

First Session – Forty-Third Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Social and Economic Development

Chairperson
Mike Moyes
Constituency of Riel

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	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
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Thursday, October 10, 2024

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – MLA Mike Moyes (Riel)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia)

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the committee present:

Hon. Min. Marcelino

Ms. Byram, Mr. Jackson, MLAs Kennedy, Moyes, Mr. Oxenham

Substitutions:

Hon. Min. Schmidt for Hon. Min. Marcelino at 9:43 p.m.

APPEARING:

Hon. Tracy Schmidt, MLA for Rossmere

PUBLIC PRESENTERS:

Bill 7 – The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Kyley Parker, private citizen

Tanya Palson, Manitoba Building Trades

Marc Lafond, International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 987

Victor Da Silva, Laborers' International Union of North America, Local 1258

Sean Ramsay, private citizen

Nicholas Adams, private citizen

Kyle Kalcsics, United Association, Local 254

Paul Moist, Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees

Yvette Milner, Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba

Tyler Slobogian, Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Peter Wightman, Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba

Ron Castel, private citizen

Daemien Bernhard, private citizen

Joshua Fisher, private citizen

David Grant, private citizen

Bill 9 – The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

*Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour
Susan Russell-Csanyi, Canadian Cancer Society
Patrick Tohill, Crohn's and Colitis Canada*

Bill 21 – The Public Schools Amendment Act

David Grant, private citizen

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:

Bill 7 – The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act

Ben McGillivray, private citizen

George Emery, Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association, Local 222

Ryan Sellar, International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Local 555

Robert Duarte, Ironworkers, Local 728

Joshua Lapointe, private citizen

Bill 9 – The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

Alanah Duffy, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 7 – The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act

Bill 9 – The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

Bill 21 – The Public Schools Amendment Act

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Clerk Assistant (Ms. Katerina Tefft): Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to order.

Before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I'd like to nominate MLA Moyes for Chair and MLA Kennedy for Vice-Chair.

Clerk Assistant: So we'll do the Chairperson first. MLA Moyes has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Moyes, will you please take the Chair.

The Chairperson: Our next item of business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

MLA Marcelino: Yes, I'd like to nominate MLA Kennedy for Vice-Chair.

The Chairperson: MLA Kennedy has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Kennedy is elected Vice-Chairperson.

Before proceeding with the business before the committee, I want to make everyone aware that this evening we have staff collecting footage of the Assembly's educational video series Inside the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. Our camera operator has permission from the Speaker to film from a variety of angles and so will be moving around the room. As a reminder to all of those here this evening, no other photography or video is allowed in the committee room. Thank you for your co-operation.

This meeting has been called to consider the following bills: Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act; Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act; and Bill 21, The Public Schools Amendment Act.

I would like to inform all in attendance of the provisions in our rules regarding the hour of adjournment. A standing committee meeting to consider a bill must not sit past midnight to hear public presentations or to consider clause by clause of a bill, except by unanimous consent of the committee.

Written submissions from the following persons have been received and distributed to committee members on the MLA portal and they are: Ben McGillivray, private citizen, on Bill 7; George Emery, OPCMIA Local 222, on Bill 7; Ryan Sellar, International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, on Bill 7; Robert Duarte, Ironworkers Local 728, on Bill 7; and Alanah Duffy, MS Canada, on Bill 9.

Does the committee agree to have these documents appear in the Hansard transcript of this meeting?
[Agreed]

Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I'd like to advise members of the public regarding the process for speaking in committee.

In accordance with our rules, a time limit of 10 minutes has been allotted for presentations with another five minutes allowed for questions from committee members. Questions shall not exceed thirty seconds in length, with no time limit for answers. Questions may be addressed to presenters in the following rotation: first, the minister sponsoring the bill; second, a member of the official opposition; and third, an independent member.

If a presenter is not in attendance when their name is called, they will be dropped to the bottom of the list. If the presenter is not in attendance when their name is called a second time, they will be removed from the presenters list.

Proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript. Each time someone wishes to speak, whether it be an MLA or a presenter, I first have to say the person's name. This is the signal for the Hansard recorder to turn the mics on and off.

On the topic of determining the order of public presentations, I'll also note that we do have out-of-town presenters in attendance, marked with an asterisk on the list. With these considerations in mind then, in what order does the committee wish to hear the presentations?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I would like to suggest that we hear from out-of-town in-person presenters first. And then proceed with the regular order.

The Chairperson: With these considerations in mind, is—sorry. So we will hear the presentations from out-of-town presenters first?

It's been suggested by the honourable minister Schmidt that we will hear presenters from out-of-town first, if they're in person. Is that agreed? [Agreed]

Thank you very much for your patience, we'll now proceed with public presentations.

Bill 7—The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act

The Chairperson: I will now call on Kevin Rebeck from the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

Kevin Rebeck, please proceed with your presentation.

Kevin Rebeck (Manitoba Federation of Labour): I'm Kevin Rebeck, the president for the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

Manitoba Federation of Labour is Manitoba's central labour body, representing the interests of over 30 affiliated unions and over 130,000 Manitoban workers in the public and private sectors, as well as the building trades. This includes manufacturing, government offices, retail stores, hospitals, schools, natural resources, tourism, agriculture and many others.

I'm glad to be here tonight, speaking in favour of this government making the smart, prudent decision to lift Brian Pallister's boneheaded ban on project labour agreements. PLAs are powerful tools for creating good, family-supporting jobs, which is why Brian Pallister hated them.

*(18:10)

This ban has been detrimental to good-paying, family-supporting construction jobs for Manitobans, and robbed Manitobans of the many benefits of PLAs, including strong health and safety standards, opportunities for apprentices and historically unrepresented groups of workers like women, Indigenous and BIPOC workers.

Brian Pallister's ban has flown in the face of a decades-long tradition of using project labour agreements, or PLAs, to build large public infrastructure projects in our province—a tradition started, I might add, by PC premier Duff Roblin with the building of the Red River Floodway.

PLAs have long been used across North America in the public and private sector. They are pre-hire collective bargaining agreements negotiated by project owners and workers that govern wages, benefits and other work conditions.

Project owners and workers alike benefit since the agreements support a consistent supply of high-quality labour and avoid costly work stoppages resulting from labour disputes while ensuring a strong floor for wages, training and workplace safety and health.

Often, these agreements also include commitments to ensure that the investment benefits the local economy and workforce, such as setting targets for supporting small businesses or targeting hiring efforts to economically disadvantaged communities.

These agreements benefit working families, our economy and all Manitobans who benefit from the vital infrastructure which is built to last by well-trained workers who make a decent living.

Manitoba's labour movement has been clear all along that PLAs are the right way to go because they've served Manitobans well for decades.

PLAs consistently deliver high-quality hydro dams, hospitals and other infrastructure. Work environments on these projects are complex, and dozens of employers and hundreds to thousands of workers may come in and out over a long period of time. Like a Manitoba Hydro dam, in such complex work environments, PLAs provide for stability through consistent labour standards, wages and human resource procedures and practices, all while guaranteeing there'll be no strikes or lockouts for the full duration of each project.

And while right-wing commentators and members of the opposition continue to peddle the myth that these agreements are forced unionization, under PLAs, any contractor, small or large, union or non-union, is free to bid for work. If they win a tender, they are then required to pay fair wages to their workers and pay a fair share to the cost of training workers.

But we're glad to see at least one PC MLA tell the truth during Brian Pallister's time in office. As noted in Hansard, former MLA for Midland and minister of Infrastructure, Blaine Pedersen, had the courage to say what many of his colleagues wouldn't say about PLAs. He said there is no forced unionization in a project labour agreement. In a project labour agreement, there is not a compulsion to join the union, full stop.

I would encourage members opposite to join their former colleague in seeing the light. We have seen many quality infrastructure projects in Manitoba completed on time and under budget using PLAs. In fact, the floodway expansion under the NDP government came in \$38 million under budget, demonstrating the productive value of PLAs.

With so many obvious advantages, it's clear there's truly no merit in PLAs—oh, sorry. I lost my—no merit in opposing project labour agreements. Such agreements avoid labour-related disruptions on projects using predetermined dispute resolution processes to resolve disputes on site and by prohibiting work stoppages, including strikes and lockouts. They secure the commitment of all stakeholders, employers and employees on a construction site so the project will proceed efficiently without unnecessary interruptions.

These agreements prevent the practice of multiple contractors from undercutting each other in the bidding

process by driving down wages and cutting corners on safety training and qualifications.

This race to the bottom affects those who are employed on a project through substandard wages and working conditions, but it also freezes out those contractors, including local ones, who want to employ highly qualified workers and pay them what they're worth. It disadvantages all Manitobans and their communities by robbing them of the benefits that result when Manitoba's workers are employed in well-paid, family-supporting jobs by Manitoba companies.

PLAs are also a powerful tool for providing the training and experience needed to build the skilled workforce Manitoba needs, now and into the future.

This is especially important given the fact that Manitoba is facing a skilled worker shortage. To have any hope of addressing this skilled labour shortage, government needs to be doing everything it can to train up Manitobans and ensure there's work for them to build their careers right here at home.

The Pallister PC approach of failing to train, cutting apprenticeship opportunities and forcing Manitobans to find work in other provinces because of a lack of investment was the wrong approach.

Because they contain requirements to train workers and provide apprenticeship opportunities, PLAs not only provide workers with the skills and qualifications needed on a specific project, they also provide skills and qualifications workers can build on and use throughout their careers. That benefits those workers, Manitoba's employers and our economy.

PLAs often contain specific requirements for training and hiring workers who are underrepresented in the trades, including Indigenous and women workers. Those underrepresented groups are key to building the skilled workforce our province needs now and going forward. And while PLAs ensure a strong floor for wages and training, they also ensure strong health and safety on the job to make sure that all workers come home safely at the end of the day.

The MFL whole-heartedly supports the repeal of this regressive piece of legislation. Manitoba workers, families and communities will be better off for it now and into the future, and we look forward to the government bringing back the tried-and-true model that PLAs provide to Manitoba, to benefit from public investments and infrastructure.

The MFL was encouraged to read that Bill 7 will bring back good-paying union jobs to public projects

in the government's news release announcing the bill in March. And now that Brian Pallister's ban on PLAs is being lifted, we'd like to see government create a framework to harness the power of PLAs and use Manitoba's building trades union labour to build Manitoba.

We know that government will have a number of projects on the horizon, like the next phase of Winnipeg's North End Sewage Treatment Plant, the wind farms that form the centrepiece of the government's recently released green energy plan and more.

Lifting Brian Pallister's ban provides the perfect opportunity for the provincial government to start building with reliable, local Manitoba building trades union workers once again.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Rebeck, for your presentation, again, and thank you for the MFL's continued expertise and advocacy for workers across our province. I have two questions if we have time.

The first is that unions have a safety advantage compared to non-unionized places. Can you speak a little bit about why you think unions have that?

And, secondly, if you could talk about the cost related to PLAs and why they would be worth it in the long run.

The Chairperson: Please proceed.

Floor comment: I think you need to say my name, right?

The Chairperson: Kevin—please proceed, Kevin Rebeck.

K. Rebeck: Yes, to speak to the safety issue, it is a demonstratable fact—and I can pull up statistics—but that unionized workers are safer work environments. Largely that's because (a) they're able to elect representatives to serve on their health and safety committee, and they tend to have a dispute-resolution process for grievances or to raise issues, and knowing that they have someone to back them up if they want to raise safety concerns or issues to be able to make sure that they're taken seriously and dealt with and have processes to do that.

So union workers, workers with a collective agreement, workers with a PLA are better off for having stronger processes and advocates to help them ensure that their rights are protected at work and that they're able to finish their shift and go home at the end of it safely and whole.

In addition to that, I think you asked about, kind of, the long-term benefits of this. Well, we've reaped the long-term benefits of PLAs for many years on projects that are often done on—under their deadline time frame and under budget. We've seen that with the floodway expansion. We've seen that with other project labour agreements as well.

Having that stable workforce for the life of a project, knowing that we're supporting good family-supporting jobs enriches our economy, helps families and Manitobans get ahead and ensures that all local businesses can apply on a level playing field without just trying to bid it by undercutting workers' wages or cutting corners on safety.

So there's long-term benefits and immediate ones for Manitobans.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Do other members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Thank you very much for your time, Kevin Rebeck.

I'd like to call on Nicholas Adams, please.

* (18:20)

I'd like to call on Mr. Shawn Wood.

I'd like to call on Mr. Connor Ketchen.

I'd like to call on Mrs. Lois Ruston.

I'd like to call on Mr. Kyley Parker.

Mr. Kyley Parker, please proceed with your presentation.

Kyley Parker (Private Citizen): Hi. My name is Kyley Parker. I was born and raised in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

Just to give you a little bit of background of my experience in the construction industry, when I was 18 years old I joined the Canadian Armed Forces, and I spent six years as a tank driver. And when I got out of the army, I was in Alberta at the time, and I went up to the oil patch and I started working in the open pit mines in Alberta, non-union. And that's where I cut my teeth in construction, and I wound up in Manitoba pursuing a blaster's licence. So I used explosives to—

in mining and in industrial projects, and that brought me up to the Keeyask generating station.

For four and a half years I worked on that project, so I've worked non-union, union, on project labour agreements and not under project labour agreements. A little bit about my background.

PLAs are a powerful tool used by the government to ensure that Manitobans get the most out of our public dollars that are funding or helping to fund construction projects in the province. Really they are a way to maximize our investment when we're spending our money in Manitoba.

A construction project can be much more than a contractor completing the job and moving on. By utilizing a PLA, the government can ensure that we are training our next generation of journeypeople by requiring certain apprenticeship numbers on the job.

So most jobs, you know, yes, you're going to have apprentices on them, but there's nothing mandating to have X amount of apprentices on the job to make sure that we're building the next generation of workforce. Because we have a lot of journeypeople that are retiring, and we need to train people big time, and we need to build up that pool.

And a PLA is a perfect way to do it, because you're going to have the numbers, and they're going to be reported on. So it's a way to make sure that we're training. And those folks are getting their levels and they're moving up, and they're not getting stuck as a level 1 or a level 2 for years and years and not moving along, right? So that's one example.

PLAs can use to ensure equity hiring, to make sure that folks that traditionally aren't part of construction, we're going to bring them in. And a PLA is a—is the best way to do that, because we can have equity hiring, but then we can also ensure a workplace that's welcoming, respectful for these folks that traditionally aren't construction workers.

And, you know, when I see when I—what I mean when I say that is, you know, on a project labour agreement, you have representation, and it's well used. I was a job steward up on the Keeyask project and helped a lot of folks through tough times when they were at work. And that was part of their membership, being a union member. That was part of my job, on top of my regular duties up there.

And we're—and we need to invite those folks in, because we, again, we need more and more people in the construction industry, and we need women

especially in construction. And there's a lot of barriers there that have been there for a long time that keep women out of construction.

And under the PLA, the project—the Province can mandate how we're going to run a construction project. And that means that you're going to have bathrooms for females, males and others as well. It's hard enough to get bathrooms on a construction project most of the time just for use in general, let alone having them there for, you know, gendered. And the people don't realize it, that's a big thing that keeps women out of the field and out of the trades.

And that's just little things, but the Province can dictate it. It's up to you, right? It's not up to the contractor or whether the contractor wants to agree with it, right? That's the power of the PLA when you're on the job site.

PLAs can require, through language in the agreement, that Manitobans will get priority hiring, with emphasis on real opportunities for locals when hiring and not just job numbers by sticking them with the worst—least-skilled jobs on the site. Again, that's utilizing your power and making the collective—or, sorry, the project labour agreement the way that we want to see the business done here in Manitoba.

And you know, in my experience, and I think other people will—you know, can agree with it, that when we're doing work and it's on treaty land or it's on traditional lands, like Keeyask was, there's often quotas of having to hire locals, but that doesn't mean they have to have good opportunities and good jobs. Most of those folks end up, you know, in house-keeping, working in the kitchen and they're not getting an opportunity for a trade if they want and to continue on in a career in construction. Once the project's done, it shuts down, the camp's gone, they're out of their job, and they don't really have anything to work with. And that's gone on a long time.

So we can strengthen that where, you know, the Province is saying we have to hire this many people, but you also have to have them, this many people, if they want it, in the trades, in an apprenticeship, to build that career, not just have a job while the project's there.

So that's, again, it's how powerful it can be for you.

They offer great, you know, labour stability through the project, right, no strikes, no lockouts for the duration of the project, very straightforward. Manitobans, they allow Manitobans to earn good

wages, health benefits and pensions for their retirement, which, again, is great for our local economy.

Folks out there need good-paying jobs right now. Everyone's behind. If you're working-class people, a lot of folks don't have two pennies to rub together at the end of the pay period. That's just reality right now. So when folks are working dangerous jobs and working long hours, that should mean something in their bank account.

Removing wages from the bidding process: so a contractor has to rely on its efficiencies, productivity and quality to make money on the job and not by making money off of the backs of workers. That's a big part of what appeal they can provide to Manitoba workers.

High safety standards, so Manitobans don't feel pressured to work unsafe or intimidated for reporting a safety issue. Again, it's factual: union jobs are safer, all right, because people aren't pressured and they don't feel like they have to do something that they may lose their job or they may lose overtime or they may have a punitive action taken against them by a foreman or a superintendent because they got in trouble because they had an unsafe work area and they reported or they told them to do something unsafe; if they weren't going to do it, then they were going to, you know, be punished. That's a reality. If you don't believe that, then you haven't worked on a construction site.

Project labour agreements are a way for our government to extract maximum value and opportunity out of a construction project. And in today's economy, Manitoba needs to make sure that we're doing everything we can to provide good, safe jobs and taking a different approach to construction, something that isn't just dollars and cents and where labour isn't just a line item when someone's bidding on the project.

So I appreciate your time, and that's the end of my presentation.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Parker, for your presentation today and for coming out.

Just wanted to let you know that your comments the last time you were here during the implementation of this bill, the first time, were actually quite moving for me to read. You did say something and alluded to it again today—then alluded to it again today regarding the ability of folks to come in to a project as maybe

like a entry-level position, and then you said that after a few years, by the end of the project they already levelled up to some other next level for apprenticeship or even finished the requirements for their trade.

Can you give me an example of how something like this can happen over the length of time of a PLA or for the length of time of this agreement?

Floor Comment: Sorry, I couldn't hear the last part. I have a cold and my ears are a little plugged right now. I'm sorry.

MLA Marcelino: Can you please give me an example of somebody that you know, if you can mention, or an example of how this could be that somebody would have, like, an entry-level position to begin with and then by the end of the project they're already at the next level for their trade designation. *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Just one second.

Kyley Parker.

K. Parker: Sorry. Yes, on the Keeyask project, an ex-member, his name was Kyle Ott *[phonetic]*, and he was a labourer.

* (18:30)

And labourer's a hard job, especially when you're—pour a lot of concrete up on a dam. And Kyle *[phonetic]* wanted to do something a little bit different and not be on the end of a jackhammer for 12 hours a day, so he wanted to become an apprentice with the carpenters.

And on that job site, because of the numbers that were needed, you could approach a different trade and you could go, I want to, you know, transfer and I want to become a carpenter. And because of that project, there was civil work on that project. For six years, seven years, there was carpenters on there.

Kyle *[phonetic]* left that project as a Red Seal carpenter because he worked up there the whole time. And you know, that's carried on. I'm still friends with Kyle *[phonetic]* and, you know, his career's taken him many other places but, you know, that's one example of that happening.

And another example I have is a good friend of mine from Nelson House, Stu Francois *[phonetic]*, started working on these projects as being a local. Wuskwatim was his first dam that he worked on. And started off as a GL and got put on to a drill and blast crew. And through Wuskwatim and through Keeyask, Stu *[phonetic]* worked on drill and blast, and Stu became a licensed blaster.

A lot of people don't realize, like, on that project, out of the 2,500 craft workers that are up there, only the blasters are licensed by the Province to do their job. Because we're detonating sometimes 100,000 kilograms of explosives, and we can really send things sideways.

So that was another person through those project labour agreements that got equity—was first on the board to get hired, because Stu *[phonetic]* was from Nelson House and Wuskwatim was on the traditional lands of Nelson House and got set on that path and—as a successful trade as a blaster.

So there was two, sorry.

The Chairperson: Before I go on, just a reminder that questions—to the members of the committee that questions are to be 30 seconds. So, just a friendly reminder.

Are there other members of the committee that have questions?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, Mr. Parker.

This is maybe more of a comment, but I just want to say thank you for sharing your experiences and for presenting here at committee tonight and taking time out of your evening. So I just want to share and express my appreciation for that.

So thank you, Mr. Parker.

The Chairperson: Any other questions?

Thank you very much for your presentation.

Bill 9—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

The Chairperson: Okay, moving on to Bill 9. I'd like to call Kevin Rebeck.

Kevin Rebeck, please proceed with your presentation.

Kevin Rebeck (Manitoba Federation of Labour): I'm Kevin Rebeck, back again, president of the federation of labour still. And we still represent over 100,000 unionized workers in the public and private sector.

I'm here tonight to commend this government for making a simple and straightforward update to our Employment Standards Code to ensure that the code aligns with federal employment insurance benefits, EI, and that very sick and injured workers will have job-protected leave when they need to access federal EI sickness benefits, which provides for up to 26 weeks

of financial assistance if workers are unable to work with medical reasons.

And while this legislation fix is very simple, it's taken far too long to make because of inaction by the previous PC government followed up by the disgusting decision to delay this legislation made by the PC opposition last spring. As a result, Manitoban workers have waited almost two years for the ability to access full EI sickness benefits without fear of losing their job.

Historically, the Labour Management Review Committee, which is made up of employer and union representatives, has recommended that employment–Manitoba's Employment Standards Code align unpaid job-protected leave provisions with the duration of federal EI benefits.

This has been standard practice because unions and employers that make up the LMRC have always agreed that our provincial laws should make sure that workers are fully able to access federal EI benefits they are entitled to without fear of losing their job for doing so.

In December of 2022, nearly two years ago now, the federal government expanded the available EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to a maximum of 26 weeks. Shortly after that, the co-chairs of the Labour Management Review Committee, myself and management co-chair Peter Wightman, wrote to then-minister of Labour Jon Reyes to ask him to follow the standard practice of aligning our Employment Standards Code to ensure that workers who access the full EI benefit have job-protected unpaid leave to do so.

I stress that we wrote to him because the minister's office didn't seem to notice or care that our Employment Standards Code was now out of step with the length of time of EI sickness benefits.

Months later, in May, the minister wrote to LMRC saying that yes, he would like our advice on how to proceed, even though we had already recommended updating the code. We took that opportunity to recommend that to him again.

And then we waited. And waited. But unfortunately, the PC government decided against making this simple, straightforward legislative amendment as quickly as possible. I guess very sick, injured and vulnerable workers in Manitoba just weren't a priority for them despite the consensus advice of labour and business that they do something about the gap in our legislation.

Unfortunately, the previous minister of Labour, and frankly, the entire PC government, wasn't interested in following that standard practice and listening to the consensus recommendations of employers and labour. Instead, they've left sick and vulnerable workers twisting in the wind for almost two years while they dragged their feet and delayed a very simple, straightforward way to make sure that workers didn't lose their job for taking EI sickness benefits beyond 17 weeks,

To make matters worse, now that they're in opposition, the PCs decided to delay this bill further, claiming that consultation was needed. Well, news flash to the PC caucus and the former minister of Labour: consultation on this bill already happened with unions and employers. We sent our joint consensus recommendation over a year and a half ago, and it was ignored.

I'm disgusted that the PC caucus decided to hold up Bill 9 because of all these PC delay tactics. It's possible for workers—it's—was possible for workers to access the full 26-week EI sickness benefits but still be terminated by their employers after their leave lasted more than 17 weeks.

So thank you to this government, and particularly to the current Minister of Labour, for moving ahead on Labour Management Review Committee's advice from a year and a half ago. Sick and vulnerable workers will have more job security as a result.

And to the PC opposition, I hope that you can reflect on what you've done and think twice the next time you consider playing politics with the lives and livelihoods of working Manitobans, especially their most vulnerable.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thanks again, Mr. Rebeck, for your presentation and for your time here today.

You know, during I think it was first reading and maybe second reading, members of the opposition brought up in debate issues like not enough consultation with small-business owners, perhaps. I'm not sure if they knew about what the Labour Management Review Committee is.

Can you maybe speak to any kind of discussions or any kind of concerns those folks might have had?

I know that, ultimately, you had a consensus decision, which was, you know, really, really wonderful.

But can you speak a little bit about that?

K. Rebeck: Sure, the Labour Management Review Committee has existed for a long time under various governments. It's made up of representatives from labour and business. It includes the representative from the chamber of commerce among other groups and represents the broad view of business.

They have an internal process by which they consult and deal with business owners and leaders. We come together and try to build consensus as much as possible. We have a very good track record of finding reasonable, level-headed solutions to move forward. And on the issue of something as simple as making sure that when people are accessing a legitimate federal government benefit that's been provided to them, that their job isn't at risk, has never been a debate point.

In fact, it's been one that we've had one discussion, said let me double check with my group if there's a concern. Business has gone back, come back right away and said no, this is about as simple and straightforward as it gets. And we don't think workers should lose their jobs by accessing employment leave that is provided and covered for them by the federal government.

That's what happened in this instance. We initiated it because we weren't asked. Then when we were asked, we said, we've told you already, this is what our recommendation is. Please implement an act on it. And it—not only did it fall on deaf ears, but it seems to continually to be some sort of delay for a consultation. With whom, I'm not sure.

* (18:40)

When they—the government of the day, they didn't ask anyone else. They only asked LMRC. LMRC gave them advice, and they chose to ignore it and delay it yet again.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Do other members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

All right. Seeing none, thank you very much, Kevin, for your presentation.

Okay, just to be clear for everyone, on Bill 9, we do have an out-of-town—an out-of-province presenter, but they are on Zoom. That's Mr. Patrick Tohill.

Bill 7—The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act

(Continued)

The Chairperson: So we're going to actually go back to Bill 7, and I'd like to call Ms. Tanya Palson to present.

Tanya Palson, please proceed.

Tanya Palson (Manitoba Building Trades): Good evening, everyone. My name is Tanya Palson. I'm the executive director for the Manitoba Building Trades council, here as a representative of the Allied Hydro Council of Manitoba as well.

Manitoba Building Trades has 13 affiliated construction unions, representing skilled trades workers across our province. I am pleased to be here on behalf of those members to speak in favour of Bill 7, which will repeal the ban on project labour agreements or PLAs.

When the ban was put in place under the Brian Pallister government, it was done so in a direct and targeted effort to harm building trades unions. But the reality is, it has harmed our provincial construction industry labour pool as a whole. This ban is the only one of its kind in North America, and has had devastating impacts on work force development, labour cost certainty and employment standard enforcement on provincial infrastructure projects.

PLAs are a very common tool in construction and are regularly used by both public and private entities to ensure cost certainty for project owners, while also maximizing those training opportunities, local hiring opportunities and ensuring uniform employment standards on job sites.

Many of the largest infrastructure projects in Manitoba's history—critical infrastructure that Manitobans rely on and use every day, mind you—were built under a project labour agreement. Manitoba Hydro itself had the longest project labour agreement in Canada's history, until it expired in 2023 under the previous government.

The Burntwood/Nelson Agreement, in partnership with the Allied Hydro Council of Manitoba, successfully employed tens of thousands of Manitobans on major hydro installations. These projects have placed Manitoba as the leading producer of clean, renewable energy and included many generating stations, including most recently the Keeyask generating station.

PLAs have also been integral on delivering on those larger moving projects beyond hydro, like the

floodway expansion, which not—which was not only completed early, but also on budget.

PLAs are time-tested and provenly effective policy enforcement tools for ensuring priority of local hiring and diversity hiring targets, providing apprenticeship and training opportunities and workforce development oversight planning, providing all workers with collective agreement rates and industry-leading benefits, ensuring cost certainty for government and stabilizing access to skilled trades labour.

Further, the Province, as the project owner, was guaranteed access to labour supply and standardized dispute resolution mechanisms so that no strikes, lockouts or shortage of skilled labour would prevent work from being completed on time and on budget.

These agreements provide taxpayer funded projects, all of these benefits and more, and Manitobans deserve to know that their tax dollars are used efficiently and are benefitting our communities and our workers.

Some of you might have heard, and as a—you know, a phrase in favour on the opposition, that PLAs are forced unionization or that they limit the number of contractors who can bid on a project. I'm pleased to inform you that these statements are categorically untrue. If you don't believe me, you could ask the Supreme Court. They refused to hear Merit Contractors' forced unionization claims case, which was the impetus for this ridiculous ban in the first place.

In Manitoba's long history of successfully using PLAs to employ and train Manitobans, there has been no rapid increase in non-union contractors being organized. In fact, I challenge you to find a case of any contractor who has been forced to unionize during—or performing work—sorry—during or after performing work under a Manitoba project labour agreement.

And why is this? It's because PLAs have always prioritized labour stability for projects.

The Burntwood/Nelson Agreement specifically restricted the union's right to organize a contractor on a PLA project. Other PLAs have gone further, including a cooling-off period where the unions relinquish the right to organize those contractors for a set number of years after a project has concluded.

Workers under a PLA are not required to stay within the union in any capacity. During a PLA project, all workers receive equal prevailing union wages and benefits that are industry leading and further support our healthy Manitoba tax base. They receive represen-

tation, ensuring that they are treated fairly with good and safe working conditions.

PLAs support open and fair tendering so that high-quality contractors are not forced to work down to a lowest cost bid model. The lowest cost model puts our local construction industry at risk from bad industry actors moving in and being awarded our publicly owned projects with subpar workers from out of province, and it's happening every single day right now.

The evaluation of bids should not be based—the evaluation of bids should be based on quality and expertise and not based on who can pay their skilled workforce the least. Large infrastructure projects built without a PLA continue to give Manitoba taxpayers the most grief.

For example, the South End Water Pollution Control Centre was built on a lowest cost bid. What that meant in reality is at the time when hundreds of Manitoba construction workers were coming out of work because Keeyask has wound down, the cornerstone piece of infrastructure in Winnipeg was being built by out-of-province workers.

Insult to injury is that the work was so poor in quality, that much of it continues to be redone. It is years behind on schedule and hundreds of thousands of dollars over budget. Had the project been tendered with a project labour agreement, the jobs would've been local, the work would've been higher quality and taxpayers would not be paying for preventable cost overruns.

I want to circle back to the point that I made at the beginning. I stated that the ban on project labour agreements was harmful not only to building trade unions but to the industry as a whole. That is because PLAs are critical for ensuring Manitoba's workers have the opportunity to develop their skills on a Manitoba job site.

When we know Manitoban workers have the job, we can facilitate—we, as in the unions, we facilitate wraparound supports that retain the workers and that help them navigate their training, that advance their apprenticeship, that get them that Red Seal job, so when that job winds down, as every construction job does, they're ready to go onto the next one in a highly qualified position.

This is how we train the next generation and grow our labour pool in a critical skill shortage.

Manitoba Building Trades is thrilled to see that this government has moved so fast on this, that the Bill 7 will repeal the ban on PLAs. We know that this government wants to create good jobs for the Manitobans who built the infrastructure we rely on every day, and this is an important first step.

The only real way to reverse the negative impacts the ban on PLAs had on local jobs, project quality and training opportunities for Manitoba is to legislate a prescriptive framework going forward. This way, Manitobans can know that their tax dollars are supporting fair and open tendering on our province's major infrastructure projects.

So for the good of my members, for all construction workers and the industry labour pool as a whole, I hope we can count on your support for this bill regardless of partisan stripe.

And I thank you for the opportunity to present today. And I've been working on this file—I started that—the building trades in 2018. That was not a great year for PLAs in our province. And so I'm really keen to take any questions that you have today.

And thank you, again, for letting me come and present.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, Ms. Palson, for joining us today and for your continued advocacy and leadership for the 13 construction unions that you represent.

My question is in regards to our skilled labour shortages that we currently have. Let's say our government wants to, you know, have a project and we really want to prioritize this project—this is very important for Manitobans to get this project done.

How does a PLA help get that labour that we already have this shortage for to get to that project and make sure that becomes a priority and it gets delivered?

T. Palson: A couple of factors, one being where, you know, workers will follow where the money and the work is.

* (18:50)

The Province is the major employer of ICI infrastructure in the province. Paying unionized prevailing wages and benefits is a great start to attract workers to a project.

Beyond that, the co-ordination and foresight that comes when you know a project's going to be a project labour agreement, that's when you work with the—like, on a project management agreement with the building trades unions, and we source that labour. We're a labour supply sourcer for these major projects, and we work on a labour supply model together.

The Chairperson: Do other members of the committee have questions?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Just a comment.

Ms. Palson, thank you for taking time out of your evening and presenting your—making your presentation here tonight.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Would you like to respond, Ms. Palson?

Other questions?

MLA Marcelino: Ms. Palson, I'm wondering about what a PLA actually entails, like, for you, as the person that would be negotiating it. Like, how complicated is this? We've heard Mr. Rebeck talk about how there could be thousands of workers, tens of different types of trades or more, and then all the different working conditions and set conditions.

Like, how complicated is this?

T. Palson: Any major project—and this is why it's used by both public and private—it's complicated to staff up.

It's—there's dozens, if not, you know, like, 50-different-plus occupations on a single project, especially on a lot of these major projects. These are rural and remote projects when we're talking about hydro dams.

The—a project labour agreement is essentially, as Mr. Rebeck said, is a pre-hire collective agreement. You know, the Burntwood/Nelson Agreement is in existence since the 1960s and just defaulted in 2023. That's, you know, a 100-plus-page document.

But you—I would err on the side of it is complicated to staff up a project. Doing it without a prescriptive framework, without a legal framework, without site representatives and union representatives on site and a single mandate, a single wage schedule, rules, regulations, dispute resolutions, lock strikeout bans. It's complicated, for sure. But staffing up a large project is complicated, so I can't imagine doing one—and we've seen the faults that happen when you do one without it.

And so it is a labour—it's an extensive labour relations exercise, but doing a, you know, billion-plus-dollar project without one is, you know, fairly unheard of and unadvisable.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Are there any other questions for the presenter?

All right, seeing none, thank you very much for your time.

I will now call on Mr. Marc Lafond.

Marc Lafond (International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 987): Good evening, honourable ministers. My name is Marc Lafond. I am the business manager of the Operating Engineers Local 987. We represent crane operators, stationary engineers, maintenance workers, heavy equipment operators and pipeliners, just to name a few. Our organization is 1,300 people strong, and I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to speak on Bill 7 on the repealing of the project labour agreements.

When the ban on project labour agreements was proposed in 2018, it's my belief that it was an ideological decision. The government of the day could have easily chosen not to participate in them, but instead, they chose to ban it. This was the first piece of legislation that I'm aware of that was passed in North America.

Project labour agreements are pre-hiring agreements covering all crafts, large-to-medium-size construction projects and establish terms and conditions for employment. The main purpose of PLAs is to promote predictability, co-ordination, efficiencies on projects.

Construction projects are highly skilled, labour intensive industries. The success of the construction project requires significant co-ordination amongst various contractors, and dependable, qualified workforce that are trained on specific crafts.

A PLA is a management tool that institutes uniform work and harmonizes work to improve productivity, provides access and tools to skilled labour and reduces chances of labour shortages. PLAs can produce positive outcomes, many of them include apprenticeships, individuals hired under represented groups and prioritize local hiring. A PLA establishes protocols for resolving labour disputes without resorting to strikes and lockouts. PLAs typically include provisions that ban strikes and lockouts. Project labour agreements increase investments in registered apprenticeships and reduce on-the-job accidents and injuries.

PLAs were initially concentrated around large, complex, very long and often rural projects. However, in the 1990s when the experience—the industry experienced a boom with low unemployment, construction users demanded more skilled workers. PLAs emerged as a tool to providing users of PLAs with uninterrupted labour supply of qualified craft workers and for expanding registered apprenticeship programs and invest in training.

Now, project labour agreements are used around the world on all projects, not just large ones. Non-union contractors could choose to bid on projects where PLAs are required. Non-union contractors who choose to bid on PLAs do not become union, either during the project or after the project. Workers covered under PLAs sometimes have to join a union to participate in that project, however in other instances they don't. They pay agency fees, called Rand. So they're not union members.

And the Rand formula is based upon paying fair dues to the union in order to represent those non-union workers—or union workers, for that matter—in the administration of that collective agreement. Union contractors invest in job quality and worker training.

Survey data of the Associated General Contractors of America, AGC, includes representatives of 1,800 union contractors and 3,900 non-union contractors. And the survey revealed that labour shortages are much less severe in 'ugiu' segment of the industry. Union contractors are 21 per cent less likely to experience delays in project completion, 27 per cent less likely to report that their local pipeline supply of well-trained craft workers is poor and 13 less—13 per cent less likely to lose their workers to other industries.

Project labour agreements have been applied in public projects since the 1930s consistently around the world. PLAs in the public sector have been used on schools, road construction, affordable housing, hydro and building projects. Many examples of successful PLAs have been used right here in this province: Flin Flon, the 'flhoor' project; Pine Falls, the Tembec project; 'minnedoska'—Minnedosa, the Husky project; Keeyask; east-side road; Enbridge Line 3 replacement, a pipeline project; and the list goes on and on.

Project labour agreements also have a long history in the private sector. Corporations around the world, like Apple, Intel, Honda, General Motors, BP, Proctor & Gamble, Walmart, Disney, all use project labour agreements. So I guess the question is, if they use it, why don't we?

Project agreements are a de-risking mechanism. At the same time, PLAs ensure market-competitive wages and benefits, skilled workforce, uninterrupted supply of labour, safety standards, robust workforce development commitments that create real pathways and timely completion of critical infrastructure on budget and on time.

OE 987 is pleased by this government's commitment for repealing the ban. As responsible stewards, you are ensuring that infrastructure projects get the best bang for their buck. You are ensuring that Manitobas–Manitobans are offered work on the Manitoba projects and that those projects provide provisions for safe working conditions, good wages and benefits and opportunities for all people.

I'm happy to take any questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Lafond, for coming here and letting us know about how your organization feels about how important PLAs have been to you, to your work.

* (19:00)

Can you please speak a little bit about how the ban affected your members?

M. Lafond: Thank you for the question.

Well, I mean, it did have material impact to our organization because, like one of the previous speakers spoke about, I mean, Keeyask came offline, and we have an—a work board—an out-of-work board so people get dispatched out to projects. And currently in one of our divisions, not so much in the other divisions, but there's still a couple hundred people on the out-of-work list.

So those people are waiting, they're phoning me all the time, they're hoping that projects come on stream, they're hoping that project labour re-agreements come back so that they can go to work.

So it—there is a material impact, yes.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Do other members of the committee have questions?

All right, thank you very much for your time.

I will now call on Mr. Victor Da Silva.

Mr. Da Silva, when you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Victor Da Silva (Laborers' International Union of North America, Local 1258): Hello, everyone. My name is Victor Da Silva. I'm the business manager and secretary-treasurer of LIUNA Local 1258. I represent construction craft workers, concrete finishers, mason tenders and labourers in many different sectors in the construction industry. And I am here to speak in favour of Bill 7 and the repeal of the ban of the project labour agreements, also known as PLAs.

You'll hear from those who oppose this bill that PLAs are forced unionization or it drives up the cost of projects. But there's evidence of any employee–employer, sorry—being unionized while working under a PLA here in Manitoba.

The term forced unionization is nothing more than a dog whistle for: we don't want to be forced to pay benefits; we don't want to be forced to contribute to workers' pensions; we don't want to be forced to be held accountable for working conditions; we don't want to be forced to hire local workers first.

There have been many projects built in Manitoba that were covered by PLAs, such as the Husky ethanol plant in Minnedosa, the floodway expansion, Keeyask, Wuskwatim, the east-side road and Bipole III, just to name a few. And yet no employers were unionized while working on those projects.

PLAs did do is provide owners with a project that will secure labour cost for the duration of that project. Unlike major cost overruns that took place at the south end water pollution control project and at the Winnipeg police station in downtown Winnipeg, and now, from my understanding, at the North End water 'pollu' station—pollution control station, project labour agreements provide owners with the security that their projects will be built at a higher quality. That is because cheap labour is no longer the deciding factor on who gets awarded the projects.

With PLAs, one of the largest factors in securing the project is the contractor's ability to do the work efficiently with their highly skilled workforce and their management and ability to do that project. This provides a higher quality product for the client.

PLAs also provide owners with the labour security so that their projects will be completed on time, with language in most PLAs that state there shall be no strikes or lockouts for the life of the PLA. We have all witnessed how labour unrest can affect productivity and the economy here in Manitoba.

What PLAs also provide is an opportunity for Manitobans to work in their own province. PLAs often have hiring structure that outlines and obligates the hiring local residents prior to seeking employees from other provinces, or even worse, cheap temporary foreign workers who are often taken advantage of.

This is a huge economic benefit to the province, as dollars earned in Manitoba stay in Manitoba. These hiring provisions often provide career opportunities for many individuals in under-represented groups, of—by providing them with a safe—with safety training, skill development and pathways to apprenticeship which give them a career in the trades.

So what are we actually talking about here? We're talking about individuals who want to go to work and provide for their families in an—in one of the most dangerous and physically demanding professions there is. In all, it is our responsibility to make sure that these hard-working tradespeople who build our vital infrastructure are cared for and in a manner that they're deserve, and PLAs do that.

In conclusion, PLAs are not just beneficial for Manitoban—Manitoba's economy and the owners of these projects who will end up with a top-quality product upon completion; it benefits hard-working people of Manitoba, and anyone who opposes this bill only cares about their own interests and not what is best for Manitoba.

Thank you for your time.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Da Silva, for coming here and presenting. I understand that LIUNA has a lot of members that are newcomers and other types of vulnerable workers.

Could you maybe speak a little bit about, in your opinion, how a PLA would protect the rights of workers like this?

The Chairperson: Mr.—sorry, Mr. Da Silva.

V. Da Silva: We do represent a lot of newcomers here to Canada. Labour—the labour trade is a very entry-level trade, so a lot of individuals will come into this.

But the trade itself is a Red Seal apprenticeable trade, which gives them a great opportunity to go and skill—and get their skillsets, go through apprenticeship and now make it into a career where now they can now

make a good livable wage, provide for their family, and it's a great opportunity for new Canadians.

PLAs always have structures that talk about apprenticeships, and that is vital.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Do other members of the committee have questions?

Ms. Byram: Again, thank you, Mr. Da Silva for coming and making your presentation and sharing your insight to your organization, and appreciate your time and sharing your story.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Are there other questions for the presenter?

All right, seeing none, thank you very much for your time.

I will now call on Mr. Sean Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay, when you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Sean Ramsay (Private Citizen): Good evening. My name is Sean Ramsay. I'm a Red Seal carpenter, and I hold my vocational teacher education diploma. I'm here to speak in favour of Bill 7, which will repeal the ban on project labour agreements.

Historically, these agreements have been supported by both Conservative and New Democratic parties in the province of Manitoba. In fact, former Conservative Premier Duff Roblin brought in project labour agreements to illustrate that reputable contractors with a highly trained and skilled workforce were paramount to having critical infrastructure projects being completed. This was a value-for-dollar-spent philosophy.

Project labour agreements offer many things: standardized wages, benefits, overtime schedules, equity hiring provisions, training and local hiring provisions among other things. I would like to speak to you from a perspective of training.

As a certified tradesperson and a vocational teacher, my journey allowed me to teach on several First Nations communities in Manitoba. I saw first-hand how many of the projects on these communities failed to employ community residents in any meaningful way.

Some would secure jobs, but my experience didn't show me the advancement and career opportunities that an apprenticeship would provide existed at any great degree. It is the advancement of career oppor-

tunities through programs like apprenticeships that benefit hard-working Manitobans across the province. This allows them to increase their economic well-being for themselves and for their families. The economic well-being includes, for the present, by way of a living wage; and in the future, by advancement in the trade and contributing to well-managed pensions.

The projects in northern Manitoba such as Keeyask, Keewatinook and Wuskwatim offered significant training opportunities for First Nation people and Manitoba residents because of provisions and the PLA which govern those projects.

* (19:10)

The failure to offer careers in—as an apprentice are not unique to northern Manitoba and First Nations communities in my experience. I worked as an apprenticeship training co-ordinator for Apprenticeship Manitoba in the early 2000s. I recall many similar conversations where people were working in the trade, but their employer would not offer them an apprenticeship. The promise of the apprenticeship was there after a probationary period, but all too often the apprenticeship never materialized.

Throughout my training career, I encouraged tradespeople I came to know to expand their experience and get employed with companies that would invest in them by entering into an apprenticeship agreement.

The opportunity to do this is the very thing that many projects under a PLA offer. It mitigates labour being treated as a disposable resource. When a Manitoba tradesperson is working on a project, they are investing in the company. In turn, this company is creating wealth for itself and the client that owns the finished product. Agreements like PLAs create mechanisms to ensure the wealth building is a reciprocal agreement where the contractor invests in the workers by way of apprenticeship agreements.

If the Manitoba government is investing in a project, they too are contributing to the wealth of the company and the client. I don't believe it's an unrealistic ask to have a PLA to ensure there is, among other things, an assurance that there is an investment in hard-working Manitobans' careers through apprenticeship opportunities.

The avenue for apprenticeship is key, in my opinion. Many of the trades in Manitoba are voluntary to participate in. As such, there is no onus on the company to invest in training the worker through an apprenticeship and ultimately securing their Red Seal. An investment in these workers in—is in the best

interest of the province, as it will develop a highly trained, highly skilled work force. Having a PLA can ensure that investment in a project sees a return on investment by the way of the training it provides to Manitobans who go on to have successful careers in the trades.

The shortage of skilled tradespeople in Manitoba and in Canada is well documented. The ability to address this through the use of PLAs is one strategy that is needed to increase the number of Manitobans entering the trades and becoming trained in them.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay, for coming today to present.

I have a question. I just don't really know too much about this topic. Why wouldn't an employer want to take on an apprentice?

S. Ramsay: I don't know that I can speak for all employers as to why they wouldn't, but some of the reasons that I have heard is, obviously, there is a graduation in wages as they become more skilled and advance through their levels. So while you may pay someone who is an unskilled labourer, you know, \$17 an hour, not classify them as an apprentice, and you can keep that person keeping working at that wage for, you know, two, three, four years.

Once you sign the apprenticeship agreement, there are legislated mechanisms to ensure that once the apprentice completes training plus on-the-job experience, their wage goes up. So each level, their wage is going to go up.

So where you could keep an apprentice—you know, where you could keep an unskilled worker at—and I'm just picking an arbitrary figure—\$17 an hour for three years, if that same person is an apprentice, then by the time they complete their third year, their wage could be somewhere around \$24, \$25, \$26 an hour.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Do other members of the committee have questions?

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay, for taking the time to present tonight.

We're hearing a lot about the apprenticeship, and I'm just wanting to ask: Is there enough journey-persons there to take on the one-to-one ratio, and what does that look like?

S. Ramsay: So again, I don't work for Apprenticeship Manitoba, so I don't know. My experience would tell me yes, there is, because there are other mechanisms within apprenticeship regulation that the—it's not the journey-persons that the company can rely on. There is something called designated trainers. And the designated trainer designation is that if an employer has someone that meets the skill set of a journey-person, they, too, could train. So there are avenues. And there are still ratio adjustments.

So on—when I was an apprenticeship co-ordinator, just to expand a little bit, if we had a site that was, say, a residential site in northern Manitoba or rural Manitoba, they could apply for a ratio adjustment, and it would probably most likely be granted because, really, the oversight of that—the two apprentices is not too much to ask. On the bigger projects, that becomes a little bit more tricky.

So I think the short answer is I think there are enough journey-persons and enough mechanisms in place to address that.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Are there other questions for the presenter?

Seeing none, thank you very much for your time.

Our next presenter is virtual. I'm going to be calling for Mr. Nicholas Adams.

Mr. Adams, if you are ready—oh, there we go. If you could just make sure your audio is on as well, then that would be great.

And you can begin your presentation when you're ready.

Nicholas Adams (Private Citizen): Okay, excellent. I just wanted to keep my remarks brief and just a quick introduction.

So I'm Nicholas Adams. I am from Winnipeg originally. I grew up in Ottawa. And I've worked in the construction industry, primarily private, going through to pay through school, college and university.

When I got married in 2013, I started looking for things that could be career building and that I could build a family on. So having grown up involved in the construction industry in Winnipeg, I knew that a PLA had been agreed to for the Keeyask hydro dam

working under the long-standing Burntwood/Nelson Agreement.

I knew that that would start my way to be able to build a family by starting a pension that a lot of people in their 30s and early 40s didn't really think of as commonplace as we were getting out of university, unless you worked in the public sector.

So knowing that was going to happen, I took the leap to move myself and my wife to—back to Winnipeg, back home. I still had quite a bit of family there, so I had a structure that I could build around. The only thing that was missing was a career.

So when 2016 rolled around and the very first concrete crews were being called up to Keeyask, as a Manitoban, I was able to get in on a stage hire and start with the—they had the JRS, so you were able to put your skill sets, your work history, everything was done for you through that government support that essentially was able to sign you up and find you a placement working on a Manitoba project, as a Manitoban and as well as an out-of-province hire and a local hire.

So I did that. I was set up with the company, did all of the onboarding with my defined and set-out skill sets. Once I got there, I was told I'd—which section of the hydro dam I would work in, and immediately started doing the training about the areas that we were working in, the Indigenous groups that we were doing this project in.

From that first day of training, of onboarding, I realized that this was going to be a different kind of job from my private-sector jobs where it was just fly by the seat of your pants, safety is kind of secondary and your feelings and whether it be mental health or physical health is kind of secondary to the things that need to be—to the things that need to happen, the deadlines that need to be followed. And really at the whim of, you know, the benevolence of your supervisors.

* (19:20)

So leading into my first weeks there, being away from home was really hard. You know, you had your schedules for 21 days in a row, seven days off. There was an adjustment there.

But what helped in the adjustment is that I knew that by the time I was off of my first turnaround, I now had an active benefit plan. I can go and get glasses, go to the dentist, all of those things, as well as my spouse. So immediately, that's something that I didn't have prior to that in private construction. That was just something new that was just an added.

It also included training so that when I was off on my days, I could get training at the local union hall, which was the Laborer's Local 1258. I could get my training at the local labour hall, and I could go back with the new certification, as well as know that I would have that certification when this project ended—when it would end. So it would aid into my growth as someone in construction, organized or not.

Within the first year of me working on the Keeyask hydro dam, we were able to purchase our first home—sorry, I get a bit emotional, because it's a lot—it's a big, big reason where I am today. We were able to confidently choose to build our family and have our first child, 2016. I continued to work on that hydro dam.

Realizing the value of being a part of an organized labour family, regardless of the trade, encouraged me to get involved and to help people the way that I felt like I'd been helped and supported, so I became a shop steward on that project. That led me into the relations that the workers, management, site supervision have, which, when you have the structure that you have in a PLA, becomes quite fluid and becomes an actual relationship. There's give-and-take, there's understanding, there's guidelines that everybody needs to follow. And there's a lot less of the back-and-forth. There's no play on am I friends with my superintendent, am I not. It's just based on your merits as a worker.

Then—that experience then led me into a continued career in organized labour and the construction industry. And I'm very thankful, and I wouldn't be where I am today, and I wouldn't have two beautiful daughters now, if it wasn't for that project.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thanks, Nicholas Adams.

I just wanted to comment that I wanted to thank you for sharing your complete story in depth. It really illustrates how transformative a PLA can be just for one person and one family.

So thanks for sharing that with us in our committee today.

The Chairperson: Mr. Adams, would you like to respond?

N. Adams: Thank you very much. It—I didn't want it to drag on, but the impact cannot be emphasized

enough. That I am—I—that my story is unique to me, but it is not unique to the grand scheme of the effect that working on that project under that framework has done to myself, my other friends in the industry.

You know, it was hard. You didn't go through people like you went in my private experience. And the majority of the people that did move on chose to move on to other projects across the country done under similar framework and agreements. And that's all I'll say.

Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Are there other questions for the presenter?

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Adams.

It looks like you've got a night—a busy night here. I just want to say thank you for taking the time to Zoom in and make your presentation. I appreciate your story and taking the time, like I said, to share that with us here tonight.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Mr. Adams, would you like to respond?

N. Adams: I would just like to thank Ms. Byram, as well, for taking the time to listen to my remarks.

The Chairperson: Are there other questions for the presenter?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Adams.

I can appreciate how the dignity of work and union membership has changed your life. I thank you for sharing that, and becoming a union member certainly shaped my life, as well, and is the reason that I'm here today also.

But you did mention—my question is, is that you mentioned some health and safety concerns that you experienced when working outside of a project labour agreement.

Just this week—or, last week in debate, the opposition critic for this portfolio disagreed and said, and I quote: Creating false fears and statements regarding the safety of workers when we know that this bill is only designed to funnel money into the pockets of union leaders. This only inflates costs on the backs of every taxpayer here in Manitoba. These projects will escalate due to the unrequired, fictitious, bogus, union cash grab.

I was just wondering if you had any comments about that.

N. Adams: In my—so it's essentially—the question is, if I experienced any negative things coming from my union as a member, in terms of finances, big union boss and all of that lore—is that my understanding, in regards to the specific statement you made?

The Chairperson: Honourable Minister Schmidt, can you clarify?

MLA Schmidt: Yes, I'm just curious what your thoughts are and whether or not you believe that these health and safety, you know, concerns are real or are they fictitious? And what impact, in your experience, would a project labour agreement have on health and safety concerns in the workplace?

N. Adams: Okay, sorry, I do understand. Even on the Keeyask Hydro dam, with the amazing safety record they had, we had fatalities on that project. And they were dealt with with care, compassion and results in terms of what safety protocols need to be changed, what could have been done to not have it again.

And when you look on the private side, and you've got, you know, within—in British Columbia there were cranes falling down on construction sites, whether they be under a PLA or not. Those safety things get overlooked by those companies because it's a bottom-line issue. The bottom-line issue for companies that work and work successively and willingly under PLAs, whether they be unionized companies or not, the—what makes them the profit is the work force. A healthy, safe workforce is an efficient workforce. They don't break equipment, they aren't on sites that have fatalities.

I worked in the private road-building industry in Winnipeg while I was going to university. And there were times where I was almost hit by cars, and it was simple because we decided to work later, work longer and with less safety precautions.

That's what I'll say to that. I hope I've answered it effectively.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation and for taking the time tonight.

I will now call on Mr. Kyle Kalcsics.

Mr. Kyle Kalcsics, when you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Kyle Kalcsics (United Association, Local 254): Hello, my name is Kyle Kalcsics. I'm the business manager of UA Local 254. I have a membership consisting of approximately 1,400 members. The

work we do in the industry is inclusive of industrial, commercial, institutional as well as the pipeline industry.

I come before you today to present my members' perspective on Bill 7, which will repeal the ban on project labour agreements. To my knowledge, the ban is the only one of its kind in North America and has had a devastating impact to workforce development, cost certainty, infrastructure and safe working conditions on projects.

PLAs ensure competitive bidding, resulting in fairness for workers in the industry. Using a PLA is a way to include structured training and provide opportunities for advancement in apprenticeship.

Additionally, job sites under PLAs have safer working conditions. These are just some of the positive outcomes of PLAs, all the while while providing an efficient job site.

* (19:30)

When workers, including the membership of UA Local 254, have worked on projects tendered using PLAs such as Wuskwatim, Keeyask and the Floodway, the results were more 'inclusivity' for under-represented groups and apprenticeship advancement. These opportunities correlate to a larger workforce, which ensures that Manitoba is training the workforce we need to build the infrastructure we need tomorrow, today. The opportunities these projects presented came from a long-standing PLA with the hydro—with Hydro known as the Burntwood/Nelson Agreement, or the BNA.

Without the BNA, the workforce development we achieved as a province would not have been possible. As a whole, the country grapples with forecasts of skilled workforce shortage. It is imperative that here in Manitoba, we train Manitobans and retain our workforce. One of the easiest things the Province can do to ensure we do not fall even farther behind is to go back to the basics.

Manitoba's history is rich with examples of past PLAs that provided a framework for training and advancement in apprenticeship.

As we look to offer opportunities for economic reconciliation in northern Indigenous communities, PLAs are a tool that can be maximized with wraparound supports and flexible training delivery. Without PLAs, many local jobs for Manitoba's skilled trades workers would not exist. That is because a PLA can be prescriptive in a sequence of labour procurement, which

means they can ensure that Manitoba workers get to work first.

An example of a job where a PLA would have been beneficial for ensuring local work is the South End Water Pollution Control Centre. That project was full of out-of-province workers, not to mention extremely overbudget, time frames obviously not meant–met, and, shamefully, the project has not yet to be completed, to my knowledge.

In the same vein, the North End Water Pollution Control Centre is another major infrastructure project that is a missed opportunity for our community, has failed at local hiring workers and is leaving minority groups trying to break cycles of unemployment behind.

You will most likely hear today that the repeal of this ban will be forced unionization. This is not the case. In Manitoba's tradition of using PLAs to complete projects on time and on budget, there has not been a massive influx of unionization of previously open-shop contractors. PLAs have been around since the 1960s and were created by the PC government.

PLAs have time and time again ensured the best quality infrastructure projects for Manitobans while saving taxpayer dollars. Manitoba projects should benefit Manitobans. PLAs make sure that the investments made into Manitoba benefit Manitobans first and foremost.

I want to re-emphasize: PLAs are not forced unionization. Any of the companies on job sites with labour procurement done under a PLA did not experience a wave of unionization. In fact, on the Floodway, there was a clause that prevented unions on site from organizing the companies that were not already unionized for a time-specified cooling-off period.

Without PLAs, there has been no guarantee for local jobs, construction quality or project safety. PLAs guarantee the same standards of safety and oversight for everybody working on a construction site. Without PLAs, workers are left vulnerable to accidents and serious injuries, and projects are left open to delays. Resentment, mistrust and high worker turnover are also the result.

I want to reiterate my support and my members' support for Bill 7, which will repeal the ban on project labour agreements. We know this government wants to create good jobs for Manitobans who build the infrastructure we rely on every day. This is as important first step, but the only way to reverse the negative impacts on the ban of PLAs had on local jobs, project quality and training opportunities in Manitoba is to

legislate a 'prestrictive'–prescriptive, sorry–framework going forward.

For the good of the industry, which includes my members, I hope I can count on support for this, regardless of partisan stripes.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thanks, Mr. Kyle Kalcsics, for your presentation and for being here today to give us more information for the committee for our consideration.

Could you please try to tell me a little bit more about the process, like, of at the North End or at the South End Pollution Control Centres—when they were trying to build that, that it was an out-of-province conglomerate that got the job, and then they started bringing in their workers from other provinces.

What happened to the Manitoba workers, and why wouldn't they try to hire folks in Manitoba?

K. Kalcsics: The why is an unknown. Anybody who drove by any of those projects at any point in time, you saw the multitude of out-of-province plates.

The concept of having these companies outside of our province, it's not only the workers that are here, it's the payroll staff, it's the management team, all this funding going back to the province where they live, failing Manitoba for taxpayer dollars as well as members and the general public working on these projects, putting money back into Manitoba. Hence the—for Manitobans.

The Chairperson: Do other members of the committee have questions?

Ms. Byram: Thank you Mr. Kalcsics? Kalcsics.

Thank you for taking the time and making your presentation here tonight.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions for the presenter?

All right, seeing none, thank you very much for making the time.

I would now call on Mr. Shawn Wood.

Okay, we're going to move Mr. Shawn Wood to the bottom of the list. He was signed up to be online, but he's not on at the moment.

Can I call on David Grant?

David Grant will drop to the bottom of the list.

Can I call on Mr. Paul Moist?

Mr. Moist, when you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Paul Moist (Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, honourable ministers, members of the committee.

I'm pleased to speak to you today as president of the Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees. We are retired workers, unionized workers, and we're the Manitoba affiliate of the 300,000-member Congress of Union Retirees of Canada.

I just want to say at the outset what a privilege it is to sit here and listen to particularly rank-and-file workers coming before their government to speak on worker issues. It's really why we're all here.

I speak today in favour of Bill 7 and the restoration of PLAs for public sector capital projects. We support the positions of both the Federation of Labour and the Manitoba Building Trades on Bill 7.

In 2021, I appeared in front of this legislative committee to speak against bill 13, which ended PLAs, as we've heard tonight. And many of the arguments advanced in that presentation remain relevant tonight as we restore PLAs, beginning with project labour agreements having existed for over 50 years here in our province prior to their repeal.

We reject the argument of groups like the Merit Contractors, who talk of forced unionization, which you've heard a lot about tonight. And like others, I note that the Supreme Court of Canada rejected their arguments by refusing to hear their legal challenge in 2012.

Back in 2021, before this committee, I commended to committee members an article by Manitoba author Doug Smith, called, labour conflict at hydro-electric generating stations, published by—in the Manitoba History magazine, fall of 2017, where Mr. Smith outlined the history of PLAs coming into place and talked about the Grand Rapids project; 1961, construction began.

A member of this Legislature, the late David Orlikow, who was an MLA and went on to become a Member of Parliament, travelled north and then reported back as an opposition MLA to the Legislature on the deplorable working conditions and workers actually

starving on the job site in Grand Rapids because they weren't being paid very much.

This convinced the government of that day, Mr. Roblin, to bring project labour agreements into being. Doug Smith said, if wage rates were fixed, contractors would be obliged to compete based on skill and ability rather than on their ability to cut wages. And the entire Legislature agreed with those sentiments that Mr. Orlikow put forward.

* (19:40)

Like many other jurisdictions, Manitoba faces skilled trade shortages and a shortfall in private sector apprenticeship opportunities. In restoring the use of PLAs, we urge government today to embrace the principles of fairness contained in the British-Columbia-based CBAs, which includes legislatively maximizing apprenticeship opportunities on major public infrastructure projects; priority hiring and training for Indigenous peoples and other equity-seeking groups, including women; and finally wage alignment to prevailing industry rates to promote good wages for all—wages able to support families. Those principles are at work in British Columbia today and they can work here in our province.

Building trades unions have invested millions across Canada and here in Manitoba in training facilities to prepare the skilled workforce of tomorrow. Of interest is the fact that many who oppose PLAs are not involved in training workers. Their only concern is the bottom line, and that bottom line mentality found its way into the published platform of the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba in 2016. When on this subject matter, they said, shop smarter with government purchasing by reducing the number of untendered contracts and ending forced unionization of company employees in order to work on public contracts.

PLAs don't force unionization on anyone. What they do do is promote fairness and prevent a free ride for those who do not invest in trades training or in apprenticeships. So the Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees fully supports Bill 7 and its restoration here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

I've been made aware that, according to our current rules, government members who are not the minister

sponsoring the bill need leave to ask a question. This is actually going to be changing at the beginning of the second session next month, but it's still in place now.

So accordingly is there leave for MLA Kennedy to ask a question? *[Agreed]*

MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia): Really, it's more of a comment. I would just like to put on the record that I appreciate Mr. Moist coming today to give us your presentation and the previous presenters that have come forth.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Mr. Moist, would you like to respond?

P. Moist: No, that's good.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions?

Ms. Byram: Again, just thank you for coming and making your presentation, Mr. Moist, and taking the time out of your evening, and thank you.

The Chairperson: Mr. Moist, would you like to respond to that?

P. Moist: No, that's good.

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Moist, for coming and presenting. I always appreciate the historical perspectives that you bring when you do present to committee. I am a little bit interested in what do you think was going on during this time when this ban happened?

I think I was reading somewhere it just a very set time, like 2016 to 2023, a lot of labour unrest, there was a lot of strikes, there was the wage freezes, there was all the Supreme Court challenges and what was happening around this time that made this government want to go in this direction with this ban? Is this indicative of past Manitoba labour relations history? In general I know that, for the NDP, we strive for labour peace whenever possible.

What do you think about that particular part of time that we just—the recent history that we just passed?

P. Moist: Well, thank you for the question. I think that there was a propensity in this jurisdiction, beginning in the mid-20-teens and elsewhere that labour was vulnerable and one could do what they wanted with them. And things have changed a little bit right now in terms of collective bargaining across North America and shortages and things like that.

So I have appeared in front of committees here for more than four decades and things have gone back and forth. What's new in the 2016 period was for the first time in my recollection—Mr. Rebeck mentioned the joint committee of labour and management that reviews all legislation that touches on this committee and joint recommendations, unanimous recommendations, from that committee rejected by the previous government. That is—was unusual and very not the norm in our province.

But things have gone back and forth in our province, and they will again in the future, and I think that trade union membership in Manitoba has been a positive thing in the public and private sector for all workers, and I think restoring—we'll speak later this month to the omnibus budget bill, which contains other important matters related to labour relations. But I think if you look across the country and across the world right now—I read a poll the other day that declared Republican supporters in the United States, just over 75 per cent of them, hope that their children can get a union job, in a country with less than 6 per cent of the private sector unionized. So if you can square that circle for me, I can't.

But I want to say that, historically, before this committee, in all its iterations over the last decades, the trade union movement is coming here in a responsible fashion and is actually less ideological than the right in society, in my opinion.

But I'm proud, as a retired worker, to continue to work alongside good organizations like the MFL, the Manitoba Building Trades, all of the building trades unions here today, and to say to each and every one of you that the people that work in Manitoba over the last 100-odd years are the people that built Manitoba.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions for the presenter?

Seeing none, thank you very much for making the time.

Our next presenter is online. I would like to call Ms. Yvette Milner.

If I could just call on Ms. Yvette Milner to accept the invitation to become a panelist.

Ms. Yvette Milner, if you could turn your microphone on and your video. When you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Yvette Milner (Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba): I appreciate being here. It probably won't

be a surprise that I disagree with a lot of what has been said, but I will start with my introduction.

I'm Yvette Milner. I'm president of Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba, and I've been in that role since 2016. Our association is quite unique in that it's the only association in Manitoba that exclusively has a membership comprised of open-shop contractors and their employees. And when I say open shop, meaning that you don't have to be a building trade—part of a building trade union in order to work in a company, although some of our companies do have parts of their companies that are unionized and some that are not.

We've got 170 member companies, representing about 6,000 employees, and 10,000 people on our plan—our benefits plan. So, contrary to what has been said today, some non-union companies actually provide a benefit plan and a pension. So, you know, we provide a very, very comprehensive plan that includes a lot of things that are focused on mental health, that are focused on health and benefits. And the members in our plan are very good employers.

* (19:50)

And I would say that there are good and bad employers in every kind of—whether they're unionized or not. And when I hear the comments—and I'm not sure who said it, might have been Mr. Rebeck—race to the bottom, the safety stuff, you know, I've sat on the Labour Board since 1999. You know, I think I was the youngest person appointed there, and I'm still there, and I've seen a lot of workplace health and safety issues that are with union and non-union companies. So the idea that, for some reason, a union workplace is better, to me, doesn't resonate.

What else will I say here? We're not welcoming to newcomers—I think that's a bit silly. And that we don't provide training. You know, we've got a scholarship fund at Red River College, we provide tuition bursary programs or re-funds. We very much support apprenticeship and women in the trades. So all that kind of nonsense is nonsense.

So I'll go on with my speaking notes. About 70 per cent of the workforce in Canada, construction, in Canada and in Manitoba, is open shop. And what Merit really strives to do is ensure that open-shop contractors and their employees can work in their chosen trade without forced affiliation in a trade union.

So I don't disagree with what's been said about having agreements on big projects, but I think you can build criteria into those projects diversity, safety, all

of those things without—and I disagree with the comments that were made about it's not forced unionization. If people have made a choice to have a non-union company, and they're forced to participate in the—feeding the union, the perception is it's forced unionization.

So what we advocate for is fairness and open tendering in support of the thousands of open-shop contractors that are working along with the union contractors. And in our view, the repeal of Bill 7, although, again, I'm going to say I don't disagree with obviously having agreements on big projects, but it opens up the door for public-sector projects to force the requirement for workers to be affiliated with a building trade union. And it's not just a union, it's a building trade union. And sometimes against their wishes.

And we've heard from our members, they just would not bid on projects if one of the requirements was that they were to be forced to be a part of a building trade union. They've made that choice. And I would say that there is evidence that shows—and I've just read a very recent research from Cardus on the CBAs and PLAs in BC that, you know, they can have benefits. But when you have less competition, there is an increased cost of doing business to the taxpayer.

And I would not say that's a race to the bottom. Certainly, I'm speaking to my members, not for the whole open-shop community, but I'm guessing there's some bad union employers out there too. I'm actually not guessing that.

So my understanding is that Bill 7's primary purpose is to promote transparency, accountability and fairness in the procurement of construction services. And in my view, that means allowing everyone to compete on a playing—a fair playing field, and that's what Merit is all about. And it aids to economic benefits and there's more competition; people aren't being discouraged from bidding on projects. And that's really why Merit opposes this bill, or the repeal of the bill.

And so I think that—I don't think that all of us are far apart on wanting to ensure equity, wanting to show diversity, wanting to show local employment. But I'm not sure that a PLA that requires open-shop companies to contribute to a building trade union is the answer.

So our basic philosophy is open, fair and transparent tendering based on achieving the best value at a good cost, and that doesn't mean a race to the bottom. And it should go without preference to non-union,

non-affiliated unions or building trades union. It should just be open.

And so we really think that—just that fairness is really what we talk about as keystone. And I know I'm probably running out of time here. But I disagree with some of the comments that have been made in terms of project labour agreements on large public sector projects, you know, based on the feedback I have from our members who were back in the day, they did have to. And they already provide a good benefits package, pension, everything else, and so—and adhere to safe and—safety and health regulation.

And I would say that British Columbia is a very good case in point right now. Like, they're having a lot of problems, you know, with respect to 19 building trade unions. Every one, within 30 days, has to sign up. And I know that's not a Manitoba example, but it's something that's going on.

So just to close up here, we don't want anyone, whether it's union, non-union, you know, a non-affiliated union, to have a monopoly on government projects. I think that hurts workers. It hurts our companies for sure, and costs taxpayers. And it's just wrong, in my opinion.

And we believe in training, we support apprenticeship, we invest in training the apprenticeship. And, yes, I just think that it's got to be open and fair.

And I'd just like to clarify that, I think a few people have said that our—the past, it was before my time, but that the court thing was thrown out of the Supreme Court. There were no merits heard on that case. It was just a jurisdictional issue, where they needed it to be in the Labour Board. And so, you know, there was mis-understanding there.

But those are my comments, and subject to questions.

Thank you for having me here.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Ms. Milner, for your presentation today.

My question is, if this PLA ban were such a good idea, and very necessary, why is it that we were the only jurisdiction in North America that had this?

Y. Milner: That's a good question, and I don't know that. I just think that there can be ways around this with criteria and agreements that don't require—and I

think this is the—I don't think, I know—this is the feeling of my members, without having a building trades component to everything when they are the minority, really.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Do other members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Ms. Milner, for making your presentation tonight and taking time out of your evening. And it's nice to have a different perspective on this.

* (20:00)

And I'm just wondering, you made reference to a few points during your speech, but in particular I want to ask more specifically, in terms of safety, and if you can expand a little bit on what it is that some of the open shops might provide or what they do to help with their employees in keeping them safe.

Y. Milner: I'm glad you asked that question because I did jot down, when someone made the comment that only unionized workplaces need to have a safety committee, which is ridiculous. You know, I mean, the safe—the same safety legislation applies to all employers, and some are good, and some are bad.

And we have criteria that people have to comply with to be in our membership. We have kicked some people out. You know, they comply with the same legislation. They've got safety committees. They've got safety talks.

And I have seen one WSIB study on safety which was of—probably not construction, and, you know, that said that unionized workplaces were better. And I'm not saying they're not better; I'm just saying that everybody has the same legislation that they have to comply with. And, as I said, I've been on the Labour Board for a long time, and there's good and bad employers, whether it's safety or whether it's employment standards, whatever it is.

But there is no race to the bottom because you're not unionized. And so the implication that somehow because you're open shop you're not a good employer, you know, I just know with the 170 companies that I deal with, that's just not the case.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Are there further questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Ms. Milner.

I just wanted to try to add on to what you were saying earlier about the jurisdiction issue, which is why you said that that didn't go through the Supreme Court.

Why was it that Merit did not agree to continue with the Manitoba Labour Board route with your forced unionization claims?

Y. Milner: You heard—when the government changed. And so we didn't think it was worth the legal fees.

I'm sorry, did I answer your question?

The Chairperson: Yes, thank you.

Further questions?

Ms. Byram: Yes, question for you regarding the apprenticeship ratio, and is that—the recent changes to that, is that going to affect some of your membership?

Y. Milner: Sorry. I think it's just based on informal discussions, but yes. And I can't remember the name of one of the prior speakers, but, you know, I think it does have an impact on some of the smaller companies who don't want to, you know—more journeypeople.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation and for taking the time tonight.

I would now like to call Tyler Slobogian. All right, Tyler will go to the bottom of the list—oh. Oh, sorry, he's online. Okay.

Tyler, you can start your presentation whenever you're ready.

Tyler Slobogian (Canadian Federation of Independent Business): Perfect, thank you, Mr. Chairman, honourable ministers and other members in attendance. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to put some words on record surrounding this bill and ultimately share our members' perspective and concerns about repealing this legislation.

I'll start by providing a bit of a brief overview about CFIB, which is who I'm with—the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—and we are a non-partisan, non-profit organization representing the interests of over nearly 100,000 businesses across Canada, and that includes to close to 5,000 members in Manitoba and many of these being contractors and subcontractors.

Yes, I'm here on behalf of my members in Manitoba who have explained their opposition to this bill and to why some small- and medium-sized com-

panies may not support these types of agreements and this legislation repeal.

First and foremost is competition. You know, PLAs often require that all workers on a project be unionized, which can severely limit the pool of available labour. For small- and medium-sized businesses, this can be a significant disadvantage. Many of these companies rely on a mix of union and non-union workers to stay competitive. By mandating union-only labour, PLAs effectively shut out a portion of the workforce and create an uneven playing field. This not only stifles competition but can lead to higher project costs as well.

We also must consider the financial implications. Small- and medium-sized companies typically operate with very tight budgets and fewer resources than larger firms. PLAs often impose strict wage scales and benefits that can significantly increase costs.

Obviously, we believe everybody's entitled to fair wages and, you know, benefits and so on, but for smaller companies, these added expenses can often make it difficult to bid competitively on contracts. Small businesses will find themselves forced to raise their prices even further which could drive clients to seek more affordable options elsewhere. This could jeopardize the viability of these businesses and lead to fewer opportunities for growth, as well.

Project delays could also be a major issue. When projects are delayed, costs can escalate due to extended timelines, potential penalties and increased overhead. As a result, what initially seemed like a manageable project can quickly spiral into a costly endeavour, jeopardizing the financial stability of smaller contractors, leading to significant budget overruns.

Another major concern for small businesses is the administrative burden. These agreements often come with complex requirements and often regulations that can be overwhelming for smaller firms. Navigating the intricacies of compliance can consume valuable time and resources, which many small business owners don't have that.

Instead of focusing on project execution and client satisfaction, small businesses may find themselves buried in paperwork and bureaucratic processes. This diversion of focus can stifle innovation, slow down progress, ultimately hindering the overall effectiveness of the project.

The potential for skilled labour shortages should also not be overlooked. You know, PLAs can limit hiring flexibility, as they often dictate that contractors

must employ workers from specific unions. If small- or medium-sized companies are unable to hire the right talent for a project due to these restrictions, it could lead to delays and compromise quality. When businesses are unable to assemble the best teams, the outcome of the project can suffer, affecting not only just the company but the clients and the overall community.

Additionally, let's consider the broader economic impact on local economies. Small- and medium-sized businesses are often the lifeblood of their communities, providing jobs and supporting local initiatives. By favouring PLAs, we may inadvertently undermine the very companies that contribute to economic growth and community well-being. A thriving small business sector helps to create a diverse economy, and we must be cautious not to enact policies that could stifle their growth.

These—there is the issue of workforce diversity as well. Small- and medium-sized businesses often employ a diverse range of workers, including non-union labour, which reflects the local population. PLAs may limit the diversity by enforcing a union-only workforce, potentially sidelining skilled workers who are not union members.

While project labour agreements may offer certain benefits, it is vital to consider the unique challenges they present to small- and medium-sized companies as well. These agreements can stifle competition, increase costs, create administrative burdens, limit hiring flexibility. They can also undermine the vital role that small businesses play in our economy and our communities. So I think it's crucial that we ensure the—and prioritize policies that foster an environment where all businesses, large and small, can succeed.

Thanks for listening.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Slobogian, for your presentation today.

* (20:10)

The Chairperson: Would you like to respond?

T. Slobogian: Thanks, Minister.

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Slobogian, for making your presentation here tonight and giving us, again, another perspective to the impact that this can have, especially on maybe small business.

I'm wondering if you can maybe expand a little bit further and explain just what the impact of Bill 7 would be on your membership and small business.

T. Slobogian: Yes, thanks for the question.

Yes, we're doing some initial research right now to see exactly what the numbers would be, but, you know, we have some good data out there that does already say, you know, the majority of businesses are already kind of fighting those tight margins, and I think wage costs are already the No. 1 cost constraint. So, you know, increased—any additional increased costs at this point would put many over the edge.

So be happy to share that data when we have it in the near future.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions for the presenter?

All right, thank you very much for taking the time tonight.

I would now like to call on Mr. Connor Ketchen. All right, Mr. Connor Ketchen will be put to the bottom of the list.

I'd like to call on Mr. Dave McPhail. All right, Mr. Dave McPhail will go to the bottom of the list as well.

Mr. Peter Wightman. Mr. Wightman, whenever you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Peter Wightman (Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba): By way of introduction, I'm Peter Wightman. I'm the executive director of the Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba, short form, CLR. I've held that position since 1996. You're looking at the only person in this room who's actually negotiated project labour agreements for a variety of government parties over the decades, written them, created them, negotiated them. So you're looking at the only expert in the room here who can really talk to you in real terms about the value of project labour agreements. Just going to say that right up front.

Now, I have some written statements, and I've heard a lot of what's been said by my colleagues and other folks that have chosen to come here and speak this evening. So I'll just get through my comments, my written comments, and then I'm going to turn into sort of just a general conversation of my experience with project labour agreements.

Who is the CLR? The CLR is an entity that was created in the early '60s. Its focus—and continues to be

its sole focus—it's a construction association whose members are the major infrastructure contractors in Manitoba who employ unionized tradespeople across all trade scopes. What I do is I represent their interests when I sit down with my building trade partners to negotiate province-wide collective agreements, project labour agreements and a variety of other issues, lobbying government, et cetera.

The CLR contractors build Manitoba. The lights are on; we built that. The water flows; we built that—throughout the province. The hockey rinks, the hospitals, we built that. Go to Portage and Main and look at every building; we built them all. So we build Manitoba. We're not building Mac's Milk. We're not building apartment buildings. We're building the infrastructure that makes our province run; i.e., economic development. And we've been doing that since the '60s.

Now, we are the go-to organization that owners—in this context of this bill and this piece of legislation that this bill wishes to repeal, you are the owner—government.

This bill is specifically about the removal of a piece of legislation that, with all due respect, nobody came to my association, to me, to talk to me about whether it was a good idea to take both of government's arms and tie them behind their back as they go in to prosecute a very complicated major infrastructure project that they're the owner of. That's like tying someone's arms behind their back and throwing them in the lake. It's not a good outcome.

Project labour agreements, as you've heard all of the various benefits that come out of it—and trust me, they're all real. But most importantly, who are they driven by? They're not driven by the unions; they're driven by the owner. I meet with corporate owners, week in and week out, for the past roughly 30 years, coming to meet with me to talk to me about project development in this province.

Depending on the size of the project—and we're usually talking about significant ones like the Simplot project; I wrote that PLA. Pine Falls paper industrial plant: I wrote it, negotiated it. The floodway agreement: the government asked me to be their lead negotiator, write and negotiate that, which I did. It was a massive success. All of these have been massive success projects. On time, on budget.

All the goals that the owner came in and said, hey, we want to make sure that we're going to develop the next workforce that's going to go forward in time so

the folks that are working on this project today as journey persons—20 years from now, they're going to be retired. We need the next workforce so that the next time we come back to this province and we want to build a hospital, we want to build a water treatment facility, we don't have to go outside the province to get the skilled labour. It's already here, because we invested that as an owner—government—as an owner of the project.

You may not be building it yourself, you're going to farm that out to a general contracting firm who will manage it for you, but as the owner, the folks that write the cheque, you own that project, right?

So as an owner, you can say: Hey, we have a thing in this province called minimum wages for the construction industry. Everybody's got to pay minimum wages as per CWA That's your legislation; that's in the PLA. Oh, by the way, after 40 hours you get time and a half overtime. That's in the employment standards act. Your act. It's your property; it's not mine; it's not theirs; it's yours.

So, as an owner, the idea of community benefit agreements—a.k.a. a PLA—are the same. They're synonymous with each other. So, for this particular situation—and I'm not sure what Ms. Milner was referring to—the repeal of this is not going to require the government of Manitoba going forward to use a PLA. You have your choice; you could use it or not use it, but you have the choice. Right now, you have no choice. That's bad business.

The amount of corporate folks that I have been dealing with since this piece of legislation, probably the worst piece of legislation I've seen in my 35 years working in this province, probably the worst one. Where did this come from? Why was the—who was the brain trust that came up with this idea?

As an owner of a megaproject, just look at the rest of the world. Megaprojects, which you folks are involved with, like dams, like water treatment facilities that take 10 years to build; these are megaprojects for our province. You want to have every bullet that you have available for you as an owner to make sure that project goes off perfectly. Right? It spans many governments usually. So you, as a government, looking out across the timeline, you want to have the ability to manage it properly. You drive the PLA, not the unions.

When I meet with the unions, the deal's pretty much done. I go in with them and say, Here's what the owner of the project wants.

They come back and say, okay, we're okay with that. We'd like something though. We'd like Rand formula.

* (20:20)

And the owner says, no problem, because we need your people to build this. We don't need 50 people, we need 500 people.

And the only place you can get 500 skilled tradesmen in a certain—carpenters, electricians, labourers, that category—not in total, the only place in country you can get that is through the labour movement. They have the ability to bring people from all over the country to prosecute the project in Manitoba. Okay?

So if you don't allow the government to have the ability to create such a document that allows them to bring people in, you're just spinning your wheels. Your project is not going to go off the way you think it's going to go off. It's not going to be organized very well. And I can tell you, the general contractors that would be interested in even doing this job aren't going to be very interested in doing it because they know it's going to be a mess.

The PLA creates structure for big, complicated projects that span many years in their development. General contractors are risk-averse organizations. Their entire organization, from top to toe, is focused on risk mitigation. And not having a PLA on a project, the types of which we're talking about with this bill, those types of projects are filled with risk. The PLA mitigates a lot of it.

It allows the owner to look at, in minutiae detail, you as government can say, hey, we want First Nations quotas. You know, maybe that's not the right word, but First Nation employment opportunities. We want women working on this project. We want the next generation of skilled tradespeople, i.e., apprentices, developed on this long-term project. These are the goals of the owner, you. You tell that to me, I go to them, and guess what? They all go, yes, we're on board with that. No problem.

That's why PLAs make sense. It's an organizational document, nothing more, nothing less, and it's your call as government. It's like you're trying to build a house, but you say, you know what? I want you to build my house, but no carpenters allowed, just plumbers and electricians. Well, who's going to do the framing? That's what I meant by tying your hands behind your back.

We are a small province, population wise.

The Chairperson: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Wightman. We're out of time at the moment.

We're actually having some technical difficulties at the moment. The broadcast has went down. So we're going to go into a recess. My apologies.

Before we get to questions for you, we're going to try to get the broadcast up and running. So we're going to be in recess until that is taken care of.

Thank you.

The committee recessed at 8:23 p.m.

The committee resumed at 8:36 p.m.

The Chairperson: I'd like to call the meeting back to order.

Thank you, Mr. Wightman, for your remarks.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Wightman, for your presence here tonight, for your comments.

I was wondering what your—in your opinion was the impacts on our provincial economy—writ large, the ban had on our provincial economy?

P. Wightman: It's significant. And I can only speak in an anecdotal basis, but because of my role and what I do in this province, been doing for many, many decades, major owners of projects corporately come and visit with me on a regular basis; weekly.

And when this act came into play—and, you have to understand, these are folks that are going across Canada and they're touching base, it's like a touchstone they do, with the CLRs in each province. And we're private entities, we're not a government thing, we're not affiliated with each other in-province. We're individual organizations. But they come to us because they know we understand what's going on in the market space, labour supply issues, legislative concerns.

I would spend half an hour of the first hour of the meeting, and we usually have an hour, trying to explain to them that they can do a project labour agreement in this province. Because they came in with the idea that they were not allowed to do one, to build a corporate project. This kind of legislation has a damaging impact when it's not well thought through. Okay? You don't see that. I see that.

If I had all that time added up, that I've spent dealing with this, forgive me, nonsense, I'd probably

have another two years to my life at the end of the day. I know I'm going to be laying on my deathbed wondering, gee, I wish I had that time back. I'm serious.

Am I annoyed? You're damn right I'm annoyed. And that has an impact, because they come in here—

The Chairperson: Order.

Sorry, just—sorry, Mr. Wightman, just to interrupt, I just—to remind you of the language, actually. Please continue.

P. Wightman: Yes, I'm a little annoyed. This is an opportunity for me to vent a little bit to the folks who can make a correction. A smart correction. Get it done. Don't delay. Okay?

Those same major players are the same folks that you need to build your next infrastructure project. The general contractor element. I'm telling you, they are not going to come to this province—and sometimes you need them—from out of province. Companies like PCL as well, locally here. Massive concerns about taking on a major government infrastructure project where they know: drill down on labour supply issues, drill down on safety issues, that's what they're all about. Risk mitigation. If they can't do a PLA, they're going to walk away. They're going to walk away.

* (20:40)

They're just not even going to approach you. That's bad for business, for the government's business. What will result? Your costs will go up. Your project issues will expand.

All you have to do is look at the North End project. And I know that's not a provincial-sanctioned project; it's a City project. And I've been dealing with that project since the south end project, where, with all due respect, the City made some very bad decisions about who they were employing. They should have done a PLA. I spoke to them about it for many, many, many months. They chose at the last minute to not do that, and their project, sorry, was a bit of a mess.

And I told them, and it's on the record, if they make the same approach for North End, which is 10 times the south end project, they'll bankrupt the city.

Guess what? It's a problem. They're not doing a PLA. I cannot believe that the brain trust at the City has chosen to not do a PLA for a major—the biggest infrastructure project the City of Winnipeg has ever had in its history. It's screaming for a project—a benefit community agreement, whatever you call it. An ABC

agreement. It's an agreement to help the owner manage the project. It's just smart business.

The details are what the owner wants, paying the bill. To not allow them to do it is—I'm not allowed to swear. It's stupid. Stupid.

The Chairperson: We only have a little bit of time left, but do other members have questions for the presenter?

Sorry—is there leave to ask another question? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Wightman.

I just want to make a comment and say thank you for coming here and sharing your comments and your perspective.

P. Wightman: I'm used to running the room, so pardon me, I'm sorry; I'm not following your protocols.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Do we have leave to ask a further question? *[Agreed]*

MLA Marcelino: Just while you're up here, Mr. Wightman: earlier, Mr. Rebeck mentioned the Labour Management Review Committee's consensus decision on the implement standards amendment regarding extended sick leave.

Do you have any comments about that? You were the chair of the LMRC—or co-chair of—at the time.

P. Wightman: I appreciate the question. Thank you very much.

Mr. Rebeck did mention me in—by name in his presentation. So to have the opportunity to respond, I think, is fair game. I have no issues whatsoever—and I hundred per cent support the detail of his presentation. I'm on board with it a hundred per cent.

It's in the record; I don't need to repeat it, but the LMRC—and I'm the longest serving member on LMRC; for close to 30 years I've been on that. I'm on the Manitoba Labour Board, too. Been on that for a long time. I'm one of the government's eight appointed conciliation mediation officers. Like, I'm immersed in this stuff.

And everything that Mr. Rebeck said about what occurred is one hundred per cent accurate and was extremely annoying for a group of folks who get together. We're not paid to do it. And we work many long hours trying to help government, whoever that may be, and, as I've been there for close to 30 years, all those governments. We're there as sort of the wise

owls to help government with issues that they are bringing forward that affect the employer-employee relationship.

Sometimes, the ideas are good; they need to be sort of tweaked to work with labour, to work with the management of the big companies in this province so that we could come back to government in a very focused way and say, change this, change that, you're good to go. Or here's an idea that you're not thinking about that you should be thinking about, so you get ahead of something. It's a fantastic committee, and it's very unique to Manitoba.

So what Mr. Rebeck said is, that's our esprit de corps. We figure it out. So I'm a hundred per cent on board with what he said about the issues he was talking about.

Hope that answered the question without making a big speech, but.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation and for taking the time tonight.

I'd like to call Mrs. Lois Ruston. Okay, she'll be dropped to the bottom of the list.

I'd like to call Mr. Ron Castel.

Ron Castel, when you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Ron Castel (Private Citizen): Thank you very much to this opportunity to come and speak to you today about these project-led agreements, Bill 7.

I don't know what else I can say in regards to what has been said already about the benefits of the PLA, but I'm here today from the ground. I'm working in the front lines at Keeyask. I was a labour-relations individual for Keeyask and our unions.

And my specialty there was the Indigenous liaison for the partners, the four partners up at Keeyask. But, also, I had experienced all the safety meetings that we had with our contractors, all the labour disputes that we had with our contractors and our employees, our union members and also with our community partners.

So my perspective on the PLA is that I lived it, I've seen it and I delivered it, and it was prosperous. It was prosperous right across the North. Me, I'm a northerner. Me, I come from Leaf Rapids. I'm a miner by trade. My father was a miner for 35 years—Inco and Hudson Bay, they were also PLAs as well. My father got a job, he became PLA.

Then highway recruited him, so it was like a progression where I got the opportunity to represent the North and the communities that we served through this PLA, the four communities. But also, our union members, our 2,500 union members that worked on that Keeyask dam.

So when you talk about the benefits, when you talk about the outcomes, when you talk about a complete project and the cost and the legacy that's left, we're talking about a PLA that affected those communities, that allowed those communities to get hired. It allowed those communities to have the purchasing power through their members to get employed, their members to get experience and become the next workforce for another major project. They allowed them to enhance their skills in the North, to be a viable workforce.

But on the flipside of that, when you talk about a PLA, what happens when you don't have it? You'd have a safety issue. I was sitting in many safety incidents at Keeyask, and we resolved them. What we're going to do different next time so this doesn't happen again. How we're going to keep our members safe so they go home to their kids, their wives, their families at the end of the day. So there was a lot of safety precautions taken on that megaproject in the North.

I had the opportunity to help the east-side road prior to coming to Keeyask. I worked with Berens River. I helped a contractor train local people because the east side was also a PLA. And they used that method to provide training for local workers in Berens River.

So I had the opportunity to help a contractor train local workers to become truck drivers, to become rock-truck drivers, to become drillers, to become blasters and build that road that connects with society, from an isolated community to an all-season road. And they learned skills, and there was safety in there as well—a big safety component.

So when you talk about PLAs and you talk about where—what's the end of the dotted line, we're talking purchasing powers for company, purchasing power for the partnerships in the communities. We're also talking about the legacy of that project. And me being first-hand, being able to have that opportunity to work in that project for five years, it was, like, an awesome opportunity.

* (20:50)

And working for Hy-Lite hydro and the union members that they represent was an honour and a privilege to do—to do that work.

And in closing, I just say PLAs are an awesome opportunity for the government to share the wealth, not to a business-only concept: bottom line, this is how much we're willing to sacrifice safety in order to get a project done. PLAs are, we're going to invest; we're going to invest in our workers; we're going to invest in safety so they can come back and be prosperous with the next job.

So, in closing, I'd like to say thank you very much for your time, and if you have any questions, by all means.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you very much, Mr. Castel, for coming today in front of the committee and presenting. We really appreciate your presence here.

My question for you is: In future PLAs, what do you think First Nations communities should be or would be asking for?

R. Castel: Excellent question.

I'm glad you asked that question because prior to me coming to Keeyask with my background—my background's HR; my background's labour relations; my background is community development; my background is a—training the local workforce. When I got to Keeyask, there was a lot of questions the communities had asked. What is a union? What is a labour agreement? What is a collective bargaining agreement? Lot of communities weren't aware.

When I got there, I was doing a lot of liaisoning with those communities, the four—those four communities, explaining the roles, explaining my role as their union rep. Explaining my role, how I'm there to help them. Explaining my role so they understand how they can utilize the PLAs to benefit their communities through training, through apprenticeship, through collaboration with the contractors.

So, when you have an Indigenous representation on a megaproject like that, it smooths out a lot of roads. Especially in the truth and reconciliation that's coming out nowadays, it's vital that you have someone that has that expertise, that ability to talk to all the partners and relay that back to your members. So that's how—why it's important.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Do other members have questions?

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Castel, for being present here tonight and again sharing your experiences and your contributions to the North on the various projects that you've worked on.

So thank you again for being present here tonight.

The Chairperson: Mr. Castel, would you like to respond?

R. Castel: I'd just like to say thanks for listening.

You know, it's an opportunity to, like, the last presenter, is to—you're the owners. It's an opportunity for you to say, yes, let's be owners, let's continue that prosperity.

MLA Marcelino: I think I'd like to correct you, Mr. Castel. We're not the owners. We are the owners together as this province. It's all of Manitoba that will own that PLA and benefits from that agreement.

The Chairperson: Mr. Castel, would you like to respond to that?

R. Castel: Yes. Yes, I understand what she's saying.

As Manitobans, we're all responsible. We're all here to be a prosperous province. But I'd also like to say that, you know, from a First Nations perspective, we're at the table now, right? We're here. We're here to help. We're here to enhance the PLAs.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions for the presenter?

Do we have leave for the Honourable Minister Schmidt to ask a question? *[Agreed]*

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the committee for granting me leave, and thank you, Mr. Castel, for being here.

You mentioned the concept of truth and reconciliation, and we know that certainly historically in Manitoba, megaprojects like hydro dams have not always benefited all Manitobans or all communities equally.

So I'd like to hear your perspective on how you think that project labour agreements can contribute to economic reconciliation here in Manitoba, something that our government is very focused on.

R. Castel: Yes, thank you for the question.

You know, in history, you know, our unions haven't been at the forefront and upfront with the First Nations communities of this province. But recently, you know, we have been more aware. We have been more inclusive, we have been more communicating. Our doors have been reaching out to engage a lot more

with our Indigenous communities because, when you really think about it, on a major project like Keeyask, that was in someone's backyard. Whose backyard was it, right?

So, with that Keeyask project, they had that opportunity to hire local, right, through a PLA, local meaning north. But if we can't find the workers there, we go to the province of Manitoba. Can't find the workers there, we go outside of that. So that really benefitted those four communities that were part of Keeyask at that time.

So moving forward, you know, being in my position as the director of Indigenous relations for Manitoba Building Trades, you know, I'm able to enhance the building trades a little bit more. You know, working alongside my colleagues, working alongside their colleagues, working alongside their projects. You know, able to go out and engage with the communities and train their local workers. You know, we're able to do that now—go out to the community and train the community about labour, construction craft workers, bricklayers, insulators, you know, we're able to provide those things now.

And utilizing our partnerships with Indigenous Services Canada you know, ISET holders, all those things coming more and more and more. So it's a great opportunity to utilize these partnerships that are out there, you know?

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for taking the time today and for providing your insight.

I just want to let folks know that we've received a late written submission to Bill 7 from Joshua Lapointe. The submission has been uploaded to the MLA portal.

Is there leave to have this submission included in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

I'd like to call on Mr. Daemien Bernhard.

Mr. Bernhard, when you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Daemian Bernhard (Private Citizen): Hi. Hello, my name is Daemien Bernhard, and I'm the assistant business manager of IBEW 2085.

Tonight I'm presenting to you in my capacity as a construction electrician, and I want to thank the committee for taking the time hear the speakers this evening. And I want to thank the government and Minister of Labour for bringing forward Bill 7, which will repeal the ban on PLAs.

The ban on PLAs is the only one of its kind in North America and has damaging impacts on Manitoba skilled trade workers and the construction industry as a whole.

The work as I do as an IBEW 2085 has been done for 64 years and has built the critical infrastructure for Manitoba's needs. I've personally worked on many projects that were built under PLAs. I've worked at Wuskwatim, I've worked at Keeyask and I've worked at Keewatinook.

During that time working up there, I got to mentor a lot of First Nations members that were local up there. I've got a good friend, Ian Beardie *[phonetic]*, who's now a journeyman. He brings his skills back to his hometown. He works on the water treatment plant there; he keeps all the infrastructure working in Bird, in Fox Lake. It's super critical that we keep PLAs like this around.

Part of my history: I worked eight years non-union before joining a union, so I have a third of my experience in the trade is non-union. When I was working at Keewatinook, I worked directly beside non-union companies that worked under the PLA.

Those companies were not forced to be union. Those members—those people that came in and worked on that project, they were—got to enjoy the benefits of being union by getting the high wages. They got the pension, they got the benefits while they were on-site. When they left, they went with their company back to the jobs that they had. Some of them actually joined the unions after because of their preference to get these wages and benefits.

* (21:00)

So the fact that it's forced unionization is not true. I was—the repeal on the ban on PLAs signals to me that the Province is keen to invest on workforce development strategy that will benefit Manitobans.

BC has some incredible statistics following their implementation of PLA framework that I'd like to share with you now: 91 per cent of workers on infrastructure projects are BC residents; Indigenous and female participation in BC's construction industry is less than 5 per cent for both groups overall, but under PLAs, there's 15 per cent Indigenous participation and 9 per cent female participation; the 9 per cent female participation saw 10 per cent of all hours worked and 15—oh, sorry—and the 15 Indigenous participation saw 14 per cent of all hours worked.

When I hear stats like that, I can't help but be hopeful that, here in Manitoba, we are able to proudly tell the similar story. Bill 7 is an important first step in ensuring the government can reinstate framework that's going to give Manitoba the social and economic outcomes we need as a province.

I am hopeful that we will—that they will immediately move to legislate framework for PLAs, ensuring that workers like myself have fair wages and economic opportunities while building critical infrastructure community—our communities need.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Bernhard, for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Bernhard, for your participation today. And thanks for all your really, really hard work over the years on all those big projects for our province.

My question is that you mentioned that you were non-unionized for a third of your career and then unionized for the rest so far.

What do you think was the biggest difference between that time and this time that you're unionized now? What are some contrasts or changes that you feel you can highlight?

D. Bernhard: When I first started in the trade, I did commercial residential maintenance. I actually did maintenance for Manitoba Housing and making sure any time there was issues, we'd clean that up. But I wasn't learning anything new in my trade. The safety wasn't there that I needed. I had people threaten me, try to jump me for my tools while working in Manitoba Housing.

I got tired of that race, and I went to the union hall and wanted to pursue different avenues in my career. As soon as I became a unionized member, I got to go up to Thompson and work at Vale Inco. I got to travel all across Canada. I've been in the mines all over, Esterhazy, potash. I've been in BC. I've been in northern Baffin Island. I've enjoyed many things from the union, so now it's my turn to give back. That's why I became a union representative.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Are there other members of the committee that would like to ask a question?

Ms. Byram: Just to thank you, Mr. Bernhard, for making your presentation here tonight and, again, sharing your experience in union and non-union.

So thank you.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, thank you very much for taking the time tonight.

I would now like to call Mr. Joshua Fisher, who is online.

If Mr. Joshua Fisher could turn on your microphone and your video.

You can begin your presentation when you're ready.

Joshua Fisher (Private Citizen): Hi. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my submission. My name is Josh Fisher. I'm here to speak in favour of PLAs.

Just a little bit of background. So when I was in my mid-20s, I was struggling to find good employment—good-paying employment. So I was looking for something that would be stable. So I applied to the labours union, and within six months, I'd received a call to work at the Keeyask hydro dam under a PLA. With priority being given to Manitoba residents, it enabled me to be hired on this project.

Working at Keeyask with the union under a PLA allowed me to save for a house, provided me with great benefits, wages and a pension that supported my family.

At the time, it was the highest wages that I'd ever earned working construction, so that was huge for my family. Working under a PLA is not only good for Manitoba workers, it's good for Manitoba. Keeps a lot of the wages in Manitoba by providing priority hiring to Manitobans. Working at Keeyask, I know I personally saw the social—socio-economic benefits and skills Indigenous and northern residents gained as a result of priority hiring at the Keeyask project, under the PLA.

Again, I really support PLAs and keeping the work in Manitoba for Manitobans.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

Do we have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Mr. Fisher, I just wanted to thank you for your time and effort in presenting to committee tonight. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Would you like to respond, Mr. Fisher?

J. Fisher: No. Thanks for listening.

Ms. Byram: I, too, Mr. Fisher, would like to thank you for participating tonight. I know it's not early; it's later into the evening, and taking the time at this time to participate is appreciated. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Mr. Fisher, would you like to respond?

J. Fisher: No. Thank you very much for your guys' time.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for taking the time tonight to provide your perspective.

**Bill 9—The Employment Standards Code
Amendment Act
(Continued)**

The Chairperson: We're now going to be moving to bill—back to Bill 9.

So I'd like to call Ms. Susan Russell-Csanyi.

Whenever you're ready, you can begin your presentation.

Susan Russell-Csanyi (Canadian Cancer Society): In the handouts, you will find a policy note, Manitoba's 2024 cancer stats and CCS's April 2024 opinion poll to illuminate Manitoba's support of Bill 9.

And I can be—I'm comfortable with being addressed as Ms. Russell going forward; Csanyi is a little bit hard to get off the tongue there.

All right, so good evening, members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Susan Russell-Csanyi and I serve as the senior advocacy co-ordinator in Manitoba with the Canadian Cancer Society. I'm honoured to be here this evening to express our strong support for Bill 9, the employment standards amendment act, extending the length of leave for serious injury and illness from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

It's a critical change in one that could make all the difference in the lives of Manitobans with cancer and their families. No one ever plans to hear the words, you have cancer. But for 7,600 Manitobans that will be diagnosed with cancer in 2024, those words are a reality.

For nearly 40 per cent of those diagnosed, cancer will strike at a time when they are in the prime of their careers or preparing for retirement. They may be working hard to buy their first home, paying off debt or simply providing for their families. At these times, people are often juggling multiple responsibilities with many others depending on them, and that's why

the peace of mind that unpaid job-protected leave offers is a necessary component to a healing journey.

We know these are already difficult times. We are living in an affordability crisis where the cost of—the rising cost of living dominates our conversations at the grocery store, at the pharmacy and here in the Legislature. Meanwhile, the costs associated with cancer are only rising. When someone faces cancer, their struggle is not just medical but financial. People living with cancer often face a reduction in income or a rise in expenses as well as an increased risk of unemployment due to a cancer diagnosis.

As elected officials, you hear from Manitobans every day who are struggling amid a cancer diagnosis or other serious illnesses. An expanded job-protected-illness-leave policy reflects the realities of living with cancer. By ensuring job protection is afforded up front, having a job to return to is one less thing for a cancer patient and their family to worry about.

* (21:10)

The increased anxiety and stress resulting from financial insecurity experienced by individuals facing cancer can impact a person's psychosocial well-being and can have adverse impacts on their mental health, physical health and the quality of life for those that care for them. By providing job security for cancer patients as they receive and recover from treatment, it will help reduce financial insecurity and help them heal and return to work as healthy and productive as possible.

The amendment from 17 weeks to 27 weeks allows Manitobans the opportunity to not only return to the same job and career opportunities they had before they went on leave, but also a week to establish employment insurance coverage. The expanded unpaid job-protected illness leave to 27 weeks aligns with the federal EI sickness benefit. The expanded job-protected leave allows Manitobans to access the benefits they need to make ends meet.

Manitoba's compassionate care leave provides employees the opportunity to take 28 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave to care for or support a critically ill family member. Seriously ill Manitobans or injured Manitobans deserve the same opportunity to maintain their employment status and career opportunities, just as those caring for them do.

Ill or injured Manitobans and their families should not have to experience financial hardship or uncertainty during their cancer journey; there is hope. Thanks to advancements in treatment, more and more people are

surviving cancer and returning to work. These individuals want and deserve the chance to rebuild their lives. They need to know that their job will still be there when they're ready to come back, and Manitoba has a chance to provide that opportunity.

Manitoba can join the other jurisdictions that are setting the standard for job-protected leave and a standard of hope that the rest of Canada will follow. Currently, Quebec and Nova Scotia have aligned with the federal benefit; Quebec is offering 27—pardon me, Quebec is offering 26 weeks of job-protected leave, and they started offering that in 2003. Recently, Nova Scotia's Progressive Conservative government passed a similar legislation; Nova Scotia's 27 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave received royal assent in two weeks.

Manitobans support this legislation. We—pardon me. We conducted an opinion poll in April and found that 92 per cent of Manitobans surveyed support the expansion of unpaid job-protected illness leave to 27 weeks. That's why the Canadian Cancer Society has worked to elevate the needs of people living with cancer to push for these vital changes. Together, we've advanced the conversation around unpaid job-protected leave and advocacy on behalf of Manitobans and patients and their families.

Expanding unpaid job-protected serious-illness leave will reduce barriers to cancer care, help reduce the financial burden experienced by people affected by cancer and ensure that people with cancer have the same—have the time they need to heal and return to work as healthy and productive as possible. This is particularly important during this time of financial restraint. No Manitoban should experience financial hardship during their cancer journey.

It takes a society to improve the cancer journey for everyone and involves governments, employees, health care and community to work together. Expanding unpaid job-protected illness leave can reduce financial burdens on cancer patients.

On behalf of the Canadian Cancer Society, we wholeheartedly support and endorse Bill 9. It's more than just a smart policy; it's the right thing to do because while cancer doesn't wait, your job should.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Russell.

Does—do members of the committee have questions?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, Ms. Russell-Csanyi. I

wanted to thank you for all the meetings that you provided with me to brief me on this topic and the research that the Canadian Cancer Society has done on behalf of its members to advocate for this important amendment.

I wanted to ask your opinion or your response to opposition concerns that folks would try to, you know, use fraud or something like that in order to try to get unpaid job-protected leave.

What is your response to that kind of concern that the opposition has raised?

S. Russell-Csanyi: Thank you for the question. We're so happy to be here today to speak in support of Bill 9.

So if I'm understanding your question correctly, it's, will employees be asking for more time away due to expansion of unpaid job-protected leave?

CCS conducted an analysis of the current job-protected leave legislation to examine the influence of illness and disability absences among eligible workers potentially affected by the policy; that includes non-unionized workers who met the tenure requirements and other non-eligible workers.

We did not find any evidence that Manitoba's current policy increased the overall length of illness and disability absences and Québec's policy was associated with decreases in lengths of leave. Our research analysis clarifies that people are not found to take advantage of unpaid job-protected leave policy.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions for the presenter?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you Ms. Russell, for your presentation today, and on this very important matter.

I'm sure we have all known someone, whether it be family or friends that have gone through severe illness, critical illness in particular, perhaps cancer even. And I want to say thank you for taking the time, and also, thank you for responding to the minister's question, and—as well as giving us your handout here with some further information to follow that up.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Ms. Russell, would you like to respond?

S. Russell-Csanyi: You're welcome. Thanks for having us today.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions for the presenter?

Okay, thank you very much, Ms. Russell, for taking the time tonight.

I would like to call Mr. Patrick Tohill, who is online.

Mr. Tohill, when you're ready you can begin your presentation.

Patrick Tohill (Crohn's and Colitis Canada): Good evening, my name is Patrick Tohill. I'm director of advocacy and government affairs for Crohn's and Colitis Canada.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Chair, the honourable minister and other members here tonight, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the more than 10,000 Manitobans who live with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, and their families.

I'd also like to acknowledge that I'm calling from Toronto, which is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. Crohn's and Colitis Canada acknowledges the enduring and vibrant presence, culture, history and inherent rights of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit across Canada, on whose traditional territories we live and work.

For fifty years, Crohn's and Colitis Canada has been transforming the lives of those living with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis through research, patient programs, advocacy and awareness. We are the world's second largest charitable funder of research to cure these conditions, with more than \$150 million invested since 1974. Our patient programs include peer support, scholarships, camps for children and much more.

Tonight, we're pleased to join our colleagues from the Canadian Cancer Society and others in supporting the proposed amendments to Bill 9, to extend long term job-protected leave for those impacted by serious illness or injury from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

This measure is critical to ensuring that all Manitobans experiencing serious illness or injury are able to take the medical leave they need, and when the time comes, return to work without risking their employment.

According to a recent—the most recent Canadian survey on disability, in 2022, some 8 million people in Canada, 27 per cent, reported living with a disability. Of these, only 35 per cent report experiencing continuous limitations. Another 65 per cent experience disabilities that are dynamic in nature, meaning they are progressive, recurrent or fluctuating. This latter category of disability dynamics includes episodic disabilities where periods of wellness are

punctuated by intermittent and often unpredictable activity limitations.

Chronic illnesses such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, as well as other chronic illnesses including arthritis, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, would all fall under this category, along with some types of cancer and HIV, mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, musculoskeletal conditions such as back or neck pain and chronic fatigue syndrome.

Such periods of episodic disability are unpredictable. They may be invisible to others and may also impact the employee's mental health. Many with Crohn's and colitis may even hesitate to disclose their illness to their employer unless absolutely necessary. This may be out of concern that they will not be taken seriously or due to stigma around a condition that is accompanied by diarrhea and bowel urgency that may result in a frequent need to visit a washroom, as many as 20 or more times a day in some cases.

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are the two main forms of inflammatory bowel disease, or IBD. Both are characterized by inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract, that disrupts normal digestive function.

* (21:20)

This can mean unrelenting pain and fatigue, uncontrolled diarrhea, fever, rectal bleeding and declining mental health. Extraintestinal manifestations associated with IBD include skin conditions, eye conditions, muscular and joint pain, as well as diseases of the liver, pancreas or gallbladder.

While people living with these inflammatory bowel diseases may look fine on the outside, they may be feeling far from fine inside. With the right drug therapy, inflammation can be controlled and people can live relatively well. However, these conditions are individual, and not everyone will have the same experience.

Even when stable on a drug, active symptoms of IBD, or flares, may be experienced. In some cases, flares may prove debilitating, resulting in a temporary or even prolonged absence from the workplace. Some will be hospitalized as a result of flares for two or more weeks, and upon release, they require many weeks of recovery.

Some may still be receiving nutrition from a feeding tube during the first weeks, and it's not uncommon that they might also require the assistance of a personal support worker. Many will have experienced

severe weight and/or blood loss or even loss of muscle mass. It may be many weeks more before they're able to return to the workplace. Some may require accommodations upon their return.

At some future date, Crohn's and Colitis Canada hopes to have the opportunity to work with the government to better address the needs of Manitobans with episodic disabilities through improved workplace accommodations.

The longer one lives with IBD, the more likely that complications may be experienced, including bowel obstruction, intestinal rupture, fistulas in the bowel, malnutrition with resulting weight loss and colorectal cancer. Some of these will require surgical intervention, which comes with an even longer recovery period.

We are grateful for the Manitoba government's leadership in aligning the Province's unpaid leave benefit for serious injury or illness with the federal employment insurance sickness benefit. These important changes will ensure that workers experiencing serious illness will not only be able to take full advantage of the extended EI benefits, they'll also be able to take the time off they need without fear of losing their employment.

In conclusion, extending the length of job-protected illness leave from 17 weeks to 27 weeks not only aligns Manitoba's benefit with the federal EI sickness benefit, it also will make Manitoba a leader in protecting workers who are experiencing a disruption in their employment due to serious illness or injury and provide an important safety net to these workers and their families.

Those experiencing a work disruption as a result of Crohn's or colitis tell me they want nothing more than to find a way to continue to do their job or to find another job that they can do. It's critical that those who are once again able to return to their job may do so when their active symptoms are once again under control.

Thank you for your time.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Tohill, for your presentation and for joining us tonight at the committee. And I also wanted to thank your CEO and president, Lori Radke, for her letter to me and continued advocacy of Crohn's and Colitis Canada on

this important amendment change that we're hoping to bring forth here in Manitoba.

My question is, I think that the previous presenters on Bill 9 were able to, you know, let the opposition understand that there was enough consultation done on this bill already through the Labour Management Review Committee process.

I just would like to get your opinion on how would you address members opposite's concerns that this—that folks might try to fraud the system?

P. Tohill: Yes, you know, unlike my colleague at the Canadian Cancer Society, I don't have any analysis or data to share. You know, but, you know, anecdotally, you know, from the people that I speak to who have lived with Crohn's and colitis, you know, it's much more often the case that they are not given sufficient consideration by their employers.

Many are not—many tell me they are not given the accommodations that they need. People don't understand that they need to be close to a washroom, you know, in returning to work. People don't understand the time that they need to take off and their long recovery. And, you know, many who are in—who don't have the protection of a good contract, you know, whether it's a good white-collar job or whether it's a union contract, you know, people in retail and other more precarious industries.

You know, I literally worry that they're going to need longer than the time that they're allotted to recover. So I just ask the committee to consider, you know, that absent evidence that people are taking advantage. I think we need to give people the benefit of the doubt.

The Chairperson: Are there other members that have questions?

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Tohill, for presenting here tonight and joining us at this time of evening. And, again, I want to say thank you for sharing the information and I found it very informative.

And thank you so much.

The Chairperson: Would you like to respond?

P. Tohill: Thank you. Nothing to add.

The Chairperson: All right, thank you very much for taking the time tonight and for providing your perspectives.

All right, I'd like to call David Grant for Bill 21.

When you're ready, please proceed with your presentation.

David Grant (Private Citizen): Could I speak to 7?

The Chairperson: Sorry?

D. Grant: We were doing 7. Could I do my—

The Chairperson: You have 10 minutes, but you can—*[interjection]* Oh, sorry, you're—we have you signed up for Bill 21 at the moment, as well as Bill 7, but can you speak to Bill 21 right now?

D. Grant: Okay. No, I think I have nothing to add to what other people have said on Bill 21.

Thank you.

And I did want to offer my apologies for not being here when called before, but I was down the hall and lined up to speak there, and I guess it's related to Bill 21.

In the old days, when we spoke here, there was a list, and the list was the speaking order, and there were no complications, like other translators and the, what can we say, the being-out-of-town issue, that crept in a few years ago. But, anyway, it would be nice to see that again, because if I'd known when my name was coming up, I would've been here and not wasted your time that way.

So thank you.

The Chairperson: Would you like to provide some comments right now, or are you passing—

D. Grant: Not on Bill 21, but just on the fact that I wasn't here—

The Chairperson: Okay. No. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

**Bill 7—The Public Sector Construction Projects
(Tendering) Repeal Act**
(Continued)

The Chairperson: Okay, we're going to now go to Bill 7, to the people that were dropped to the bottom of the list.

So is Mr. Shawn Wood here? Okay, so they are going to be dropped from the list.

Now we have David Grant for Bill 7.

My apologies for making you come up twice. Please proceed with your presentation.

David Grant (Private Citizen): Anyway, on Bill 7, the bill that's very short and obvious; there is space for

an explanatory note at the bottom of it on the website. And what it says is what the bill says: it's going to be deleted; the thing—the act is going to be revoked.

It would've been useful, I think, to people reading that to have some idea of what the previous bill did that's being revoked. When I searched on the website for the previous bill by name, I got all the deliberation years ago when 2017 was brought in, but nowhere did it say what it did. And that was just, you know, my comment on it as a process; it would be nice to not spend the whole evening on this because I didn't know who's coming up next.

But also the bill, and really, for Bill 7, I think it was very eloquently explained by people three speakers ago, and I would just revert to them and their comments and I have nothing really to add to that, other than it would've been nice going into it without a lot of research to know what Bill 7 and its predecessor were intended to do. That was—that's a comment on it and on the explanatory note that was brief, and I think there's room in that box to do—other boxes have lots of detail, and I would've liked to see more detail on that one.

So, again, that's a rules sort of thing, housekeeping, rather than the bill. But that was my comment on it, and thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your comments.

Do members of the committee have questions for Mr. Grant?

* (21:30)

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Grant, for coming down to the Leg. and spending time with us tonight. It's really great to know that members of the public are very attunedly aware of what we're doing in here. Sometimes we think nobody's paying attention, and you certainly are. And a lot of times folks don't care about legislation that's going by, and it's important that people do.

And so, thanks for your participation and look forward to seeing you again.

The Chairperson: Mr. Grant, would you like to respond?

D. Grant: Thank you very much for the kind words.

And what I'm saying, would've been nice if that was—more stuff was in that explain box. I can do research, you know, I've done lots of it for decades. But for the person just casually looking at what's

going on around here, what was there didn't really do the job. I think the guy I was sitting next to during the break explained to me that one of the people here had completely—I think during her talking points here, had completely misunderstood Bill 7. So having the explanatory notes saves people a bit of embarrassment, and it would've been useful. So that's—again, that's a lesson we could learn for future bills.

And not just what the bill does, but what the implications are, how is it going to affect my life. And—because some of this stuff will affect—these workers explained very much PLAs and what they're good for. And knowing that as you read over the page in the—on the website would have been useful, so.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Are there further questions for Mr. Grant?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, Mr. Grant, for being part of this tonight and putting your comments on the record.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, thank you, Mr. Grant, for taking the time tonight.

All right, next, we're calling Mr. Connor Ketchen. Okay, so they're going to be dropped from the list.

After that is Mr. Dave McPhail. Okay, they're going to be dropped from the list.

Mrs. Lois Ruston? Okay, she'll be dropped from the list.

Okay, that is—that concludes the presentations for the three bills.

* * *

The Chairperson: All right, in what order does the committee wish to proceed with the clause-by-clause consideration of these bills?

MLA Marcelino: Just by numerical order of the bills.

The Chairperson: It's been suggested that we move by numerical order.

Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 7—The Public Sector Construction Projects
(Tendering) Repeal Act**
(Continued)

The Chairperson: We're going to be considering clause by clause of Bill 7.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 7 have an opening statement?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I'd like to thank those that came out to present on this bill tonight. And I would also like to thank the staff from Labour and Immigration and Consumer Protection and Government Services who are here to support me tonight.

This bill will bring back the option for public sector employers to tender or enter into project labour agreements.

At the moment, Manitoba is the only outlier in Canada that bans project labour agreements. We know that the previous government's decision to ban PLAs was rooted in ideology and not in fact.

Project labour agreements work out collective agreements in advance of the building of critical infrastructure. PLAs are used globally and are recognized as useful in stabilizing the workforce and wages, addressing safety, preventing work stoppages and reducing the risk of disruptions.

In Manitoba, PLAs have a long history of being a tool in supporting apprentices, contributing to local communities by hiring local and ensuring projects are completed on time and within budget. Consultations were undertaken with departmental staff from Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, Consumer Protection and Government Services, and Finance in the preparation of this bill.

This bill fulfills our government's commitment to protecting workers' jobs, standing up for workers' rights and making it easier for Manitobans to get good-paying jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Just want to thank the presenters that participated in this tonight and shared their views and their perspectives, and that's part of what the process is and I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you to the member.

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

**Bill 9—The Employment Standards Code
Amendment Act**
(Continued)

The Chairperson: We'll now consider Bill 9.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 9 have an opening statement?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I want to thank everyone joining us today to discuss this important bill, and making time to contribute to the development of measures to protect the jobs of Manitobans and to stand up for the rights of working people.

I want to thank all the presenters who made time today to be part of this process. This process is unique to us in Manitoba, as it gives us the opportunity to the public to participate and offer comments on this proposed bill. I would also like to thank the staff from Labour and Immigration and Consumer Protection and Government Services who are here to support me tonight.

In 2022, the federal government made changes to employment insurance and the federal labour legislation as part of broader EI reform. These changes increased EI sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks and the maximum length of unpaid medical leave from 17 to 27 weeks for federally regulated employees under the Canada Labour Code.

Long-term leave for serious injury or illness is currently a 17-week unpaid leave in Manitoba. To qualify, an employee must be employed by the same employer for at least 90 days, and as a result, Manitoba workers are currently not able to access enough unpaid protected leave from their jobs to receive the full extended EI benefits.

We know that both the employer and labour communities, represented by the Labour Management Review Committee, has recommended that Manitoba align the Employment Standards Code with the federal government's changes to EI sickness benefits, and the Canadian Cancer Society and others have also advocated for these changes.

I will also note that a Probe Research poll found that 92 per cent of Manitobans support passing a law in Manitoba that would protect the job status of seriously ill and injured employees for up to a minimum of 27 weeks.

This government is taking action by extending the length of long-term leave for serious illness and injury from 17 weeks to 27 weeks to align with the EI sickness

benefits. These enhanced measures will protect the jobs of Manitobans and will ensure workers have the time and the flexibility needed for treatment and recovery.

* (21:40)

Manitoba will join several jurisdictions that provide serious illness and injury leaves that mirror EI benefits, including the federal government, Quebec and just most recently it was unanimously passed in Nova Scotia, while other provinces like Ontario are considering also aligning their leave with the EI sickness benefits.

I'm highly interested in moving this priority mandate forward, giving our government's commitment to protecting jobs and always standing up for the rights of working people, we want to support Manitobans who are recovering from serious illness or injury and I hope that the opposition feels the same and would support this bill.

With these short remarks, I thank the presenters again today, and the committee for their consideration of this bill.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you to the presenters who—from the Cancer Society and Crohn's and Colitis, and the presentation that they made here today and the information that they shared with committee.

Serious injury and illness, I'm sure we've all been affected whether it be family or friends, and—impacts one's life in a variety of ways, and I look forward to seeing this go through.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Committee Substitution

The Chairperson: We'd like to inform the committee, our rule 85(2), the following membership substitution has been made for this committee, effective immediately: Honourable Minister Schmidt for Honourable Minister Marcelino.

Thank you.

Bill 21—The Public Schools Amendment Act

(Continued)

The Chairperson: Does the minister responsible for Bill 21 have an opening statement?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Good evening. Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I'd like to start by thanking the departmental staff that were able to join us here tonight for their support.

The purpose of Bill 21, The Public Schools Amendment Act, is to reduce barriers and improve access to school for children residing in Manitoba. It proposes amendments to The Public Schools Act to change the right to attend school from age six to five years old and the compulsory school age from six to—pardon me, from seven to six.

These changes better align Manitoba with the rest of Canada and will come into effect for the next school year. We anticipate that these changes will have minimal impact to enrolment numbers, as the vast majority of children in Manitoba already start school at the age of five or six. We will ensure to monitor the situation closely and help school divisions should they see a major increase in their enrolment, but again, we don't anticipate that.

Additionally, this bill seeks to expand the definition of a resident pupil. This will ensure that children are able to attend school in the division where they reside, as long as they are living with a responsible adult. This better recognizes the multitude of family and care arrangements in our province and prioritizes children being in school regardless of who is caring for them.

The amendments will also ensure temporary residents' right to send their children to a public school.

These amendments will contribute to a more equitable and inclusive public-education system and support the success of all Manitoba students.

Unfortunately, this bill was delayed so tonight it will require a minor technical amendment. But I hope that we will have the support of the committee and that we can all agree that children having access—earlier access to education in our communities is a good thing.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): Thank the minister for the statement recognizing that she is relatively new in this role.

I'll reiterate some comments that I've made previously with regard to this bill.

We have no issue, as the official opposition caucus, with the premise of this bill whatsoever and never did. In fact, I believe it was something that we were pursuing when we were still in government as well.

What we have issue with and why the bill was held over was due to the rapidly expanding student population in our public school system and the fact that the—initially when the minister—previous minister of Education brought this bill forward, he couldn't answer the question about how many students that this decision making would add to our public school system.

We know that hallway education is alive and well in our public school system as it is, and so we think it's irresponsible to bring forward a piece of legislation and implement it, that would raise the number of students in our student population without knowing exactly what that number is.

And so, on top of that, we have a government who's cancelled the construction of nine new schools and have brought forward no plans to build additional school capacity across the province. And so, that's why we held this bill over, to give the new government an opportunity to make those plans known to Manitobans and to do some of that research.

When asked at the second reading bill debate, the minister who, at that time was designated to respond to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Consumer Protection and Government Services (MLA Naylor), admitted on the record that that work hadn't been done and that she couldn't answer the question. And so we have no assurance, and so, unfortunately, we're left with likely not supporting this bill as it moves forward for a vote today.

So hopefully, the new minister will undertake to do that work to ensure that we have adequate space in our public school system to welcome all students at age six when this bill is implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

All right. During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass.

Shall clause 5 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Chairperson: I hear a no.

The floor is open for questions.

Sorry. Honourable Minister Schmidt.

MLA Schmidt: I move

THAT Clause 5(1) of the Bill be amended by striking out "July 1, 2024" and substituting "the day it receives royal assent".

Motion presented.

The Chairperson: The amendment is in order. The floor is open for questions.

Seeing no questions, is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Chairperson: The question before the committee is as follows:

THAT Clause 5(1) of the Bill be amended by striking out "July 1, 2024" and substituting "the day it receives royal assent".

Amendment—pass.

Clause 5 as amended—pass.

Shall the enacting clause pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Chairperson: I heard a no.

The floor is open for questions.

* (21:50)

Voice Vote

The Chairperson: All those in favour of the enacting clause, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Chairperson: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

Clause—sorry, the enacting clause is accordingly passed.

* * *

The Chairperson: Title—pass.

Shall the bill be—sorry, shall the bill as amended be reported?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Chairperson: I hear a no.

The floor is open for questions.

Voice Vote

The Chairperson: All those in favour of reporting the bill, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Chairperson: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

An Honourable Member: Mr. Chair, can I request on division from committee? Okay, then—*[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Mr. Grant—sorry, Jackson. My apologies.

Mr. Jackson: At this hour, I'll take it.

On division, please, Mr. Chair.

The Chairperson: The bill shall be reported as amended, on division.

* * *

The Chairperson: The hour being 9:51, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

The Chairperson: The committee shall rise. Thank you.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 9:51 p.m.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Re: Bill 7

Hello Chair and Committee members,

I am totally interested in this Bill and I don't have any concerns with it passing through the House and looking forward to it getting done through Royal Assent.

Thank you,

Ben McGillivray

Re: Bill 7

Dear Members of the Legislative Assembly,

I am writing to express the strong support of the OPCMIA Local 222 Union for Bill 7, which seeks to repeal the ban on Project Labour Agreements (PLAs) in Manitoba. This submission outlines the significant benefits of PLAs, the detrimental effects of the current ban, and the positive impact that repealing this ban will have on our construction industry and workforce.

The ban on PLAs was a misguided policy that has adversely affected not only union interests but the entire construction sector within our province. This unique prohibition in North America has undermined workforce development, project cost predictability, and the safety standards that we strive to uphold on construction sites.

PLAs are widely recognized as effective tools for both public and private construction projects. They offer essential cost certainty for project owners, promote local hiring and training opportunities, and ensure consistent safety standards across job sites. Many key infrastructure projects in Manitoba, including those crucial to our communities, have successfully operated under PLAs.

A notable example is the Manitoba Hydro experience, which featured the longest Project Labour Agreement in history—the Burntwood-Nelson Agreement (BNA). This collaboration with the Allied Hydro Council employed tens of thousands of Manitobans on critical hydro installations, particularly in remote northern areas. Through such projects, Manitoba has established itself as a leader in clean, renewable energy, exemplified by significant installations like the Kettle Rapids and Long Spruce Generating Stations. PLAs have also been instrumental in delivering large-scale projects such as the Floodway, which was completed ahead of schedule and within budget.

Effective implementation of PLAs not only trains the workforce of tomorrow but also guarantees local hiring, standardizes fair wages, and expands the pool of contractors eligible to bid on projects. Contrary to misconceptions, PLAs do not enforce unionization nor restrict the number of contractors. Historically, Manitoba has successfully utilized PLAs without a surge in non-union organizations, and many agreements include provisions that allow unions to relinquish organizing rights for a designated period post-project completion. Moreover, PLAs focus on the contractor's ability to provide skilled labor rather than simply being the lowest bidder, as they align wages with prevailing union rates.

The positive community impact of PLAs cannot be overstated. Projects using PLAs foster goodwill by creating local jobs and delivering economic benefits. A prime example is the Wuskwatim Generating Station, a collaboration between Manitoba Hydro and the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. This project not only generates clean energy but also exemplifies how PLAs can facilitate successful partnerships that prioritize local community benefits, enhance training programs, and reinforce safety practices.

Conversely, the repercussions of not utilizing PLAs are evident in projects like the South End Water Pollution Control Centre, which was constructed using the lowest cost bidding method. This approach resulted in the employment of out-of-province labor, despite the availability of local workers. The outcome was subpar quality, significant delays, and budget overruns. Had this project been executed under a PLA, we could have ensured local jobs, maintained higher quality standards, and avoided unnecessary costs for taxpayers.

It is crucial to emphasize that the ban on PLAs has had detrimental effects on the construction industry as a whole. PLAs are vital for equipping Manitoba's workers with the necessary skills and for securing local jobs, which enhance support systems for worker retention, reduce disputes, and facilitate training navigation. Collaborating with educational institutions and Apprenticeship Manitoba allows us to deliver flexible training options that maximize job site potential.

The OPCMIA strongly advocates for the repeal of the ban on PLAs through Bill 7. We believe that the government is committed to creating quality jobs for Manitobans who contribute to our essential infrastructure. Repealing this ban is a critical step forward and essential for establishing a legislative framework

that addresses the negative impact on local jobs and project quality.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement and look forward to your support for Bill 7.

Sincerely,

George Emery
Business Manager
OPCMIA Local 222 Union

Re: Bill 7

I am writing to you today in my capacity as Business Representative for Boilermakers Local 555. On behalf of our 150 members, I want to express support for Bill 7 which will repeal the ban on Project Labour Agreements (PLAs). For decades, Manitoba built high quality infrastructure projects using PLAs which ensured the safe construction of high-quality builds with hiring practices that put local employment first. Manitoba was not unique in using the practice, PLAs have been used by the public and private sectors across North America to construct everything from schools, hospitals, bridges, stadiums, pipelines, floodways, dams, and more.

Repealing the ban gives the government to opportunity to instate properly structured PLAs and ensure publicly funded projects will be built safely, by Manitoban workers, to the benefit of Manitobans. The consequences of the ban on PLAs (which is incidentally the only of its kind in all of Canada), has done a major disservice to Manitoban workers and their families and weakened the overall provincial economy. Wages earned by Manitoban workers stay in Manitoba. Under a PLA the hiring of Manitobans can be prioritized and ensure the benefits in the construction of publicly funded projects are enjoyed within the local communities in which these projects are built.

Every major publicly funded construction project in Manitoba for 50 years had a PLA, from the creation of Duff's Red River Floodway in 1968 to the Red River Floodway Expansion Project in 2010. These agreements embody progressive practices in the engagement of local communities, marginalized groups, and those impacted by infrastructure projects to be a part of the building, maintenance, and monitoring of those projects. They support the hiring and training of local workers and underrepresented groups, including Indigenous peoples. They often contain provisions that enable apprenticeships,

guarantee prevailing wages, establish grounds for workplace development initiatives, provide funding and economic support for impacted communities, and set forth measurable goals for minority, women, and local job hiring. Workers benefit from a legacy of experience, skills training, and employability as a result of the use of PLAs.

There is a growing base of evidence to prove that PLAs are an effective tool for ensuring that project proponents engage with and involve the communities impacted by their projects and provide workforce opportunities for those communities. British Columbia has used a PLA framework and ensured 91% of workers on infrastructure projects are BC residents. While overall the percentage of Indigenous and female participation in BC's construction industry is less than 5% for both groups, projects tendered under a PLA have increased participation to 15% Indigenous participation and 9% female participation. Even more compelling is the hours worked by these under-represented groups. 9% female participation saw 10% of all hours worked, while 15% indigenous participation saw 14% of all hours worked.

PLAs were a keystone part of Manitoba's construction industry for decades, and their ban made no sense given the value that they had provided Manitoban workers. For instance, in 2010, Manitoba's East Side Road Authority launched a series of PLAs with First Nations communities that led to the investment of more than \$80 million into First Nation communities and job opportunities for Indigenous workers and Indigenous owned companies.

We need good jobs for today's workers and opportunities to train tomorrow's skilled workforce. And we need reliable infrastructure that is built to last. Project Labour Agreements ensure everyone on our job sites are properly trained to do their jobs safely and effectively, and that all Manitobans are prioritized for the work.

For these reasons Boilermakers 555 support Bill 7 and repealing the ban on PLAs and we are hopeful government will move quickly to legislate a framework to use them going forward. It is the right thing to do for workers, and it is the right thing to do for the economy.

Thank you very much for accepting my submission.

Ryan Sellar
Business Representative
Boilermakers Local 555
Manitoba Area

Re: Bill 7

My name is Robert Duarte and I am the Business Manager and Financial Secretary Treasurer of Ironworkers Local Union 728.

We proudly represent over 400 Structural and Reinforcing Ironworkers and Welders throughout the Province of Manitoba.

I feel that I am able to present a unique perspective on PLA's as I have had the opportunity to both work as a tradesperson under the Burntwood Nelson PLA at the Wuskwatim Hydro Dam, but also represent members on a number of additional Hydro projects utilizing the PLA process such as Keeyask and Keewatinohk.

Bill 7 repealing the ban on PLA's is integral to repair the devastating impacts that were present in workforce development which slowed the ability to hire Manitobans seeking skilled trades knowledge and most definitely added cost uncertainty for projects.

The need to hire local in rural areas within Manitoba must be placed at the forefront in the desire to help rebuild the economy within communities that may have been struggling with obtaining prosperous employment, particularly in Northern Rural and Indigenously focused areas where individuals are not usually given the fair chance of obtaining opportunities such as apprenticeships within the trades.

Utilizing PLA's to employ a local workforce presents the opportunity to put the safety of employees first. Consistency and continuity of required training and certifications ensures that workforces are as productive as possible while maintaining incomparable safety standards.

Larger projects being performed without PLA's will disallow Manitobans and most certainly minority and underrepresented groups the opportunity to break the cycle of unemployment. Work at the South End Water Pollution Control Centre proved that without regulations in place, Manitobans are forced to sit on the sidelines while countless out of province individuals are in our backyards performing our work that belongs in our economy. Consequentially this lead to a significant amount of work needing to be redone and the project is substantially over budget while still not near completion.

PLA's ensure that investments made into Manitoba benefit Manitobans. Investments that will develop a skilled local workforce that will remain local once the project is done and will aid in a prosperous Manitoba economy.

I am confident that this Government wants to create productive jobs that will build the infrastructure we rely on. I am confident in Bill 7 repealing the ban on Project Labour Agreements.

Thank you,

Robert Duarte
Business Manager & Financial Secretary-Treasurer
Ironworkers Local 728

Re: Bill 7

Dear Members of the Standing Committee,

My name is Joshua Lapointe, and I worked in the construction industry for over two decades. I'm writing to you today to share my personal experience as a worker on the front lines of this industry, and to express my strong support for Project Labour Agreements (PLAs) in public sector construction projects. As the committee considers Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act, I urge you to prioritize worker safety by maintaining PLAs, which provide much-needed protections that keep workers safe on the job.

Safety Standards in the Construction Industry

The construction industry is one of the most dangerous sectors to work in. From heavy machinery to high-rise scaffolding, every day on the job presents significant risks. Over the years, I've seen and experienced how important it is to have strong, enforceable safety standards to protect workers. PLAs elevate safety across the board because they establish uniform safety requirements and ensure that every worker—regardless of the contractor they work for—follows the same rigorous standards.

In my experience, PLAs ensure that workers are properly trained before they even set foot on the job site. They mandate essential safety training, provide access to the right personal protective equipment (PPE), and create oversight mechanisms that prevent contractors from cutting corners. Without PLAs, these standards can vary widely depending on the contractor, and workers are often left in more vulnerable situations. That could mean the difference between going home safe or facing life-threatening injuries.

Personal Experience on PLA Projects

I've had the opportunity to work on projects that fell under PLAs and those that didn't. The difference was stark. On PLA-governed projects, safety briefings were thorough and consistent, and any concerns about

workplace hazards were taken seriously. There were systems in place to ensure workers were protected, such as JARR (Job Assessment Risk Review) cards, where every worker on the crew spoke about workplace hazards and safety procedures to ensure everyone was prepared. Everyone had the same training and knowledge about safety procedures. On non-PLA projects, unfortunately, I saw many corners being cut—whether it was in training, if there was even any at all. Equipment not properly maintained, or simply pushing people to work longer hours or risk personal safety to save money without regard for fatigue and safety.

PLAs Protect Workers and the Public

PLAs don't just protect workers—they protect the public and the taxpayers as well. When workers are kept safe, projects are completed more efficiently, on time, and with fewer costly delays due to accidents or injuries. High safety standards ensure that the infrastructure being built is of higher quality and can stand the test of time, benefiting all Manitobans.

Additionally, PLAs promote fair wages, benefits, equity hire and working conditions, which in turn attract skilled workers. This guarantees that public projects are completed by well-trained professionals, further enhancing safety and quality.

A Call to Protect PLAs in Manitoba

I urge you to consider the real-life impact that Bill 7 could have on workers in Manitoba. Removing PLAs from public construction projects not only puts safety at risk but also undermines the fairness and security that workers deserve. As a union member and a worker who deeply cares about the communities we help build, I believe that we need to keep PLAs in place to ensure that we continue to hold high standards in construction, safety, and worker protections.

As the government, you have the power to ensure that public sector construction projects are completed in a way that values worker safety and the quality of the work. I ask that you listen to the voices of workers, who live these realities every day. Please protect Project Labour Agreements and the elevated safety standards they provide.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lapointe
Construction Worker

Re: Bill 9

MS Canada is pleased to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development regarding Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

Canada has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in the world. An estimated 90,000 Canadians live with the disease, and, on average, 12 Canadians are diagnosed with MS every day. About three-quarters of Canadians who live with MS are women and most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 49. Most often experienced in cycles of relapses and remissions, known as an episodic disease, the unpredictable effects of the disease will last for the rest of their lives.

MS is one of the most common neurological diseases among young adults in Canada and is a costly disease for health systems and Canadian society more broadly. A recent independent study by Deloitte Access Economics found MS costs the economy of Manitoba \$102.5 million annually in indirect costs, \$46 million of which is due to decreased productivity. MS can significantly impact an individual's ability to participate in the workforce. Even among those who are employed, it can affect their ability to attend work and their productivity while at work. These impacts lead to real costs to the economy that are borne by the individual, their employers, and government.

The importance of employment security

Employment security is a top priority for our MS community. Our community's advocacy efforts were instrumental in the federal government's extension of Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks in December 2022. As the disease course of MS is unpredictable, often occurring in episodes of relapses and remissions, it's impossible to predict when someone will relapse or how long a relapse will last. The previous 15-week period often fell short of the recovery time needed for a person's relapse and the extension allows people living with MS a more effective short-term benefit that lets them remain active participants in the workforce. It provides the time and flexibility to recover their abilities through rest and rehabilitation. But, with more than 60 per cent of people living with MS eventually reaching unemployment, we know more needs to be done.

Research shows that people with MS have disproportionately high unemployment rates given their educational and vocational experience.

Many people living with the disease who want to work struggle to do so. Far too often, the problem is one of flexibility, accommodation, and a lack of understanding of episodic disability that characterize a disease like MS. Extending the length of leave for serious injury or illness from 17 to 27 weeks helps address the barriers people living with MS face in their careers.

Keeping people living with MS connected to their workplace

Manitobans living with MS need the flexibility to recover from an MS relapse without worrying about losing employment and income. Having this flexibility would mitigate stress and help with a more fulsome recovery.

Deloitte Access Economics recently published an independent report that examines the direct health care, productivity, and other costs of MS to the Canadian economy. With an overall cost in Manitoba estimated to be \$102.5 million per year, the report found the indirect costs relating to productivity losses due to MS in the province to be \$46 million. The productivity losses are borne out in multiple ways:

- **Reduced employment:** Classified as early retirement or workforce withdrawal, this is represented by the lower average employment rates among those living with MS relative to the general population.
- **Absenteeism:** Where a worker may be unwell more often than those in the general population and take more time off work, while remaining in the workforce.

- **Presenteeism:** Where a worker produces less output while at work, possibly due to physical limitations or difficulty focusing on tasks.
- **Premature mortality:** The loss of future income streams that would have been realized had the individual not died earlier than they would have otherwise been expected to.
- **Informal care:** Loss of income experienced by family members, spouses, and any other individual who provides informal care that impacts on their ability to participate in the workforce.

MS is a costly disease for Canada's health care system and the workforce. The report also found that most of the productivity losses incurred due to MS are borne by individuals living with the disease. Governments bear the second-largest share of costs, at 22 per cent, which comprises costs that would have been collected as taxes, as well as taxation loss associated with presenteeism and informal care.

Conclusion

Manitoba can better support the careers of people living with MS by extending the length of leave for serious injury or illness from 17 to 27 weeks and ensuring that this leave is job-protected. With greater flexibility in employment supports, individuals can stay connected to their jobs, advocate for workplace cultures to be more accepting of accommodations and increase the understanding of episodic disability.

Alanah Duffy
MS Canada

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>