's a good way to support employees. And I would say the member from Brandon West would probably agree with me as someone who worked in a union successfully for many years, and I really appreciate the service that he provided while working in that union, so, thank you.

You know, I don't have too many more things to say right now because I want to leave some of it for my other colleagues. There are just so many amazing actions that we've taken in this new budget and I'm really proud of what we've done. One of the things that I do want to say is that this budget really, ultimately, is a celebration of the fact that we have one future, we're one people and we are one Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I'm happy to have the opportunity to rise here this afternoon and respond to this government's—this NDP government's first budget here in Manitoba since the election. And I know a lot of eyes were on this government watching because there were a lot of promises made in this last election, Honourable Speaker. And it was hard to imagine, and now we know the reality is not all the promises that were, in fact, made during the election are actually going to be coming to fruition, at least here in Manitoba, or anytime soon.

There are a few different topics I want to be able to discuss and go over, and I'd like to start with seniors. And the reason I want to start with seniors is, something that I am very, very excited about and happy—and I do, I want to give this government credit for it—is their introduction of the independent office for the seniors advocate.

Honourable Speaker, the reason why I want to talk about this is because this is an initiative that I personally first brought to the House. It was back in 2016, when I first got elected. It was brought to my attention that BC had an independent office for a seniors advocate. So I actually went to BC and I met with the seniors advocate, and we had long-winded conversations just about what the office actually does for the province.

And this NDP government, they often talk about how the office for the seniors advocate is going to help with personal-care homes, and I'm sure they will; that's excellent. But the office is for so much more than just this. An independent office for a seniors advocate also does transportation. They talk about and they advocate for seniors when it comes to meals, when it comes to health care, when it comes to all long-term-care facilities, not just personal-care homes, but also supportive housing homes, retirement homes, 55-plus homes and hospices. There is so much advocacy work, including home care, that needs to be done for seniors, and that's what this office does.

So back in 2016, when I first introduced it, I asked for the support of my colleagues and, unfortunately, I didn't get very much. But I was still happy to talk about it in question period and members' statements and petitions. And then, few years later, in 2020, the NDP got on board.

And this is where it got really exciting, Honourable Speaker, because we know that—we knew at the time that the tides were changing here in the province of Manitoba and likely was going to become an NDP government. And so if they got on board with this idea

of an office for an independent seniors advocate, here was my chance to really hold them accountable to it.

And so kept pushing for it. We lobbied them for it, spoke with some of the members about it, and they're, sure, Cindy, we're going to do it. If we form government, we're going to do it.

And so when I saw it on the Order Paper being introduced as legislation, I was thrilled to see this, Honourable Speaker. And now I just want to make sure I continue to do my job to hold this government accountable, to ensure that the office that is being implemented is everything that it, in fact, can be, and that it serves and represents all seniors throughout the province. I'm looking forward to seeing it be more rolled out within Manitoba.

One of the things I talked about the independent office can do is fight for health care for seniors, and this is something I often hear a lot about. So I go to the McDonald's every single Saturday just to be accessible to my constituents. From 10 a.m. 'til 2 p.m., my constituents know if they come by the McDonald's on Keewatin, they can come and chat with me. And we have some regulars at McDonald's. They're there with their friends, and so if it's ever quiet, I get to talk with them. And they often tell me what's going on with their health-care issues and what they're hearing within the health-care system here in Manitoba.

One of the biggest issues that seniors are facing is the issue of affordability for prescribed medications, Honourable Speaker. Prescribed medications at—like, to face the fact, like every single person in this House will need prescribed medications throughout their lifetime. It's wonderful when we can actually afford them, but there are a lot of seniors on fixed incomes—no more health insurance, high deductibles—that cannot afford them.

Earlier today in question period, I talked about shingles—or, this was yesterday, sorry, Honourable Speaker. Yesterday I talked about shingles, because I have constituents who have come to me, one in particular, she has had shingles three times. This is a rare condition to get more than once. She's had it three times. It is very debilitating, and each subsequent time you get it, it becomes more and more severe. She cannot afford the Shingrix vaccine.

The Shingrix vaccine are two doses, about \$150 each, so \$300 total, that will prevent a whole lot of pain for the individual person, but also alleviate so many costs on our health-care system.

And that is why I believe that this NDP government should cover the Shingrix vaccine, ensure that every single senior—and if they want to have conversations about the age, I would make the argument from when a person retires onwards. Make sure that people have access to this vaccine. Make sure, because it's affecting all Manitobans. I know it's not just my constituents. I've had other people tell me they've gone to their MLAs. I know these are conversations happening, and it's ultimately up to this government to include it in our Manitoba health-care coverage.

\* (16:40)

It's something simple that we can do that is tangible; that not only changes the lives of many, many individuals but does help our health-care system, Honourable Speaker.

And with respect to seniors, I was really disappointed that this budget did not mention day programs. And the reason I say that is because when I sat here, about the same spot here, Honourable Speaker, when it was the former government, myself and some of the NDP members, we spoke in these Chambers about reinstating the day programs; how important that they are for seniors, how they're great for mind stimulation and activity, how it's great for getting people out of their houses and with community members and socialization.

And yet, this NDP forms government and not even a mention of the day programs, Honourable Speaker. If they really want to help seniors here in the province—as they promised that they would during the election—they should be talking about prescribed medications. They should be talking about day programs. They should be talking about home-care services. These are all essential needs that really, really need to be topped up here in the province of Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, I'm conscious of time, so I'm going to move on to my next topic. I want to talk about immigration. We have thousands of skilled workers here in Manitoba. They studied here in Manitoba, received the best post-secondary education I think us, as Canadians, can make, right here in Manitoba. They worked and they continue to work here in Manitoba. A lot of them are supervisors, managers; all different fields and departments throughout the province. And that is why it is so incredibly disheartening and maddening, quite frankly, that this NDP government is losing out on thousands of them. And I quite

literally mean thousands. I'm going to talk about that a little bit.

I am very, very familiar with the history of the Provincial Nominee Program here in Manitoba. When I first got elected again, back in 2016, the program was a mess. It was the biggest mess you can imagine. People were waiting over five years just to hear if they were going to be accepted into the Provincial Nominee Program. How could someone ask someone else to put their life on hold for over five years just to know if they'd be allowed to come to Manitoba, never mind any of the details around it.

So at the time, back in 2016, the new PC government came in and I was so appalled by all of this, I actually staged a campout. I slept on the marble floors outside the minister responsible for Immigration's office—and he wasn't my biggest fan at this time, Honourable Speaker. He further grew to like me, though. We have a great relationship now. We did this protest because we weren't hearing back, and I had constituents—all Manitobans; not only from Tyndall Park, or, Burrows at the time—coming to me, saying, Cindy, here, I've been waiting four and a half years; what do I do with this? And that's why we staged the protest. And I think we were out there for something like 39 hours.

And it's really funny, the—our current Minister of Immigration, her mom actually brought me food during the sit-in. She came and she said, Cindy, you're doing a good job. She encouraged me because, again, at the time, PCs were in government and I had the NDP's support on it. They were saying I was doing a good job. They were encouraging me. They themselves started to get on board with a lot of these changes, Honourable Speaker.

And so a few months go by and—again, I give credit when credit is due—the PCs did an okay job with it. They got rid of the backlogs. People were not waiting for more than three months to hear back from the Provincial Nominee Program, Honourable Speaker. And this is a testament to what you can, in fact, do with the program. They deserve to be congratulated for that.

Now, shortly after that, Honourable Speaker—I don't know why—but they brought in this \$500 head tax. This was a mistake. They shouldn't have brought this in. The program had run successfully in the past when it was introduced without this \$500 fee. It's a fee that when applicants are accepted they have to pay now. And again, NDP government, when they were in opposition—so, over the last six years here—they

screamed. They would stand here at their desks and they'd go like this, and slam on their desks and get mad at the former PC government and say, you charged a \$500 head tax; how dare you do this.

Honourable Speaker, they kept it. The hypocrisy. Here was their opportunity. If they wanted to give a break to some of our newer immigrants, get rid of the head tax that they so actively campaigned against or talked against for the last six, seven years. It amazes me, the hypocrisy.

And immigrants to Manitoba? We need immigrants. Our economy needs immigrants. We get about—over 9,000 provincial nominee certificates every year on average. This past year, the NDP's first year in government, failed us. We lost—we missed out on over 2,000 immigrants here in Manitoba, highly skilled individuals, because of their negligence. Because they chose not to invest in the program, and they've messed it up so bad, Honourable Speaker, I now have probably about 500 people, and I can talk to this, too. We've—I've had three meetings so far.

The first was at my constituency off—and I posted it online saying if people want to come and talk with me about the Provincial Nominee Program, if you've been waiting a substantial amount of time, come and see me. No exaggeration, over the course of two hours, I had over 250 people come into my constituency office. It was insanely busy, Honourable Speaker, but I got all their details and we've been developing an Excel spreadsheet. Since then, my list is over 500 people.

These individuals have come, they've protest outside at the Manitoba Legislature on a couple of occasions. And yesterday, I actually had a Zoom call with many of them. What I thought was going to be a one-hour Zoom call turned into a four-hour Zoom call because I learned you can't have more than 100 people in a Zoom room. And so I had to go over and over and over again.

But I'm trying to address all of the issues that this provincial government has the ability to fix if they invest in it. But they've chosen to invest peanuts into it, Honourable Speaker, when the backlog is months and months. People are waiting almost a year now. These are where investments should be made.

Honourable Speaker, I'm just going to take a sip of water here. I want to talk a little bit about crime and safety. I made mention to some of this earlier, so I'll keep these remarks a bit shorter, but some of the points here—and this is directly from the budget, page 78—cuts to both the Winnipeg and northern

Child and Family Services. Cuts to the mental health and addictions treatment recovery, that's page 114. Cuts to Community Corrections, that's page 127.

Think about our community safety, Honourable Speaker. This government keeps standing up on the so-called podium and talking about how they're going to make our community safer. Then why, according to page 127, are they cutting Community Corrections? Why are they cutting Family Resolution Service? This is on page 128 to 129. Why are they cutting Crime Prevention and the Security and Intelligence Branch and the Manitoba Criminal Intelligence Centre on page 130?

There is no mention of a creation of a youth mental health strategy, which had been called for numerous times by the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, Honourable Speaker. And no mention of any creation of a strategy to reduce or eliminate intimate partner violence, whereas Manitoba is one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence across the country.

And to talk about the advocate for children and youth here in the province, we called for an emergency debate. It was a—this was a few weeks ago now, Honourable Speaker. There have been so many tragic cases in the media lately, and so we brought forward an emergency debate calling on this government to come to the table and have a conversation about what we could do better for children in care.

And I do—I want to thank my colleague from Midland. My colleague from Midland, she came out strong on this. She helped support the cause, she helped work with so many Manitobans and bring forward the concerns that I know all MLAs are hearing, but, for whatever reason, the minister responsible, the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine), she chose to say, and she literally said, I'm too busy to have this conversation.

Honourable Speaker, this is literally her job. She can't be too busy to talk about children in care when this is her job to talk about it. We had the advocate for children and youth say that we should be having this debate. We've had many of media suggest that we should be having this debate. We've—we must have had hundreds of different people reach out to us as MLAs, encouraging it. And for her to just shut it down when she was here in the room, and she just said she was too busy.

Again, I would just—I would argue that is her job. I don't know what she is too busy doing. It's very disappointing.

And when you think about it, we have over 8,000 children still in care today. What we can be doing is we can be working more with Indigenous leadership. That's something that our province could really take the lead on, and we know needs to happen. But unless we have these debates, that can't happen, Honourable Speaker. We can be working more with foster parents and agencies.

At the end of the day, we want to make sure that as many children as possible can remain with their biological families. That is the ultimate goal. That is what we want. But we need to make sure that those who are still in care have the resources that they need.

\* (16:50)

There are children in care today, here in Manitoba, who do not have a pair of shoes. That is on us, Honourable Speaker. As elected officials, we need to make sure we are investing in—whether this be items like shoes or resources or agencies—to ensure that Manitobans have their basic needs met.

And that's often where—when I start to think about this gas tax. And Honourable Speaker, I want to come out very clear on this. I support the gas tax; I voted in favour of the gas tax. I think it was a promise made by the NDP government, Manitobans deserve to have what was promised to them kept. But when we think about how money could be used, think about the shoes for the children in care who don't have shoes, think about seniors who cannot afford their shingles vaccine. There are so many other ways we could be using this money, and it would've been nice to have the minister responsible—of Finance engage in this conversation a little bit more.

Honourable Speaker, again, I'm very happy about the independent seniors advocate. I'm also very happy that there was mentioned—of the Mollard Road construction. That's something that I first brought forward into this House, and I'm glad that the NDP government have decided to support it. For the ER up North, about replacement workers, it only took them six, seven months to get to it, but I'm glad they got on board, especially being the NDP government.

I'm very disappointed when it comes to my constituency, because there was no more mention of the Tyndall Park school. Under the former government they were building six new schools; one of them was in the constituency of Tyndall Park. I can tell you my constituency desperately needs a school and this NDP government decided to cut it. No more Tyndall Park school. We need that high school, Honourable Speaker.

They also didn't mention Seven Oaks hospital, something, again, they campaigned on, Honourable Speaker. They spoke about it, they mentioned Seven Oaks hospital during the election, how they're going to improve it and help it, and not one mention of it in this budget. The North End is growing. Our population is getting bigger and bigger and extending. Where's our local hospital? Why is this government choosing to neglect Seven Oaks?

And I don't quite understand why they're choosing to neglect Seven Oaks, because they've got NDP members all around it as well. I know my colleague from the Maples, my colleague from Burrows, I've heard them talk about the needs for—at Seven Oaks hospital here in this House, again, when they were on opposition. Well, now they're in government. They have the opportunity to actually do something. So I would encourage them: advocate for the Seven Oaks hospital.

And I'd encourage this government: think about all of Manitoba. Think about the North End a little bit too. Invest in the North End, especially as our population continues to grow and emergency services are necessary, Honourable Speaker.

So just to wrap up, this government is hiding its cuts to services by offloading backdoor taxes onto municipalities. Municipalities are having to raise taxes to pay for our roads and bridges, funding that this government is taking away from municipalities. This government is keeping the PC tax cuts, which is money that could go towards our school divisions. We know that the increases that the NDP have talked about are simply not at the level that many school divisions have said that they need. We need to do more to support our school divisions, education here in the province of Manitoba, Honourable Speaker.

School divisions and municipalities are having to increase taxes by 10 to 15 per cent, and all while this government pretends to cut taxes while starving funding from municipalities and the school divisions. What I found to be really interesting is that the interest alone—just the interest, Honourable Speaker—that Manitoba pays on debt is almost three times as large as the expense of the entire Department of Justice. If you think about those numbers, think about the distribution of money. Think about how we could benefit hundreds of thousands of people here in Manitoba if you really sit down and think about who needs the money.

This government talks about ending homelessness, Honourable Speaker, and their eight-year plan.

It's concerning—I hope they do it; I truly hope they do—but it's concerning. We're more than six months in: zero progress so far. When are they planning to start? Why wasn't EIA mentioned once in the budget?

There are a lot of preventative measures that we could be taking, and none of it is coming from this government. So we look forward to what is to come, Honourable Speaker, and I hope that many of their promises do come to 'flurition', but at this point, there's not a lot of optimism.

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

**Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière):** Honourable Speaker, I'm delighted to rise today to speak to the budget our government has put forward. I want to first thank our Finance minister, our First Minister, our Cabinet, members of the Treasury Board and all of the staff that have committed so much time to producing such an optimistic path forward for our province.

This budget is built on five pillars: rebuilding health care; lowering costs for families; healthier families and safer communities; growing our economy; and a government that works for you. And these pillars lay the foundation and the vision for how we can move forward.

This budget finds that balance between investing in the areas Manitobans elected us to work, rebuilding health care and making life more affordable for those that need it, while also addressing the fiscal mess we've inherited from the previous government.

I'll admit, the work of government can sometimes be complicated. As someone who's been doing it for a whole six months, I still find it that way. But I think there's some foundational things that government should be doing. One of them is ensuring that we have a functional public service. And part of that is honouring and recognizing the work of the public servants that ensure that our government is working. And so I was so thankful to see investments in improving those foundational services that Manitobans expect from their government.

We're getting rid of those paper health cards that we've had for decades. I don't want to speak for public servants but I think they're chomping at the bit to make this happen. This is something Manitobans have been talking about for as long as I can remember.

We—as a new member, I've had so many people coming to me talking about medical cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates, those basic forms of ID that are—actually cause a barrier for people accessing services if they don't have them. So I'm so excited that

we're committed to ending that backlog for those vital pieces of ID.

And members have talked about the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, MPNP. It is so vital that we process those applications so that folks can—in Manitoba, can get to work, grow their families and do the—build their lives in the way that they want and I'm so glad that our Minister of Immigration ensured that we have more staffing to process those applications so that we can grow this economy together, grow this province together. And so I want to thank the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and the Minister of Immigration, too, for ensuring that we have the staffing, those public servants that want to do the work, they're there to process those applications.

Prioritizing young people and their education are some of the smartest ways governments can invest in Manitobans. I am so happy our government sees this and is working to undo the damage and hurt years of underfunding has done to the education system, to educators, to students and to families.

Investments in physical infrastructure are an important part of ensuring opportunities are in place for young people. Schools in Lagimodière are bursting at the seams and the two new K-to-8 schools in Sage Creek are great news.

These partnerships, with Louis Riel School Division and the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine are important investments that meet the needs of our growing community.

When these schools open, child-care centres will open alongside them. The importance of a continuum of learning opportunities is valued by our government and I have to thank our ministers for ensuring this budget reflects that.

I cannot properly express how important expanding access to child care is for families. Just last week, I had a community member reach out wanting to meet. We set up a time. She's like, okay, a couple more people are going to join us. We had a table of 10 people when we ended up meeting and it was just—it just speaks to how much communities care and are invested in ensuring that there's child care available to their families and to their community.

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

When this matter is next before the House, the honourable member will have 15 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 3, 2024

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