

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

Good afternoon, everybody.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 300—The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), that Bill 300, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Miigwech.

Motion presented.

Ms. Fontaine: As an animal welfare advocate, I was happy to be approached to bring forward public Bill 300, The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act, which will change the composition of the foundation's board and facilitate the appointment of members. This bill will also ensure the long-term success of the foundation's assets, which will make sure that all animals can find the care they need and the hope of new home well into the future.

I look forward to the House passing this bill.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Bill 216—The Abortion Protest Buffer Zone Act

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas, that

Bill 216, The Abortion Protest Buffer Zone Act, be now read a first time.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for St. Johns, seconded by the honourable member for Point Douglas—*[interjection]*—order—that Bill 216, The Abortion Protest Buffer Zone Act, be now read a first time.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm proud to introduce bill 16, The Abortion Protest Buffer Zone Act, which establishes buffer zones or safety perimeters around any clinic, hospital or health-care facility offering abortion services, in addition to buffer zones around schools—public schools, Madam Speaker.

This bill prohibits any protest, demonstrations or picketing within these zones to protect Manitoba women, girls and trans persons, alongside health-care providers, against harassment, intimidation or persuasion on abortion.

Finally, anti-choice adults have no business protesting at our children's schools here in Manitoba. Anti-choice protestors are more than welcome to protest here at the Legislature anytime they want.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: I do have a report to table.

In accordance with section 28(1) of The Auditor General Act, I am tabling the Auditor General's report titled Quarry Rehabilitation Program Investigation, dated May 2020.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Vyshyvanka Day

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I'm exceptionally honoured to rise in the House today to celebrate Vyshyvanka Day.

Vyshyvanka Day is an annual celebration where Ukrainian communities all over the world wear beautiful shirts adorned with our traditional Ukrainian embroidery, or vyshyvankas, as a symbol of unity and our pride in our Ukrainian heritage.

Vyshyvankas are much more than just beautiful garments. They are steeped in our deep Ukrainian tradition and heritage. Archeological research in Ukraine shows that the very detailed embroidery depicted on vyshyvankas has existed there since prehistoric times. They have long been a symbol of hope for a brighter future and showcase the incredible creativity of Ukrainian people.

Canada and Manitoba have made Ukrainian ties to Ukraine—have many Ukrainian ties to Ukraine and its people. Thousands of Ukrainians, like my babas and gis, came to our province seeking a hope and a dream for a better life in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These resilient and hard-working individuals built so much of Manitoba and the very Manitoba that we call home today. They made sacrifices, worked hard and ensured that their heritage was deeply rooted in their communities.

That sense of community and heritage remains strong today, Madam Speaker, and I am proud to say that Manitoba is even the home of Canada's National Ukrainian Festival, which I can't wait to attend in Dauphin in 2021.

Today in the Chamber there are many members of Ukrainian descent, and I know how incredibly proud our ancestors would have been to see so many Ukrainian legislators here in this Chamber.

Our government recognizes the important contributions that Ukrainians have made in our province. We are proud to support Vyshyvanka Day, which raises awareness of the tremendous pride that Ukrainians have in their community and culture.

Thank you to our Ukrainian community for helping to make Manitoba the vibrant, multicultural mosaic that we have here and the mosaic that we all love, share and appreciate, and really make Manitoba the best province to live all across the country.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Vyshyvanka Day is an opportunity for Ukrainian Canadian communities and the numerous Ukrainian communities around the world to stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Canada is one of 50 countries around the world in which Ukrainians take part in International Vyshyvanka Day.

The vyshyvanka is a traditional attire for Ukrainian celebrations. It's worn by people regardless of their gender, social status and religious beliefs. The traditional vyshyvanka is a piece of artistic cultural expression. Masterful hands embroider colourful patterns and designs specific to the regions of Ukraine into the traditional white frock.

With the clothing's increasing popularity in contemporary fashion across the world, a day has been dedicated to the vyshyvanka to acknowledge the Ukrainian heritage these garments represent and promote Ukrainian cultural awareness worldwide.

* (13:40)

The artistry behind a traditional vyshyvanka was inspired by the power of protective symbols. Meanings behind the embroidered symbols and patterns range from circles that represent the sun and harmony, grape bunches that symbolize happiness and horses that symbolize aspiration.

Today is an opportunity for Ukrainians, as well as their descendants and supporters, to wear a vyshyvanka and show their Ukrainian pride. Ukrainians today unite to celebrate their identity, display their beautiful vyshyvanka designs, creating a sense of cultural pride and national solidarity.

I encourage you all to use this day to learn more and immerse yourselves in the Ukrainian history and cultural traditions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: It gives me great pleasure to join my colleagues in the Legislature to celebrate Vyshyvanka Day, vyshyvanka being a colourful garment that provides symbols of inspiration, optimism and hope for the future.

Madam Speaker, this day is very important to Ukrainians, descendants from Ukraine and our larger

community, and I am exceptionally grateful for the strong presence of Ukrainian heritage here in Manitoba. We are incredibly fortunate to have many active community members around us of Ukrainian descent who have made huge contributions to our province in virtually all areas of life, from agriculture to science to health care.

I take great pride in our Ukrainian community and our province when thinking about the contributions of the community to the labour movement here in Manitoba. As many of my colleagues will know, as I've seen them there at events throughout the year, the only surviving labour hall associated with the 1919 General Strike is the Ukrainian Labour Temple, and it continues to be a great source of pride and a gathering place for the community.

I know growing up, Madam Speaker, my parents really instilled in me the importance of community and heritage. My father took me on a trip to Ukraine to better understand the country as a whole, and for the last seven or eight years, my father and I have continued to host an annual perogy lunch specifically to thank the Ukrainian community. These opportunities have allowed for me to learn so much and build some amazing relationships within the community.

And lastly, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, even in 2020, Ukrainians must be vigilant about their own sovereignty because of ongoing actions from the Russia government. We will stand in solidarity with the people from Ukraine of—and of Ukraine as they are forced to defend their independence.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Wayfinders Program

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to recognize the Wayfinders of Seven Oaks School Division. Established in the fall of 2008, Wayfinders is an after-school mentorship and advocacy program for high-school students living in poverty or marginalized in northwest Winnipeg.

Through a four-pillar model of the additional opportunities and supportive programming outside of the school day—meaning mentorship, tutoring, post-secondary and career exploration, service learning programming—in-school support and advocacy, financial support for students and a bursary program, Wayfinders struggle—or, strives to be a

program that fills the gaps and provided additional opportunities for all 425 students it serves.

It was created as a program to addresses the gaps and provide the additional supports to students. Through intentional and multi-year relationships that they build with students they serve, Wayfinders works for an intervention strategy to create belonging, mastery, independence and generosity in students' educational lives.

These strategies are developed in concert with students, their families, caregivers, school personnel and other community-minded individuals to—in a wraparound model that students can thrive and succeed in.

Wayfinders delivers 25 hours of evening and weekend programming each week, and to date they have supported more than 500 students graduating from high school and transitioning to post-secondary programming of their choosing.

On October 17th, 2019, Wayfinders celebrated its 10th anniversary. Held at the program centre at 950 Jefferson Ave., the open house was attended by more then 200 current students, program graduates, families, community members and stakeholders.

The event was an opportunity for the official unveiling of the student-led mural project that acknowledges and celebrates the strength of the Wayfinders community and students who attend. The mural was created as a result of student workshops and was led by local artist Jordan Stranger.

I would like to thank and congratulate the dedicated staff and volunteers of Wayfinders and wish them another helpful and happy 10th—10 years.

Thank you.

Consumer Protection for Door-to-Door Sales

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Last November 25th, 2019, I raised the issue of door-to-door direct selling with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding). Media reports and complaints from my constituents gave proof to the urgent need for this government to honour their commitment to help the growing supply of victims of unethical door-to-door sales practices.

At the time, I highlighted a particular scam perpetrated by Utilebill, where Manitoba consumers signed contracts promising to pay over \$37,000 for a furnace, a HEPA filter, water filter and electronic air cleaner, when all of these products should've cost less

than \$10,000, including the equipment and installation.

At the time, the minister offered his deepest sympathy to the victims and he ensured that the House—that his government was taking consumer protection issues seriously. I am pleased to see the minister has introduced Bill 38, a bill amending The Consumer Protection Act, prohibiting the direct sale of furnaces, air conditioners, windows and other household systems and supplies.

This will bring Manitoba more into line with Ontario and Alberta when it comes to banning this practice. This is a welcome step in the right direction that—to protects consumers going forward.

However, the minister has done absolutely nothing—zero—to compensate victims of these scams.

The minister is aware that direct sellers in Manitoba are required to be bonded in order to compensate victims. I would like to know: has this government called these bonds, and if they have, what day did they call them? Has this been done, and if not, why not? Why is this such a big secret? Is he going to let these bandits walk off scot-free?

Evangeline Mance

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Madam Speaker, today I have the great pleasure of delivering a private member's statement honouring Waverley constituent—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes: —and my good friend, Ms. Evangeline Mance.

For the past several years, Vangie, as she is known by most, has been committed to serving her community. As someone who had made the journey to immigrate to Canada, she understands the hardships that many newcomers face.

In 2014, Vangie and her late husband, Mario, decided to kick-start the Life of Peg Association of Manitoba, a unique platform with a mission to assist and guide newcomers as they settle in our province. As a full-time volunteer, spending thousands of hours in her organization, she can be found picking newly landed immigrants up from the airport, finding living spaces and directing them towards the right organizations for professional evaluation.

Vangie always keeps her social media open for questions and has even provided her own rental property spaces for families. To help make these

individuals feel at home, Vangie also began a sports fest with games of volleyball and badminton. This way, newcomers had the opportunity to play the sports they love, meet new friends and network with others, especially others who emigrated from the Philippines.

Vangie has been recognized for her outstanding contribution and dedication—commitment to her volunteering initiatives.

In January of 2018, she was the recipient of the Pasasalamat, meaning gratitude, award for the categories of sports, fitness and immigration settlement.

In May 2019, she launched the Mario T. Mance P. Eng Memorial Scholarship to continue her husband's legacy. Since its inception, six scholarships have been awarded for professional engineers from the Philippines who wish to continue their profession here in Manitoba.

And most recently, Vangie provided a total of 210 free meals to front-line workers during this COVID-19 pandemic, just to show some deserved appreciation for their hard work in this difficult time.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honouring Ms. Evangeline Mance for her positive work in the community and for all the lives she has touched through her love of service.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Youth Mental Health and Addiction Services

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): On May 7th, to mark national youth mental health day, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth released their report on the persistent gaps in youth mental health and addictions services here in our province. The report paints a dark picture of the last six years in our province and the ways that, frankly, we are failing Manitoba's youth—young people.

Rural and northern youth are not met with the services they need in their own communities. They are asked to travel to Winnipeg, where the demand vastly outpaces supply.

The leading cause of death of children in Manitoba aged 11 to 17 is suicide. Manitoba's youth suicides are more than double the national average. We've known this for some time. Yet, nothing seems to have changed. We continue to deal with a hodgepodge of services that the advocate says are not child-friendly nor youth-focused. The VIRGO report

told us where and how we were failing back in 2018, and today, very little progress has been made.

* (13:50)

A vast majority of these children are indigenous and we have a responsibility to not only the children, their parents, but to the First Nation and the Metis communities to work collaboratively to help keep children mentally healthy so that we can eliminate suicides and the deaths of children.

The advocate released her report in the wake of COVID-19 because, and I quote her here—and I'm sure the Premier (Mr. Pallister) should be listening to this: If we've learned anything from the COVID-19 pandemic response it's that governments are capable of moving quickly on pressing issues. Children cannot wait any longer to become the priority of this government.

Madam Speaker, this really isn't—there really isn't any excuse here. We have seen how quickly things can be done when we see them as urgent, and we've prioritized lives and public health.

Thank you to all the workers who live who are—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Was the member asking for leave to—

Can the—is there leave to allow the member to complete her statement?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: I heard a no.

Mark Fosty and Ben Hildebrandt

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to two of my constituents, Mark Fosty and Ben Hildebrandt, who recently competed and completed the Iron Dog 2020 snowmobile race in Alaska. Mark and Ben made up Team 37 and were deemed the Friendly Canadians as the pair became fan favourites on social media.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Iron Dog, it is the longest snowmobile competition in the world, covering over 2,400 miles through the rugged terrain and adverse weather conditions of Alaska's back country. The route of the race begins in Fairbanks and makes its way to the finish point in Big Lake.

Without the advantage of having GPS maps or other navigation equipment that other teams

benefitted from, Mark and Ben relied mainly on their instincts to route their way through the Alaskan wilderness. Besides derailing with mechanical issues and Mark's sled having to be pulled out after getting swamped along the Kuskokwim River the pair got turned around on the trail in error, costing them considerable time and took a toll on their momentum. After taking some time to re-evaluate their situation over a hot meal, Team 37 made the decision to forge on and complete the race.

Iron Dog Executive Director John Woodbury was quoted in the media saying: Can't keep those determined fellas on Team 37 down. They're a pair of the most jovial, good-spirited folks we've ever had on the trail and if their riding skills and sleds don't get them across the finish line in Big Lake, their positive attitudes will. We are rooting for you, Canada.

Team 37 were one of 11 teams out of 29 to finish the Iron Dog 2020 snowmobile race. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mark Fosty from Thalberg and Ben Hildebrandt from Stead in the RM of Brokenhead, who are watching from home, Madam Speaker, on their amazing accomplishment—and thank you for representing Canada in true Manitoba style.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Public Service Layoffs Economic Impact

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): It's cheque day for seniors in Manitoba, with each letter sealed by a kiss from the Premier. However, we know that one thing this Premier won't sign are the layoff notices that he's sending out across the province of Manitoba: 700 layoffs at Manitoba Hydro, thousands of people laid off from schools and many—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —many more cuts taking place right across the province of Manitoba.

What's more, Madam Speaker, we know that these cuts have nothing to do with the pandemic, that it's simply been the Premier's plan all along: \$860 million cut, just as he promised in last year's election platform.

Will the Premier stand in his place today and admit that all these cuts are not only going to damage our economy, but are simply not necessary?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member is right in one aspect only of his preamble, Madam Speaker: on this side of the House we respect, we love and we appreciate our seniors very, very much in this province.

We've been acknowledged, actually, as a government, Madam Speaker, as the Province which has, through its suite of programs and plans, some of the most ambitious supports for our people here, our most vulnerable in particular, and we've also been acknowledged by independent analysis as having the third lowest impact of any Canadian province on our public sector to the tune of around 2 per cent impact.

Now, Madam Speaker, that, I think, is testament to the degree of support we have and affection and appreciation we have for our public servants as well.

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

Manitoba Hydro Layoffs PUB Emergency Resolution

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, it seems there's a bit of disagreement. We on this side of the House know that these cuts will be very damaging, all the members on this side of the House.

So, to settle this disagreement, we asked the Public Utilities Board to hold an emergency hearing to find out just how damaging these cuts at Manitoba Hydro will be. We received a response in the letter today. I'll table that for the benefit of the Premier.

The PUB says they're happy to hold a hearing if they are asked by resolution of the Legislature to do so. We are going to give the Premier the opportunity to vote on just such a resolution this afternoon.

So the answer—the question that the Premier needs to answer right now is: Is he prepared to face the accountability and questions that Manitobans want answered, or is he going to duck transparency?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member so much for raising the issue of transparency, Madam Speaker, in particular in the context of the Public Utilities Board.

The previous NDP government did not allow the bipole waste line—as many call it, multibillion-dollar project—to be heard by the Clean Environment Commission and, therefore, did not allow the Public Utilities Board the benefit of the full analysis and scrutiny that should've been provided on that mega-

billion-dollar project, which went, Madam Speaker, billions of dollars over budget. So the member shouldn't throw stones from inside a glass house.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, these cuts are unnecessary. These cuts will harm our economy, and Manitobans deserve to hear the truth.

What's more, the Public Utilities Board, in the letter that I just tabled, is saying that they are prepared to be the venue to have that hearing of the facts, so Manitobans can hear just how harmful these cuts are going to be. All that needs to happen is for this government and for these Cabinet ministers to agree to the resolution we're bringing forward this afternoon. Then the PUB can investigate these cuts, we can have a full hearing of the facts, and Manitobans can know with confidence what the real impact on our economic recovery will be.

So the question is simple: Will the Premier agree to pass our resolution this afternoon, or is he going to keep hiding from accountability?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I accept that the member has some personal experience in hiding from accountability himself, Madam Speaker, but the fact remains that the changes that we have made are in response to a pandemic which is real. The member opposite proposes, as the NDP does quite frequently, that we just borrow our way out of it, tax our way out of it and spend our way out of it, and that's why we're in the mess we're in as the most indebted province in the country.

Madam Speaker, while the member only sees today, and the political and partisan advantages he tries to derive from today, this government sees the future and wants Manitoba to be, and knows it will be, the first to respond and the most resilient province in the country of Canada.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

K-to-12 and Post-Secondary Education Layoffs and Tuition Increase

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): If the Premier is so confident about what he's just said, pass the resolution and let's have the Public Utilities Board be the adjudicator.

We know that the cuts, however, unfortunate as this may be, will go much further than Manitoba

Hydro. We are already seeing the impact of the cuts at the universities and colleges on Manitoba, and we know it is the young people, the students, the leaders of tomorrow, who will bear the brunt of these cuts.

Now, we know that there has been a huge impact already, and the form that it's taking, that we've just heard about today, are the tuition hikes at the University of Manitoba. In the faculties of arts, of education and in medicine, the tuition will be skyrocketing by 7 per cent a year, Madam Speaker, and that is directly a result of the orders of this Premier.

Will the Premier simply help students get through the pandemic and announce today that he's backing off from the cuts and tuition hikes at post-secondary institutions?

* (14:00)

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, let's do our best, Madam Speaker, to replace the pandemic panic of the hyperbolic member and let's talk about our support programs for students.

Students need work. The NDP was never very good, when they were in government for 17 years, of creating opportunities for students, but this government is pursuing that with enthusiasm, and we have already created over 2,000 new jobs just in the last few days for Manitoba summer students so that they can afford to go to post-secondary institutions and continue their studies.

We've also increased by 50 per cent the amount of money available over last year's budget and by 500 per cent over the last NDP budget the amount of money available for scholarships and bursaries for students.

Madam Speaker, these commitments are real; they're not hyperbole; they're the facts. We care deeply about the future of our young people in this province, and we're acting accordingly as a government.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it's pretty tough for this Premier to make the statement that he just did when he's putting thousands and thousands of Manitobans out of work.

We know that in the K-to-12 sector alone there have been nearly 5,000 Manitobans laid off at the orders of this Premier and his Cabinet:

Portage la Prairie, 182 jobs cut; Mystery Lake, 68; Border Land, 133; Prairie Rose, 142; Red River Valley, 126; Interlake, 163.

No one on that side is speaking up. We will: more than 5,000 Manitobans put out of work during a pandemic, during a recession, making the economic misery worse.

I'll table correspondence from one of the school divisions, which illustrates that these cuts were ordered by this Premier, his ministers and this government.

The simple question that we have is: Who on that side will be the voice of reason and stand up for Manitoba jobs?

Mr. Pallister: Let's substitute an irrational rant with some facts, Madam Speaker. Here are the facts. Our gap program, which was designed specifically to complement the federal program and catch Manitoba small businesses that fall through the cracks, has got successful enrolment already from over 3,400 small businesses throughout our province. That's over \$20 billion already paid out directly to small-business owners to help create jobs and opportunity for people.

The people in our province are suffering, Madam Speaker, as a consequence of a pandemic. They'd be suffering a lot more if we hadn't come to government and done the necessary things to correct the course the NDP had us on with three credit downgrades, with \$1 billion of debt service costs and with absolutely no ability whatsoever to see anything but the present.

This government sees the future, and it's a stronger future for the people of Manitoba because of the actions we've taken.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, I want to take a moment to put a human face on the impact of the cuts that this government is ordering.

Now, we know that those 5,000 employees from schools who've been laid off, well, their families are on hard times because of this Premier and his Cabinet, but I will table this document from École Riverside, Madam Speaker, which puts a human face onto the impact of the students themselves. This is to all of those participants in the speech-language pathology stopgap services program helping kids who need more assistance learning how to speak, read and write. It says that because of the orders of this government that this speech practice program has been suspended.

Madam Speaker, these cuts are hurting not only the workers, not only the students across the province, but, indeed, some of the most vulnerable children in Manitoba.

Will the Premier simply reverse course and start to invest in our people?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, as far as a human face is concerned, I'm sure that the actions of this government can demonstrate our empathy and understanding very clearly and in a real way, rather than just in words. So let's illustrate: the summer student job recovery program, which has given over 615 employers the opportunity to employ more than 1,500 young people across our province already and much more work to be done there.

Multiply these personal situations and these individual circumstances by thousands, Madam Speaker, and you understand how inhuman and impersonal the actions of any government that would simply propose to dump a debt load onto the future children of our province are.

What the member is proposing is that we go deeper in debt. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: What the member is proposing—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: What the member is proposing is in keeping with the constant refrain of the NDP: borrow more on the backs of children, spend more on the backs of our future, tax more on the backs of all of us. That's the NDP proposal; always has been, is every day here, Madam Speaker.

Our proposal is to help make this province No. 1 in recovery after this pandemic.

Public Service Layoffs Impact on Front-Line Services

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Madam Speaker, we know that large cuts in the midst of a deep recession will only make things worse, but the Pallister government is rigid and ideological. They just can't help themselves. Why else did they arrive at cuts worth exactly the amount they said they would cut during the election: \$860 million.

The pandemic has simply revealed the government's true intentions: cuts to schools, cuts to Crown corporations, cuts to front-line services.

I ask the minister: Why are they making such short-sighted cuts?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): According to analysis done by independent sources, Madam Speaker, we have the third lowest impact in our public sector in the country: less than 2 per cent overall.

Madam Speaker, I rest my case with the facts, as opposed to the rhetoric of the member opposite.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry, on supplementary question.

Mr. Wasyliv: Well, we see the Premier likes to quote statistics. Well, I have some for him this afternoon.

The most recent Labour Force Survey, which I will table in this House, it shows that there's 12,000 less people working in health care and social assistance in Manitoba than there was one year ago. That is the biggest percentage reduction in the entire country by a lot. Front-line health and social service care are being weakened in this province and this Labour Force Survey is just—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —the most recent data: 12,000 less on the front line in health care and social services.

Why has this government chosen again and again to make such short-sighted cuts? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Let's substitute enthusiastic rhetoric for facts, Madam Speaker.

This year's budget alone there'll be over \$1 billion more. That was the plan: more than \$1 billion more invested in social services, education, health care—more people working in these services than ever before in our province, Madam Speaker. That's the facts.

And the fact is we'll be borrowing billions of dollars in addition to that to support those very front-line services that the member chooses to ignore in his phony rhetoric.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wasyliv: Well, we have seen again and again what the Pallister government really values. There are 12,000 less people working in health care and social services than one year ago, and thousands less than months ago. Those are the facts. These are the worst cuts in the entire country by a significant amount.

This minister and this Premier would have us believe that the reckless cuts don't hurt, but here it is in black and white.

Why won't the minister just state the obvious: they cut before, they cut now, they're going to cut tomorrow and they don't care about front-line services.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member needs to do a little of his own cutting, and maybe cut his preamble down and leave some facts in, but then there wouldn't be anything left, Madam Speaker, because the fact of the matter is there are more doctors working right now in Manitoba than ever before. There are more nurses. We've had dozens of nurses—and thank you to them—come back out of retirement to assist during this pandemic.

The member's rhetoric is phony. What isn't phony, Madam Speaker, is the progressive protection plan that we're pursuing as a government to work in partnership with our health-care sector, with all our front-line workers and with the private sector so that we can lead the country in resilience.

Madam Speaker, those are the facts. Those remain the facts. Those always will be the facts.

Evictions and Rent Increases Request to Freeze

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, we know that for many Manitobans, they've faced unimaginable financial stress during this pandemic. We know that with many families who are facing reduced pay or a loss of work, loss of work for a spouse, they still have rent to pay at the end of the month and for them it's a real hardship and it's a struggle.

* (14:10)

In the face of this uncertainty, the government's freeze on rent is set to expire in just a little while at the end of this month.

Will the minister commit to extending freezes on rent increases today here in the House?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our government takes great—proud of the fact that amongst everyone across the country, of all provinces our support programs for people as well as businesses is second to none other provinces. *[interjection]*

We'll take nothing from that member opposite. In fact, we came to this Chamber not over a month ago to pass an additional billion dollars of support to

support Manitoba's, whether it be residents or whether it be businesses. That's important. We encourage the members to support these types of initiatives.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, with now over 80,000 Manitobans unemployed because of COVID-19, people in many cases have found their income significantly reduced or cut altogether. And for them it's very difficult to make the monthly rent, but the need to have safe, secure housing has never been more important in this province.

Again, the government has only committed to freeze evictions until the end of May.

Will the minister commit to extending the freeze on evictions today here in the House?

Mr. Fielding: We are amongst the first provinces to extend, ensuring there's a freeze on rent increases as well as evictions. In case there's, you know, criminal activity that would be a part of it.

We provided more support to our residents, not only just before COVID where we had the Rent Assist program with more than 3,000 more people supported. We want to make sure people are supported here in the province of Manitoba, and that's why we put our money where our mouth is and we're putting important projects, important initiatives forward that the Privy Council has suggested is No. 1 of all the provinces in terms of our supports for people. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, for so many people time is running out and this minister continues to equivocate.

But it's no—it's not just individuals, we know Madam Speaker, but small- and medium-sized businesses that are also feeling the pinch. Commercial rent assist program has not taken effect and the program will not go to tenants who have now faced two months of reduced or no income. It's been estimated that 70 per cent of Manitoba restaurants may close if they can't make rent, and tenants haven't seen any direct help from this government.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) provide immediate rent relief for commercial tenants and freeze commercial evictions today?

Mr. Fielding: The member doesn't highlight the important projects, the 'fortant' initiatives we brought forward. The gap program is supporting more than 3,400 businesses that would be—fall between the gaps. That's over \$20 million of support.

We are the first province in Canada to join with the federal government on a commercial rent initiative. We think that's important. The initiative happened this week, in terms of the applications at the federal level. We want to support that in the tune of \$16 million and we want to work with the federal government. That's exactly what we're doing.

Hiring of Senior Public Servant Compensation Disclosure Request

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, while the Premier lays off hundreds of front-line workers, creating huge amounts of anxiety for Manitoban families, he continues to pay out huge contracts to insiders, like the \$2.5 million he's paying to Brad Wall. And now he's giving one of the highest paid positions in the civil service to his political campaign director, David McLaughlin.

This position should be non-partisan and not beholden to a political party, and the payment of money undermines this fact.

Will the Premier tell this House how much money the PC party has paid or given to David McLaughlin—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —this year?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I recognize the inexperience of the member in asking the question he has just asked. He could do a little bit of research, talk to some of his NDP colleagues who've been around. The member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) was here earlier—I can't speak to his absence or presence, Madam Speaker. Let's just say the member for Elmwood would be a valuable source of insight for the member. If political involvement precluded anyone from becoming a clerk, there would have been 90 per cent fewer clerks appointed in this country over the last century.

And so what the member raises today is an accusation of patronage is actually a practice undertaken by all political parties who govern, including the NDP.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Sala: According to the conflict of interest act, all members of this House must disclose any and all compensation they receive from a political party. This requirement makes sense, and the requirement should clearly extend to the Clerk of the Executive Council as well. He's a senior public servant under the terms of that act. The Premier should be open and transparent on this issue and make sure his hand-picked clerk is held to the highest standard.

Will the Premier require David McLaughlin to disclose how much money the PC Party has paid him in this year? Yes or no?

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate that the member's inexperience allows him to pursue this hopeless line of questioning, Madam Speaker. I will only say to him that if he was to endeavour to do just a wee bit of research, he might come up with NDP clerks who came with minimal experience in the public sector. David McLaughlin has extensive experience at the highest levels of the public sector.

The NDP clerks that were appointed in the past had limited experience: limited somewhat to door knocking, voter ID and putting up signs. That does not position the member to make a very good argument. He is throwing stones from inside a truly glass house, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Sala: There should be no problem in telling Manitobans whether or not the political party has been paying Mr. McLaughlin. He's supposed to be a non-partisan head of 12,000 front-line workers. It undermines the impartiality of the office if Mr. McLaughlin has been receiving thousands of dollars from a political party, and it makes a bad situation worse if the Premier won't tell Manitobans about it.

Will the Premier be clear? How much money has the PC Party paid to his new clerk this year?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, the member clearly had a line of questioning which he refuses to depart from, Madam Speaker. That speaks more to dumb stubbornness than it does to an ability to strategically ask a question.

Madam Speaker, the actual fact of the matter is that the role of Clerk of the Executive Council is one which requires a vast array of experiences. We are going to benefit as a province from someone who has a vast array of experiences in both—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pallister: —the public sector and the private sector and also as a political partisan.

Madam Speaker, the NDP had the same advice over many, many years from people who had similar backgrounds. So, again, I would suggest to the member if he does a modicum of research he would find that that was the case. That being said, I would put David McLaughlin's resume and personal accomplishments up against anyone who has served as a clerk of this Assembly, of this government, in the last 50 years.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

It's getting a little bit tense in here. We haven't seen this in a little while, and so we're—we seem to be reverting back to some old habits. I would just encourage members that when they are putting words on the record to be careful and be kind in some of the descriptions we use for other people.

So I would urge members, you might want to give this some thought. We still got a ways to go on oral questions, and I would just ask that appropriate language be used in the House when we are referring to other members.

Legislative Session Request for More Sitings

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): For weeks we've asked the Premier for real accountability, and, unsurprisingly, the Premier refuses while he continues his brutal cuts. I've repeatedly asked the Government House Leader for more sitting days to facilitate proper oversight of his boss's decisions. The Premier callously rushes through hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts while also laying off thousands of Manitobans, Madam Speaker. It's simply undemocratic to avoid accountability.

What's the Premier's plan for more sitting days of the Manitoba legislative?

* (14:20)

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): First of all, the member again throws stones from a glass house inhabited by her for close to a decade, where she cashed cheques but demonstrated no ability to produce work of any value for the people of Manitoba.

Secondly, the member had the opportunity to serve the people of Manitoba and to function respectfully as a House leader and chose not to, and,

instead, decided to erect a blockade against any work being done just a few weeks ago.

Manitobans won't soon forget that, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, order, order, order.

Just a reminder to members that when the Speaker is standing the House is to be silent.

And I—as I was just indicating to members, too, we need to tone it down a little bit, getting a little bit excitable in here and not going to serve our purpose very well.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

The Premier feels he doesn't need to be accountable to Manitobans for the decisions that he is currently making. The Premier has ordered the largest single-day cut in our province's history. Thousands of people are being laid off. I have asked repeatedly for this House to sit more days to facilitate oversight of his decisions. The Premier must be accountable for his decisions and he must face scrutiny in this House.

Will the Premier be accountable to Manitobans? Will he guarantee more sitting days in the Legislature?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, each and every day this government shows its accountability, whether that is through press conferences with the Premier or other ministers where they take questions from the media and then, of course, are speaking to the public.

Madam Speaker, there are Crown Corporations committees that are coming up, where members opposite will have the opportunity to ask questions.

When I look back statistically, though, at this session as difficult that it is, I've noticed that the opposition, led by the very member who asked a question, has filibustered about a third of the question periods that we've been scheduled to have.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: Ensuring that we sit more days in the House is fundamentally about ensuring democracy and accountability on behalf of all Manitobans, Madam Speaker. Only a small fraction of this government's \$860 million worth of cuts have actually been revealed thus far.

The Premier's doing everything in his power to avoid accountability and transparency. We need more

sitting days in this Legislature to ensure that the Premier explains why he's making these egregious and callous cuts in the midst of a global pandemic.

Will the Premier immediately commit to more sitting days beyond May 27th?

Miigwech.

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, just two points for the member.

If she would do some research, which I know is difficult for her, but she might find that we are sitting more frequently than six other Canadian provinces and about the same as the federal government right now.

But she might also, if she, on reflection, chose to examine her own behaviour in wasting over a week of this House's sitting time by offering up nothing but a blockade during a pandemic. By doing this the member gives the lie to her argument that she cares about accountability and simply demonstrates, as she did again just now, that she puts partisanship ahead of partnership every single time.

Madam Speaker: Just a reminder to members that making reference about lying in the House is not an acceptable language to be used, and I would urge caution to members.

Premier's Letter to Seniors Printing and Postage Costs

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The Premier has announced that aside from sending a \$200 cheque to himself, he's also going to write himself a personal thank-you and include a letter to 225,000 seniors in Manitoba.

It is mind-boggling that at a time the Premier is forcing layoffs and wage cuts for thousands of Manitobans that we are going to spend even a dime on a letter promoting himself. Printing and postage for a quarter of a million cheques and letters adds up pretty fast.

How much is this—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —exercise in self-promotion going to cost compared to, say, direct deposit?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I do appreciate sincerely the member raising this issue yet again in the House. It is refreshing, over and above his constant argument for a larger office, Madam Speaker.

Let me say, though, that he does oppose a program that we introduced out of respect and appreciation for our seniors and out of acknowledgement, Madam Speaker, that they are at the greatest risk of dying as a consequence of COVID-19. To show that respect is something we think is worthwhile and so does the federal government, so he'll have to take this up with Justin Trudeau as well.

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

Provincial Finances Update Request

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): In a crisis, we still need to make decisions based on evidence. The Premier has yet to offer a shred of evidence that any cuts at all are necessary. The government finances are a black hole, and instead of facts or figures, we hear manipulation.

This government has not been able to keep its story straight—even the claim that two—that there were three credit downgrades that're the responsibility of the NDP, when two of them happened under this government. The Treasury Board document was a fraud, and the appropriate level of job losses in this—wage cuts in this crisis is zero.

Because pandemic, is not a reason.

When is this government going to show us some actual, non-made-up numbers on income, revenue and, most important of all, the supposed benefits of their cuts?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member for raising fiscal issues. I would say, Madam Speaker, that we are headed towards the largest deficit in the Province of Manitoba's history. We also have inherited the highest debt of any Canadian province.

That being said, we will be responsible managers of the public purse, as we always have been. We are able, on this side of the House, to differentiate between wants and needs, and, Madam Speaker, we are able to see the future and make decisions accordingly.

We will make decisions which bear up the strength of Manitobans, support the vulnerable, leave more money on the kitchen tables of Manitoba families and help us lead, in terms of economic growth and recovery, Madam Speaker, once again after this pandemic's consequences are over.

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

Provincial Park Use Rules and Guidelines

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): This government has outsourced provincial park permitting to an American company, which has increased the cost of entering provincial parks. This is the opposite of what we should be doing as Manitobans are currently faced with strict travel restrictions and financial hardships caused by the pandemic.

Now more than ever, we should be supporting local businesses, not outsourcing to an international company.

Madam Speaker, will this government better communicate rules and guidelines for provincial parks and make provincial parks free this year for Manitoba 150, the way Canada did with our national parks, so that more Manitobans can enjoy our beautiful province?

Thank you.

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I do appreciate any opportunity to talk about our beautiful parks in this province. We are one of the very few provinces that left our parks open to the public, because of their wonderful work keeping social distance, and we will continue to reflect on the hard work of Manitobans and reward them with access to our parks.

And, Madam Speaker, the program that we have established for our park passes is used by two other provinces within this beautiful country. And it was an open-tender process, done fairly and properly by this government, and we will continue to follow proper rules when it comes to properly sending out those RFPs and finding the best possible service for the lowest price.

Thank you.

Personal Protective Equipment Locally Designed and Produced

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Madam Speaker, one of the most effective tools in the fight against COVID-19 is quality personal protective equipment, or PPE. Even though global supply chains have been impacted by this pandemic, Manitobans have stepped up to the plate with creative, can-do

solutions that are helping us to meet our PPE needs so we can keep Manitobans safe.

Madam Speaker, can the Minister of Central Services please tell the House about some of the made-in-Manitoba success stories?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): Thank you to the member for the question.

In the face of this pandemic, Manitobans are doing incredible work in the fight against COVID-19. There is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

*(14:30)

Mr. Helwer: We have so many great examples: Winpak in Winnipeg and Icon Technologies of Winkler have retooled their factories to make protective face shields for our front-line health-care workers; the Decker Colony in western Manitoba is one of the many Hutterite colonies who have collectively produced over 30,000 fabric masks for health facilities and other groups across the province; and a pair of Winnipeg physicians have designed and tested a reusable N95 mask which is being manufactured by Precision ADM here in Winnipeg.

Our government is ordering 1 million of these masks, but a special—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Reopening the Economy Request for Child-Care Plan

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Just a couple of weeks ago we asked the minister what her plan was for child care in Manitoba as we begin to—reopening the economy, and two weeks later we have still not heard or seen a plan on how they're reopening daycares and how they'll keep workers and kids safe. This is concerning because we know that parent—many parents and businesses can't return to work if—safely if their children do not have child care.

When will the minister release a comprehensive plan for child care that aligns with the economy reopening?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): We've been working closely with the Manitoba Child Care Association, with early childhood educators, with parents, Madam Speaker, parents who are looking to find child-care facilities that are open and matching them and we have been quite successful in doing so. We have over 500 facilities that are open in

the province of Manitoba. We have just under 900 vacancies within that. By the end of this month we'll have more than 275 more child-care facilities opening up.

There's more work to be done, Madam Speaker. We'll continue to work with parents and childhood educators to ensure that child care is there for parents when they need it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Adams: The minister claims she wants to open 6,000 homes to child care, but we know that this was a failure as we continue to hear from families across—that child-care services is needed. We simply don't have the child-care capacity right now to meet the demands of Manitobans returning to work because the minister has spent more time focusing on this failed plan than providing a real plan.

Child care is essential. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) and this government should make it a priority.

How much of the \$18 million devoted to home child care has been spent to date?

Mrs. Stefanson: As a result of that program we've been able to open up more than 100 new child-care spaces in the province of Manitoba. I hardly think that that's irrelevant for those parents that need to access child care in our province.

So, again, we'll continue to work with parents. We'll continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that child care is there for parents when they need it, especially as they start to move back towards employment, going back to work in the province of Manitoba. We'll make sure that child care is there for them when they need it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Adams: This is million dollars in funding that could have been put towards front-line child-care centres to pay for protective—personal protective equipment and aid in their reopening. So without a plan and without proper funding no economy recovery plan will be successful.

We need a real investment in publicly funded, accessible and affordable child care. We need a plan that shows we actually believe child care is essential.

Will the minister redirect the funds and produce a comprehensive plan for child care immediately?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, as a result of 17 years of NDP mismanagement in the area of child care, where they took a very ideological approach to child care delivery in the province of Manitoba, Madam Speaker, I will tell you that we take a very different approach.

We want to ensure that child care is there for Manitoba families when they need it. We will develop a system and a program that is there for those families when they need it, because that is what child care should provide in the province of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: And I have a ruling for the House.

Immediately following the prayer on March 11th, 2020, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) raised a matter of privilege contending that the government was violating his privileges and the privileges of all Manitobans by having a large number of government bills placed on the notice and order papers. He stated that this was undermining democratic processes and was intended to suppress debate and discussion.

At the conclusion of his remarks he moved that, and I quote: that the issue of the Pallister's government abuse of the rules of this House and its undemocratic practices be immediately referred to a committee of the House. End quote.

The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) and the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) also spoke to the matter of privilege, which was then taken under advisement.

I thank all honourable members for their advice to the Chair.

There are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for the matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege. First, was the issue raised at the earliest opportunity, and second, has sufficient evidence been provided to demonstrate that the privileges of the House have been breached in order to warrant putting the matter to the House.

On the first issue of timeliness the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) advised that he was raising the issue at the earliest opportunity on Wednesday, March 11th. However, the government bills he was referring to appeared on the Notice Paper on Tuesday, March 10th. Therefore, I conclude that the issue of timeliness was not met.

Regarding the second issue, I would like to advise the House that a matter concerning the methods by which the House proceeds in the conduct of business is a matter of order, not privilege. Joseph Maingot, in the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, states on page 14 that, and I quote, allegations of breach of privilege by a member in the House that amount to complaints about procedures and practices in the House are, by very nature, matters of order. End quote.

He also states, on page 223 of the same edition, and I quote, a breach of the standing orders or a failure to follow an established practice would invoke a point of order rather than a question of privilege. End quote.

I should also note that the protection of parliamentary privilege only applies to members of the Legislative Assembly and is not applicable to the public.

Although the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition may have a difference of opinion regarding the timing of and volume of government legislation coming forward it falls more into a category of a complaint against the government, and nor has it been demonstrated that a breach of parliamentary privilege has occurred.

With the greatest of respect I therefore rule that the matter raised does not fulfill the criteria of a *prima facie* case of privilege.

PETITIONS

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

* (14:40)

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this is signed by Letitia Shannon, Clay Shannon and Lucille Lapointe, and many, many other Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by James Poelitor, Shirley Poelitor and Chris Brode.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

(4) As of January 27th, 2020, Manitoba justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by Jordan Rocly, Karley McDonald and Desiree Dorion, and many more Manitobans.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Further petitions?

The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a petition?

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): No, on a member of urgent public importance, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Lamont: —if the petitions are now complete?

Madam Speaker: I haven't called the next item yet.

So we're just finishing off petitions, and I have been notified that a member wishes to bring forward a matter of urgent public importance.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I move that under rule 38(1) the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the need for urgent attention and debate around the recently announced appointment of David McLaughlin, campaign manager for the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba in 2016 and 2019, to the role of Clerk of the Executive Council.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for St. Boniface, I should remind all members that under rule 32–38(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in Beauchesne's, citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Lamont: I do hope that we can have an urgent public debate on the hiring of David McLaughlin in the position of the Clerk of the Executive Council. It is important in that it is an unprecedented politicization of the public service.

Because we are in a pandemic and because there are special rules around our sitting, this is our first opportunity to address this issue since it was announced last week. Clearly, we will not have any other opportunities to discuss this in the House in the next days until the next week.

I would add there are a number of standard objections to raising these issues, namely that there

are often other venues and opportunities to raise this issue, but the current situation of the emergency and special sittings—and special arrangements we've had to make around this—means that those opportunities are not available to us.

* (14:50)

We do not have daily oral questions. On occasion, my colleagues and I have been—we have not had the opportunity to make members' statements—that is not a venue that's been available to us. Estimates and committees to review legislation are not functioning yet. We are operating the Legislature at one-third capacity. All of which means that we have fewer opportunities.

And I would like to emphasize: we are calling for a full debate—an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance. And a debate, by its nature, is more substantive. It does not have the severest time restrictions imposed during oral questions.

And because I share my questions with my Liberal colleagues and are in an arrangement with the Speaker and the House, in the current arrangement, I have a total of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lamont: I have a total—

Madam Speaker: The member may continue.

I just want to indicate that I'm having some difficulty hearing because there are a number of conversations going on in the House. So, if everybody could please bring their conversations to a halt, that would be very good.

Mr. Lamont: Because I share my questions with my Liberal colleagues in the current arrangement, I have a total of 90 seconds to ask two questions a day, which amounts to two questions a week and two answers—which, it being question period, do not always rise to the level of being an answer—which are also limited in time. And the fact is that this is a matter of urgent public 'diportance' is a question of debate, a member's statement is a one-sided statement, it is not a debate. So is a ministerial statement. And an enormous amount of monumental decisions are being made, and the current pandemic shutdown has imposed incredible restrictions on our ability as legislators to hold the government to account.

As to the question whether this is important, there's no question, Madam Speaker, this is of public

importance. Le Premier ministre du Manitoba (M. Pallister) a décidé de mettre le chef de campagne du parti PC en charge du gouvernement de Manitoba. C'est une décision sans précédent. Ça envoie un message clair que le Premier ministre veut transformer le gouvernement du Manitoba en machine pour réélire les Conservateurs. Ceci est de la corruption.

Translation

The Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Pallister) has decided to put the PC campaign manager in charge of the provincial government. This is an unprecedented decision. It sends a clear message that the Premier wants to transform the Government of Manitoba into a re-election machine for the Conservatives. This is corruption.

English

The public importance of the Premier's decision to hire his own campaign manager as the senior-most bureaucrat in the public service sends a clear signal that the Premier's turning the Manitoba government into a machine to re-elect the PCs. Instead of having to raise money like the rest of us, their Premier is going to use the public treasury to finance his own party.

The decision to hire David McLaughlin is an unprecedented politicization of the public service. The clerk of the Executive Council is not a patronage position to be used to reward political friends, Madam Speaker, and I was truly surprised by many of the comments the First Minister made—the disparaging comments he made towards people who've occupied the position of the clerk to the Executive Council to diminish their expertise in their role.

I know that in the ultra-partisan environment of this Chamber, it may seem quaint to appeal to the notion that anyone is supposed to be nonpartisan, especially anyone who works in government, but there are thousands of conscientious individuals who work in the public service who get up in the morning, do their jobs to serve the public and the government of the day, no matter its political stripe, as fairly as humanly possible. I don't take the view that everyone is just out for themselves and is just looking to line their own pockets. That, I find, is a projection on the part of politicians who think that way.

The role of an independent public services—service is essential to the proper functioning of a democratic government. The clerk and other senior public servants are supposed to provide fearless and

independent advice, no matter what party is in power. The—in Ottawa, the equivalent position is the Clerk of the Privy Council. People in that position have served and advised multiple prime ministers from different political parties without ever engaging in partisan activities.

There is simply no way that David McLaughlin can function in this role. He is personally responsible for approving and launching a series of unprecedented, disgusting and unfair attacks on the character of the Leader of the Opposition. He spent years berating, belittling and trash-talking political opponents on Twitter. If any public servant did that, they would be fired in an instant. For those of us in opposition, we still need a scintilla, a fig leaf that this government is going to be able to operate with some kind of fairness and independence or that we can engage in negotiations in a way where there is any level of basic trust and good faith.

We need to know that the government will be able to treat every single Manitoban fairly, no matter whether they have a different political affiliation from the current government or if they have no political affiliation at all. That is what good government does. There is a critical overlap in the administration of justice and the administration of public services. Just as justice is blind, so should government deliver services, award contracts and support communities based on need and not just the next election cycle.

We've heard over and over from this government and the Premier that these are extraordinary times and the pandemic demands unprecedented measures. Many of the measures that have been announced are highly 'precedented'; they're just doubling down on the same PC policies that have been failing Manitobans for four years.

And I can anticipate the arguments already, and I already heard some of them today, Madam Speaker. The government will claim that this is perfectly ordinary and reasonable. They'll muddy the ethical waters that arguing that everyone else does it. They will offer guilt by association and point to some other scandal and say, this is just the way things are done.

Madam Speaker, the decision to appoint a campaign manager to a non-partisan position running the Manitoba government is different. It is unprecedented. It is an unprecedented abuse of power. And if the PCs would like to argue that it's somehow no different than anything the NDP did, an argument we've heard hundreds of times over the last years, that is no argument at all; it's arguing that two wrongs

make a right. If there are people who want to stand up and say this is the way things have always worked or that people who have an issue with it just don't understand how the game is played, our response is that we should no longer tolerate it. I've said many times there are good people in every political party and that no party or person can have a monopoly on good ideas; we all have our failures and our failings. We may not agree on solutions, but we all care about our province, our family and our communities.

I'm equally sure that there are members of the government who are uncomfortable with this decision, as they should be, because this is bad for our government. It is bad for their political party. It is bad for our democracy. And there will come a time when people ask those PC MLAs—and maybe it's happening right now—why didn't you speak up? It's clear as day that this is wrong; there is no defending this decision. Why do you stay silent and do nothing when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) put his campaign manager in charge of the government, because you knew it was wrong, but you stood by and you watched it happen?

This is a low point to this government, and I don't think for a moment we've reached bottom. That being said, Madam Speaker, Estimates should be very interesting this year.

Thank you.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, people will remember many things about the pandemic, and I suspect that this won't be top of their mind, but certainly some will remember that at the time of a pandemic the matter of urgent public importance that the Leader of the Liberal Party chose to bring forward isn't about issues that Manitobans might be facing on a day-to-day level, but it's about the hiring of a well-qualified and distinguished, internationally distinguished, individual. That is the issue that he has raised. In fact, he tried to presuppose what some arguments would be, but, of course, the one argument that he left out, of course, was qualifications because it's an argument that he can't win on if he were to raise that argument.

Mr. McLaughlin, as he has raised, is, in fact, someone that is not new to Canadian politics. He has served in New Brunswick with the Executive Council office. He was the deputy minister there, of policy and planning and the secretary to Cabinet Committee on Policy and Priorities. He served as the deputy minister to Intergovernmental Affairs, deputy minister to the Commission on Legislative Democracy, also in the province of New Brunswick, and he was also the

executive director to the council of federation's panel on fiscal imbalance.

And so both in the province and in the country, in provinces and in our country, Mr. McLaughlin has a distinguished record of service, and during a pandemic, all the Leader of the Official Opposition could do was try to besmirch someone of that reputation, Madam Speaker, and I suspect that there'll at least be some who will remember that this was what he considered to be a significant priority.

And now, of course, on the technicalities of a matter of urgent public importance, the member himself didn't even use the opportunity during question period to raise this issue. And, of course, one of the criteria qualifies a MUPI is that there are no other reasonable and practical times to raise the issue. So the member defeated his own argument by not even raising this in question period when he had the opportunity, but I suppose that speaks to the fact that he knows it is not of the issue of importance that he is trying to make it to be. But not to belabour the point because I don't think that it's a decision that is a difficult one to come to, Madam Speaker, based on the fact he himself chose not to raise this issue during question period.

He did try to raise a number of things he thought would be a defence for the government in terms of the hiring of Mr. McLaughlin. I would offer as a defence, such as it is, even though it's not truly needed, Madam Speaker, a tweet that was sent out, and I would read it into the record. It says: Congratulations to David McLaughlin on his appointment to the clerk of the Executive Council. David's extensive experience and commitment to climate change and sustainability will be a huge asset in building a cleaner and more prosperous Manitoba.

* (15:00)

And that's a tweet that came from Catherine McKenna, the federal Liberal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Madam Speaker. So perhaps the Liberal leader in Manitoba may want to speak to the federal Liberal government. He cited instances in Ottawa about how they do things in Ottawa. But clearly he hasn't fact-checked even with his own federal cousins. It is a rare day where I find myself in square agreement with the federal Liberal Party, but it must be the pandemic that's getting to me, but I fully cited that the Liberals are right on this one. Mr. McLaughlin is fully qualified for this job.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Just to put a couple of words on the record in respect of the member for St. Boniface matter of urgent public importance, this afternoon.

I would have to agree with the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), Madam Speaker, that if it had been such an urgent matter, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) could have brought it up in question period, as did my colleague from St. James.

I—my colleague from St. James brought up some—attempted to ask some very serious, important questions on behalf of not only this side for the official opposition, but on behalf of all Manitobans, particularly on behalf of public servants, of which we now know that David McLaughlin will have a fundamental role in what transpires with public servants and in their lives here. I think it's important to maybe perhaps put on the record and reiterate some of the concerns that were brought forward by the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) in respect of the appointment of the PC—Conservative Party of Manitoba's campaign manager both for 2016 and 2019.

Clearly, on this side of the House, we agree that this is a position that should be non-partisan and should not be politicized, and I would suggest to the House that the appointment of David McLaughlin certainly politicizes that role when it should not be. We know—and it's interesting, I think, that many of us on this side of the House were surprised that Mr. McLaughlin was back in Manitoba because we know that when he was appointed after 2016 to work on the climate—sorry, the climate and green plan, which you know, Madam Speaker, the House knows, was actually done away with and thrown away in the garbage after, you know, paying Mr. McLaughlin to produce that work and then the Premier (Mr. Pallister) thought that it wasn't—I mean, it wasn't necessary anymore.

You will recall and folks in the Chamber will recall that Mr. McLaughlin spent many days travelling back and forth from Winnipeg to Ottawa at the cost of—I think it was like \$62,000 of taxpayers' money, for the—for Mr. McLaughlin to travel back to Ottawa. So it was a little bit surprising that Mr. McLaughlin decided to take a position here in Manitoba again.

It does beg the question, Madam Speaker, why? Why would the Premier appoint Mr. McLaughlin at this time, this juncture? And one can surmise that perhaps the Premier is getting ready, as is the rumour

in Manitoba, that the Premier is getting ready to actually retire and leave even quicker than originally anticipated. And so perhaps that the Premier felt that he needed to put Mr. McLaughlin in place to ensure that once the Premier leaves, all of the egregious cuts and austerity plans that the Premier has thus executed still continues along its way.

I would suggest that probably under the leadership of David McLaughlin that those cuts will continue, because what we have seen time and time again, Madam Speaker, is that not one single member of the PC caucus ever stand up against their leader and the craziness, the egregious decisions that he executes on behalf of Manitobans. Not one single member of the PC caucus ever get up and tell their boss, hey, that's a bad decision; like, maybe, the appointment of David McLaughlin. I'm sure that nobody got up and said to their boss that it was a bad decision to appoint a political person to this very important position within the Manitoba government infrastructure here.

And, so I would suggest that David McLaughlin is here for other reasons, as well, than just that that he is appointed to.

Madam Speaker, I would like to put on the record as well a couple of other things in respect of Mr. McLaughlin. One, I think it is important for Manitoba taxpayers to know definitively whether or not Mr. McLaughlin will be, as he did in the past, be travelling back and forth to Ottawa at a very expensive cost to Manitoba taxpayers. If he plans on doing that, and perhaps not right now, we all know that flights and flight schedules have kind of shifted because we're in the midst of a global pandemic, but when this is over, does Mr. McLaughlin plan on going back and forth to Manitoba and who will be paying for those costs? Not only the costs for the tickets and the costs for going back and forth and all of that that's involved but, actually, also the carbon emissions in respect of flying. So who will be offsetting those costs if, indeed, he does do that?

I do want to just pick up on something that the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) also mentioned in his discussion or his notes here. It's important for Manitobans to recognize that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) appointed an individual who has spent considerable time on social media, in particular, Twitter, to attack individuals that sit on this side of the House, not the least to say, the leader of the NDP.

Mr. McLaughlin, I would suggest, in partnership with the Premier, is the very architect of what could

only be described as very disgusting personal attacks, during the 2019 election, of the leader of the NDP. This is who's been appointed, Madam Speaker. The very architect of these repeated, gross Trump-like US personal attacks on the leader of the NDP is now in charge and is now charged with ensuring that he's working on the best possible way for 12,000 front-line workers.

I would be very hesitant to say that we should be all a little nervous of that. We should all be a little bit nervous of an individual who has all kinds of time to sit on social media and tweet about people that he does not know, that is untrue, and that he has strategically and methodically attempted to destroy people's reputations.

This is who the Premier of Manitoba has appointed that the individual—will be responsible for public servants.

Madam Speaker, I think that it is—again, I would agree with the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) that this isn't a matter of urgent public importance. The member for St. Boniface could have raised this during QP as we did, and I do want to thank my colleague from—the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) for bringing this up.

This is an important matter. Manitobans should be aware of who is now at the helm of dealing with public servants. And, you know, is it a coincidence that the very week that it's announced that Mr. McLaughlin has been appointed by the Premier that the Premier decides to announce that he's asking—asking in quotations—6,000 public servants to take five days unpaid leave during the holidays? I don't think that that's a coincidence.

The Premier and Mr. McLaughlin are one and the same. Mr. McLaughlin will certainly execute the Premier's—and continue the Premier's plan of austerity on the citizens of Manitoban—of Manitoba, and we should all be very nervous and we should all request transparency and accountability, not only from the Premier, not only from Mr. McLaughlin, but certainly from every member of the PC caucus who, again—once again, has shown they refuse to stand up to their boss and the decisions that he's making that affects every single Manitoban here.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on the motion proposed by the honourable member for St. Boniface.

* (15:10)

The notice required by rule 38(1) was provided under our rules and practices. The subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention.

There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter. I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward as this is an issue that some members may have a keen interest in. Unfortunately, this motion does not fit the criteria as a matter of urgent public importance as there are other opportunities that can be used to raise this issue, including oral questions, members' statements and grievances.

With the greatest of respect, the motion is out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

GRIEVANCES

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I rise today on a grievance.

Northern communities deserve answers regarding their safety, but—and their concerns are not being heard or responded to in a timely fashion. As the minister is aware and this House should know, there is a very serious health concern being raised in northern Manitoba: Hydro work camps during the COVID-19 crisis.

As I have expressed to the minister, contracts from—contractors from other areas are being brought to the Hydro camps. This greatly increases the possibility of infection and spread of the virus. This is unacceptable. Lives are at risk.

I am greatly concerned about the health and well-being of our—the First Nation partners of the Keeyask, including Tataskweyak Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation, Fox Lake First Nation and York Factory First Nation. We need to ensure that they are treated as true partners in this project. And their concerns are real. Judicial and court action only further to undermine the trust and escalate tensions in what is obviously a difficult situation.

As I understand it, the corporation is not meeting with their partners at this time. This is not—this simply is not what partnerships should like and certainly not what reconciliation looks like.

The concerns of the communities need to be heard. They deserve more from this government. I have raised this issue with the minister, and these

communities need to hear from the Pallister government. Manitoba Hydro is bringing in contractors from areas that have high levels of COVID-19. The people making these choices do not live in the North. I would welcome the Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Wharton), the Hydro CEO and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to spend a shift rotation in Keeyask dam site if they feel every possible precaution has been taken to ensure the safety of northerners.

Northern health-care system is already strained with the cuts from this government. There is no ICU beds. The CEO of the NRHA, Helga Bryant, herself could not say how many Lifeflight planes are available.

If COVID-19 gets into the North, it would be devastating due to the systemic underfunding of First Nations.

Tataskweyak Cree Nation does not have access to an airport, and they can only travel by Highway 280. First Nation partners in this project have found the response and their concerns disjointed and confusing as Hydro has changed their protocol for Keeyask. First, it was seven days of isolation; now it's 14 days. I ask you, how can somebody self-isolate while on route to Keeyask, when they're already on their way to the North?

Will Hydro make self-isolation areas and communities for when workers return home? It is clear the Pallister government is simply flying by the seat of their pants, rather than developing a-solutions with the communities first.

Unfortunately, even precautions put forward are based on the honour system of out-of-province workers self-isolate before coming North. Many of these contractors are coming from Quebec and will have to fly out of Montreal which is a-has major outbreaks. What will happen if travellers get sick while on route to Keeyask? There is just some-so many questions and no answers.

Will the minister meet with the First Nations leadership? Why won't the Pallister government meet and talk with the leadership of northern communities? I would ask the minister to stop this and meet with the-the First Nations in true and meaningful because this is-because we are all in this together.

Madam Speaker: Further grievances?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a grievance.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I rise to speak on a grievance and I will talk about three issues: the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation, children's special allowances and Manitoba Hydro layoffs.

I stand today on this grievance on behalf of the farmers of Manitoba. The provincial government is looking to cut staff positions and salary costs at the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation, also known as MASC.

The government should not do this, and there are multiple reasons why the government should not do this. First, there is an urgent need for the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation at this time. Last year was a very tough year for farmers. I understand there is a backlog of more than 500 outstanding post-harvest claims that need urgent attention. There is urgency in resolving these claims as many farmers are out seeding now. It can't wait. Add to this their additional claims from this year, where farmers were not able to harvest last fall and have harvested the remainder of their crop this spring. A considerable proportion of those crops will need to be assessed, and farmers in spring can't tolerate wait times; they need to get their crop in.

If MASC is not working well and quickly when farmers need their help, it is a big problem. We do not need and do not want the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation to be 'e-MASC-ulated'. Add to this today's farmers are seeding and very soon the crops will be growing. We hope there are not major problems with hail this year, but if there are MASC will be needed, and there can be a big demand on MASC services if it is a bad hail year. This is not the time for cutbacks on MASC services.

Second, MASC has an outstanding record of performance and achievement and service to farmers. I have talked to many farmers, and it is rare to find a farmer who is not thankful for what used to be crop insurance and is now a MASC AgriInsurance program. Indeed, I've been told by one long-time farmer that the MASC programs are the most important programs for farmers. In a tribute to MASC, one farmer told me, talking to me on his cell phone as he was seeding this morning, that he has not met even one farmer who has hesitated to put in a crop this year, even with all the uncertainty about the COVID-19 situation. Farmers are not hesitating because they know MASC is there for them.

That is one of the biggest tributes I can say in support of MASC. MASC has essentially been the insurer, the securer of our home-grown food supply, and the food supply from Manitoba which is exported around the world and which is so important to people all over the world.

I say to the Premier (Mr. Pallister): Do not let Manitoba farmers down by cutting back on MASC. It is working well. Farmers tell me they do not see any frills in MASC. MASC is already a lean operation. In my experience, if you have a program with a really good track record and which is running well, don't mess with it and cause problems which we don't need. Programs like MASC are an example of how a helpful government program can be run to help farmers.

Third, MASC is a lean program and is constantly improving its programs and services and using more digital delivery of services. It does not make sense to arbitrarily cut a lean and efficiently run service. A number of years ago, there was a technology switch at MASC so that adjusters were working with laptop computers and MASC did not cut back on the number of—did cut back, then, on the number of employees who were keying in data because they weren't needed as much anymore. There was a business case then for cutbacks and they were made. There is no business case now for cutbacks to MASC.

Fourth, MASC is currently in the middle of a technology transformation. It is a massive job. The government should not be cutting back staff at MASC in the middle of this transformation. It involves a lot of extra training. It involves major adjustments to the work, and this is not a time to be cutting people when the people are badly needed by and for the organization and for farmers.

Fifth, most MASC programs are run with a combination of federal and provincial dollars. It is important that Manitoba is able to deliver programs like AgriStability and AgriInsurance well on behalf of both governments.

I say to the Premier: Please do not put us in a position where farmers have trouble accessing federal as well as provincial programs.

Sixth, we are in the middle of a pandemic. Now is not the time to be cutting staff and destabilizing people's lives. Indeed, MASC is needed at full strength right now not just to deal with the backlog, not just to deal with a technology transformation, but specifically because there is added need for flexibility in the response to the pandemic. People at MASC

have adjusted with more people working from home, although adjusting and lending staff are still going out to meet farmers while following full physical distancing guidelines.

* (15:20)

The Cabinet may want to run a new program through MASC to help farmers manage the difficult situation, for example, with falling beef prices. Flexibility and rapidity of response are critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. You do not want to cut the very people who are so critical in helping with the pandemic response. I say to the Premier: do not cut the people who are so essential to farmers producing our food supply during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I talked to one farmer who had this to say: he said he had heard that the Premier was calling for MASC to make cutbacks. He said: I would be hard pressed to see where the Premier's coming from. He added: I'm not sure what message the Premier and his government are sending by making cutbacks to MASC, but I, as a farmer, don't like the message.

Madam Speaker, I speak today on this critical matter, the future of MASC and the critical need for MASC, the Manitoba Agricultural Service Corporation, to be fully staffed and fully operational at this most critical of years for all of us.

I ask the Premier: Does he really want to be known from now on by farmers and by Manitobans as the chief 'e-MASC-ulator'?

Second, I will speak briefly on the children's special allowances. The provincial government is grabbing money from children—children who are the most vulnerable in our society in CFS care—and they're using legislation which they're bringing in in this session to make it very difficult for the children to ever get their money back. This is wrong.

Third, I will say a few words about Manitoba Hydro. The Premier is mandating major cutbacks in the number of employees at Manitoba Hydro. Manitoba Hydro has, over many years, provided excellent service to Manitobans. All over our province, Manitobans rely on having access to Manitoba Hydro's electricity. The safety and security of our Hydro network in Manitoba is critically important to all of us.

With our cold winters, we cannot tolerate delays in restoring power. Manitoba farmers, as an example,

are very dependent on Manitoba Hydro for their home and their farming operations. Food processors and other manufacturers, as with virtually every business in our province, is dependent on Manitoba Hydro.

Why is the Premier putting the access to Manitoba's—Hydro's—electricity at risk? Why, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the Premier acting to put at risk the basic lives, businesses and security of Manitobans by making cutbacks to Manitoba Hydro? Why, at a time when we're moving toward more use of renewable electricity, including hydroelectric power, would the Premier and his government jeopardize the future of Manitoba Hydro?

Manitoba Hydro workers contribute much to our province. The Province should not desert Hydro employees at the time of this pandemic.

Already, the Premier has made deep cuts to Manitoba Hydro. For the first time in my more than 20 years as an MLA, I have received repeated concerns about electricity outages in a part of River Heights. It is likely the slower response and the repeated nature of the outages are a result of the cutbacks the Premier has already made.

The Premier should not make further cuts, as he's now doing. He will jeopardize the security we all have from a high-performing utility. I call on the Premier to act immediately to abandon his cuts to Manitoba Hydro.

Merci. Miigwech. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

Madam Speaker: The House will now consider the opposition day motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

I will now recognize the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv), that pursuant to section 27(1) of The Public Utilities Board Act, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba requests that the Public Utilities Board immediately hold an extraordinary hearing into the proposed \$86 million in cuts from Manitoba Hydro's operations and workforce, including up to 700 layoffs that have been directed by the provincial government; and further

requests the provincial government's directive be suspended until the PUB's hearing has taken place.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kinew: The motion before the House today gives this government a simple choice: Will they be open and transparent, or will they continue to run away and hide from accountability?

Since the announcement that this government is obsessed with laying off Manitobans in the public sector took particular shape in the form of a directive to put 700 Manitoba Hydro employees out of work, we have been standing up for Manitobans' jobs. We have been working very hard to ensure that the government face accountability, face public pressure and eventually back off their plan to put all these Manitobans out of work.

We know economic history and theory teaches us that during a recession governments have to make investments to keep Manitobans working and to keep the economy moving. What I just said, Madam Speaker, was a paraphrase of what former Prime Minister Stephen Harper said in 2008 during the great financial crisis.

So it is clear from his actions, if perhaps not his words, that the issue of putting people out of work during a recession being a terrible idea is agreed by both those on the right wing as well as on the left wing. It simply defies logic and common sense that this government, seeing so many sectors of the economy hurting right now, would decide that the appropriate response is to go to some of those sectors still operating and decide to cause economic pain and misery there as well. It will not only prolong the recession and deepen the current economic crisis—when we look at the role of Manitoba Hydro in our province's economy in terms of its future for the environment and in terms of reconciliation with impacts on indigenous communities, we know that the cut being handed down under the cover of the COVID pandemic will be one that Manitobans pay the price for for many, many years to come.

And so the motion that we move today accomplishes the following, Madam Speaker: it would ask the Public Utilities Board, according to a section of the act that governs them, to have a hearing to investigate the facts surrounding this cut of Manitoba Hydro that has been ordered by this government.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Now, the Public Utilities Board has actually been quite helpful for us in this respect. Last week, I took the opportunity to write a letter to the PUB to ask them to commence such a hearing. Now, on the first day the PUB's response initially was to say that they didn't have the power to compel the government—or to order the government to do something. Now, this was important because up to now the minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) have previously tried to avoid taking responsibility for the cuts taking place at Manitoba Hydro, though clearly, the chair of the Public Utilities Board is connecting the dots and saying that these cuts are the direction of this government.

But their helpfulness went even beyond that. Just today we received a letter from the Public Utilities Board which made clear that the PUB could commence this hearing that we're asking for should they be asked to do so by a resolution passed in this Legislature. Of course, this letter also said that the PUB will be investigating this matter at their next hearing.

* (15:30)

So, again, just to make it plain, the PUB will, at the next hearing, investigate how damaging these 700 job cuts at Manitoba Hydro are and how damaging to our overall economic, environmental and social future this \$86-million cut that this government has ordered will be to Manitoba in the long term.

So this is a series of questions that will be asked of the government. There will be a truth ascertained at the end of this process. The question for the government today is will they delay and will they wait for that Public Utilities Board hearing to happen some time, perhaps, later this year when there's another rate review application, or will the government avail itself of the motion before them today and agree to subject themselves to the open and honest accountability questions that Manitobans want asked.

Now, we know that there are many Manitobans out there who do not understand why this government is so obsessed with putting working people out of work in this province. But, when it comes to Manitoba Hydro, we know that there is a few key issues that come to mind for the average person. Many, many people, since the 700 layoffs were announced by this government, have asked the question about why would the government cut jobs at Hydro when we just recently had the experience of that terrible snowstorm last October.

Many people in Portage la Prairie, surrounding region, in the Interlake and other parts of Manitoba were without power for an extended period of time. There were many people who banded together, luckily, and were able to get some assistance from Hydro and from the workers from other utilities after a number of hours and, in some cases, days. However, that showed us that, in this period of climate change where great storms occur with increasing frequency, the importance of having front-line workers at our public hydroelectric utility available to spring into action, to serve the needs of the people of Manitoba. And yet, so many people hear about the 700 job cuts, and they ask, well, how quickly are we going to be able to respond to the next storm. And that's a legitimate question. And it is one that should rightly be referred to the Public Utilities Board today by having the government members vote in favour of this motion.

I would also point out it was not lost on many of these people asking the same question that members on the other side of the House last fall were quick to say thank you, Manitoba Hydro workers, and they stood and they clapped for the workers when they stood in the gallery on that side of the Chamber, Mr. Speaker. And yet those same workers that they professed to have admiration for and gratitude towards last fall are the very same workers that they now aim to put out of work during a pandemic and economic crisis no less.

Now, beyond that, we know that the importance of Manitoba Hydro is quite far reaching to the future of our province. If we are to be able to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases in the long term, we need to be able to transition away from carbon-intensive fuels to using renewable forms of electricity. Manitoba Hydro is well positioned to play a very important role in doing that.

We also know that in terms of economic development, Manitoba Hydro's importance as a job creator, as an engine of growth, is quite important there, as well.

And, finally, we know that in spite of the positive contributions that Manitoba Hydro has made over the years to the—to our province, there has also been a terrible human toll that has been visited primarily on indigenous people within Manitoba. And so, while Manitoba Hydro, on the one hand, looks to the future to drive a clean, green economic growth-oriented exercise of its mission here in the province, at the same time, we must expect that it also advance the

mission of reconciling with its impact on indigenous communities and others across northern Manitoba. And yet, if this utility is cut further by this government, all of those goals, important as they are to our society, to our province and to our economic recovery, will be put into a weakened position. They will be slowed down, and, indeed, in some cases, as we're seeing, they will actually be moved backwards.

And so our concern here is that the actions of this government will weaken one of our most important Crown corporations, our most important public utility, probably setting the stage for privatization on the part of this government, but will eventually lead to weakened quality of service, will lead to slower response times and, of course, will lead to longer waits for Manitobans who are looking to get the construction industry back on its feet. All those measures taken together will prolong the economic misery and will damage our economic recovery.

We're comfortable bringing these facts to the Public Utilities Board. I suggest that the government get on board, subject itself to accountability and agree to have this hearing at the PUB today.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Proud to stand and speak to our motion here today, which requests that the Public Utilities Board hold an extraordinary hearing into the impacts of the \$87 million in cuts to Manitoba Hydro which have been proposed by this government.

As was just stated, this is really about transparency versus secrecy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have real concerns about the goals of this government in making these cuts, and it is only reasonable that we can look to the Public Utilities Board to help to ensure that these cuts will not have a prolonged or significant amount of—create a significant amount of damage to our publicly owned utility and the Crown jewel here in Manitoba—Manitoba Hydro.

In the midst of a pandemic, the government is attempting to move forward with an egregious attack on Manitoba Hydro, and that's bound to compromise the integrity of their services and it's bound to create real safety risks to Manitoba Hydro workers and the public at a time when we need energy security more than ever.

The fact is this government is willing to lay off 700 Hydro workers in the middle of a pandemic after Manitoba Hydro's own executive stated with total clarity that any job cuts above and beyond the 900 cuts which took place at this government's direction over

the last few years—it demonstrates a reckless disregard for the wellbeing and safety of Hydro employees as well as the financial security of these Manitoban families. It's shameful and, frankly, it's bad governance.

It may be worth reviewing the realities faced by Manitoba Hydro employees on a daily basis to inform the government why these cuts are so incredibly reckless and why they present a genuine threat to the safety of Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Hydro employees are constantly exposed to the serious hazards on the job, such as high pressure natural gas and high voltage electricity, and I don't have to tell you that both of these energy sources can be very unforgiving and that even the slightest mistake on the job can be fatal.

With these job cuts, which are being made after this government already shrunk Hydro's workforce by 18 per cent, many Hydro employees will have no choice but to cut corners in their work to save time, or they will have to complete jobs with one employee where there should be two employees simply because there will be a lack of trained employees available.

I repeat, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are creating a situation where Manitoba Hydro employees are going to be forced to cut corners because they've already experienced and endured 900 job cuts over the last handful of years and now they're being asked to proceed with another 700 job cuts or 700 layoffs that will ensure that Manitoba Hydro employees working in the field are going to face much greater risks because they simply won't be able to have the security of having a second employee to perform a job where they need to, and instead they're going to be needing to proceed with one. Or, they'll find themselves in a situation where a job needs to be done, and they'll be forced to cut corners in order to get that piece of work done because they're working for Manitobans and they want to ensure that we can continue to proceed and receive the energy security we all deserve.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's basic logic that these cuts are going to create a significant increase in the level of safety risks faced by large numbers of Hydro employees, and for what? All for the purpose of saving a marginal sum in the midst of a pandemic, and this at a time when we should be investing in the Manitoban economy.

* (15:40)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know—we've heard from all corners of Manitoba, from opinion makers on the

left and on the right, that this is a time not to be making huge cuts to our budget, but it's in fact a time to be investing in the Manitoban economy. And instead, this government is proceeding with these reckless cuts, which not only are going to create safety risks for Manitoba Hydro works, which—workers—not only going to create safety risks for Manitobans, but they're also bound to further prolong the amount of time that it will take for this economy to recover.

This is totally and completely unacceptable, and it suggests that this government has a disregard for the safety of our employees at our most important Crown corporation.

You know, the government may think that cuts to administrative employees at Hydro are acceptable, but we know that cuts to administrative supports are no less impactful than cuts to employees who are working in the field. It's those administrative employees that ensure that workers out in the field get access to their protective equipment that ensures that those workers in the field have the required supports they need in the back office to do their job safely.

So I repeat, cuts to administrative employees are no less damaging or impactful than cuts to employees in the field, in terms of endangering the safety of Manitoba Hydro workers as well as regular Manitobans. It's a reckless move and it creates further risks for Manitoban—Manitoba Hydro employees working in the field.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, every single day almost every single person in this Chamber relies on electricity and natural gas to meet our personal needs and the needs of our families. And yet, in the midst of a pandemic, the importance of safe and secure energy services could not be greater. How is it even possible that this government is willing to attack and layoff these very same people who are providing each and every one of us with an essential service every day here?

It's patently irresponsible, and it demonstrates a lack of respect for the Manitobans who are working to provide us with these services. The government's proceeding with these job cuts while at the same time, they're paying \$2.5 million for a sham review led by two ex-Conservative premiers.

That's an insult, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to Manitoba Hydro employees that they're facing layoffs at the same time as this government is paying their Conservative friends to study projects which were already reviewed in depth—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I just want to remind the member from St. James that because it's under advisement to the Speaker of—the compensation, I request that we restrain from talking about that topic.

Mr. Sala: None of these cuts make sense, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and yet—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Deputy Speaker, could you please clarify what you just decreed to the member for St. James (Mr. Sala)?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before the Speaker went—had to—I replaced the Speaker, it was indicated here that because the ruling's under advisement of the compensation for somebody to—for BC premier—former premier—BC premier Gordon Campbell for—paid with \$600,000. And then there was also a lack of, you know—so that's why. The member was going towards—was talking about that topic. *[interjection]* Yes, it has to—any kind of topic where the Speaker's going to take it under advisement—there's a list here. So I'm just following the list of what—the advisement. Give him general caution, actually.

* * *

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the insight, and I would argue that it's quite important, actually, that we consider this question about compensating two ex-Conservative premiers in light of the fact that those expenditures are totalling about \$2.5 million, which is about a quarter of the total expenditures—or, the total savings that this government is seeking to achieve from making the 700 job cuts at Manitoba Hydro.

So I would argue that there's a strong relationship there. I appreciate the warning, but I think it is important that we understand that Manitobans reflect on the fact that in the midst of a pandemic, we're paying two ex-Conservative premiers and a number of others \$2.5 million when we're looking, at the same time, to cut 700 jobs and to create a significant amount of anxiety and chaos for Manitoban families. I think that's quite important, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

None of this makes sense, and yet the government is refusing to consider stopping that review and to transfer or direct those funds to help prevent the need to proceed with these job cuts. So, again, I would suggest that it's incredibly important that we consider

that and that Manitobans have that as part of their considerations.

A few years ago, PUB—the PUB saved Manitobans a 7.9 per cent hydro rate increase, which had been requested by the Conservative-appointed board. And this is important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Public Utilities Board has been a critical, independent body in Manitoba, which has protected Manitobans time and time again. You know, just recently they also refused another rate increase that was requested to the PUB because the PUB recognized that that rate increase was not required in order for Hydro to meet its financial obligations.

And so those examples demonstrate the importance of the Public Utilities Board in protecting the best interests of Manitobans, and it highlights why the Public Utilities Board should be engaged to assist in reviewing the impacts of the \$82 million in reckless cuts this government is forcing upon Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, section 74 of The Public Utilities Board Act states that the board has a general—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala:—supervision over all public utilities and the owners thereof subject to the legislative authority of the Legislature, and may make such orders regarding equipment, appliances, safety devices, extension of works or systems reporting or other matters, as are necessary for the safety and the convenience of the public.

The board also has the power pursuant to section 77 of the act to fix just and reasonable standards, classifications, practices, measurements or service to be furnished, imposed, observed, or followed thereafter by any such owner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2019, May 1st, a spokesperson for Hydro publicly stated: We believe that further staff reductions would significantly increase the public—risk of public and employee safety or system reliability. And we need to take this into account. We need to ensure that we go to the Public Utilities Board so that they can have an opportunity to review the impacts of these reckless cuts. They're the only ones who are in a position to review this independently, and I urge this government to send this decision to the Public Utilities Board for their review.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): It is a pleasure to rise in this House today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to put some facts on the record.

Respectfully, just like the honourable member from Fort Rouge earlier's letter to the PUB, the motion is without merit. It's a solution in search of a problem that simply doesn't exist. Manitoba Hydro is not immune from the fiscal pressures of the global pandemic.

However, due to COVID-19, our government has instructed Manitoba Hydro not to collect from Manitobans who cannot pay or charging interest on penalties or on late fees. This, of course, will affect revenues and cash flow and borrowing costs. Less revenue and more expenses for Manitoba impacts all Manitobans along with the massive debt government continues to cover. To help with all of our COVID-19 response efforts and limit an—the inevitability of a higher debt load from Manitoba Hydro, modest and focused areas of cost savings have been identified.

Hydro is working hard at finding cost savings, Mr. Deputy Speaker, along with government and much of the public sector, to help us deliver more money to where it's needed most: to support our front lines, our front-line workers. And, with other economic recovery programs, we will get there.

Hydro's proposed workforce expense reduction is very modest: about \$11 million or just 1.8 per cent of its total annual payroll in excess of \$500 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Government is not the employer, and how Hydro and their unions continue to pursue the 1.8 per cent reduction is between them. But we will continue to urge them to explore all options to minimize layoffs, including temporary work-share agreements or any other viable proposals that will accomplish that goal.

* (15:50)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time, I just wanted to put on the record, as well a quote, from the president and CEO, Ms. Jay Grewal, at Manitoba Hydro, and, if I may quote, is: Since my message on Monday, many of you have reached out with questions and suggestions about what other options could be taken to avoid temporary layoffs. I want you to know that I am—and the rest of the executive leadership team—remain open to exploring all options for achieving the \$11-million workforce expense reduction we are seeking and that we are engaged in ongoing dialogue with all our unions, associations to this end. To be clear, everyone should understand that the announced layoffs have never been our desired outcome.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's a quote from the president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro. At this time,

I'd like to also put on the record some more facts regarding the NDP and their record on Manitoba Hydro.

To be clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the NDP government, Manitoba Hydro amassed large amounts of debt that now have to be managed to reduce the impact to all Manitobans. In 2007, with the decision to move Bipole III route from the east side to the west side of the province was made, the estimated cost at the time—\$2.2 billion.

In 2011, when Manitoba Hydro submitted its environmental impact statement to the Clean Environment Commission, the estimated cost was \$3.8 billion. And, guess what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? July 2018, when the line was completed, the cost had reached—hang on to your hats—\$5.4 billion. Keeyask has now ballooned to a cost of \$8.7 billion.

The NDP's direction to proceed with Keeyask and Bipole III without proper PUB scrutiny has created a massive multibillion-dollar debt problem. It's interesting to hear the members opposite talk about oversight in PUB when the largest capital investment project in the province's history was denied. Manitobans were denied the ability for PUB to scrutinize that project, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Generations of Manitobans will have to pay the bill because of the NDP.

Hydro's debt, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is set to hit \$25 billion in the next three to four years. This is more than a hundred per cent increase that Manitoba taxpayers and ratepayers will be responsible for. The fiscal mess, let's be clear, the NDP left behind, now compounded by an unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, has led to necessary but balanced decisions by not only our government, by our Crown corporations and all stakeholders involved in this terrible, terrible pandemic.

It is clear, in closing, where the NDP so clearly kept getting it wrong, this government will get it right.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Clearly, the minister doesn't know and understand what the definition of clear means because it is not clear why the Pallister government is making such crazy, egregious, callous, heartless cuts on a myriad of different fronts, including Manitoba Hydro, Deputy Speaker.

I want to remind everybody in the House, because I think that what ends up happening is that members

opposite, once their boss makes their decree that this is the crazy cut of the day, and then the cut is executed and everybody loses their mind, I think that they actually forget the decisions, the crazy cuts, the callous cuts, the heartless cuts, that their boss directs.

So I want to remind everybody, Deputy Speaker, in the House that this, you know, announcement of 700 layoffs for Manitoba Hydro workers is on top of the 900 layoffs that Manitoba Hydro was forced to execute because of the Premier (Mr. Pallister), because the Premier is hell-bent on destroying and butchering the infrastructure of Manitoba before he retires to the beaches of Costa Rica, and you can be darn sure that, come the next election, people will remember what every single member of the PC caucus stood by and allowed to happen.

And, if the members opposite don't believe me, which is fine, I want to just read into the record, Deputy Speaker, a letter that we all got, which I'm not sure if members opposite actually read. But I feel that it's important to put it on the record in Hansard, not only in our individual emails that I know everybody got, but it's important to put it on the official record in Hansard so that everybody—again, as I have often said, when people come back—when researchers come back to look at the beginning pieces of the privatization of Manitoba Hydro, what were the steps that the PC government, that the Premier did? What did he put in place to breakdown the infrastructure of Manitoba Hydro so that then all of a sudden everybody's going to say, look. They're going to say, oh, we've got to privatize it to protect it.

So I want to put on the record an email that we all got.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba: My name is Neil. I am a 46-year-old telecontrol journeyman at Manitoba Hydro. Eight years ago—*[interjection]*

I can table it. It's coming in.

I'll start again. *[interjection]* Eight—*[interjection]*

Good. I'm glad.

Eight years ago I enrolled at Red River to end a constant cycle of layoffs. I would be 40 when I graduated and I knew that looking for a new career at this age would be difficult. I chose the electronics engineering program after working with a provincial program to retain under-employed workers to find the best options.

Today, I am preparing for my potential layoff not because the crisis has taken away my work, nor because Manitoba Hydro is in a state of redundant labour. When you lay me off, this is what you will save: you will save having my experience and training to assist in the continuous improvement that helps our electricity bills, the second lowest in the country; you will save having my expertise and training to assist in the next outage; you will save the regular household spending/donating we contribute to Siloam Mission, Main Street Project, Winnipeg Harvest, MAS and a number of smaller groups that desperately need help right now; you will save the provincial income tax and PST that would have gone into the general revenues—that's not a small number; you will save the school and property taxes that will be deferred; you will save the City from receiving the water bill on time; you will save that spending that's been strategically put out to support a number of smaller businesses and restaurants; you will save having my benefits to cover monthly health expenditures, which will instead become a burden on government programs.

Now, multiply that by 700, then expand out the Manitoba Hydro—from Manitoba Hydro and multiply it again by all the labour that has been put on the street with the cuts in the last few years. What you actually saved is countless contributions of 700 economic participants like me, while decimating the skilled and committed workforce of one of the province's key economic engines.

Today, we live in the surreal environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today I'm watching as the fragility of our economic system falls to pieces at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society. I have been very privileged for the last six years as I have earned a comfortable wage. I am not rich but I am not poor either. Yet, somehow that state of comfort puts me in the top 10 per cent of earners in this province. I'm considered rich because I can go without a couple of paycheques before I need to start worrying about losing my home.

* (16:00)

The Province has always had a problem with this privilege being something that needs to be taken away instead of seeing it as a benchmark to bring everyone else up to. Right now, here in this moment, is an opportunity for Manitoba to stand up and become a shining beacon for the rest of the country. Now is the perfect time to make changes necessary to pick people up, to give them an opportunity to be part of rebuilding we will need to partake in, invest in the

people that are working so hard to protect our communities, then invest in those communities to make them stronger and more resilient to future crises. Now is not the time to race for the bottom.

And that was sent by a Neil—I don't think I know how to say his name properly, but S-h-a-no, S-c-h-a-u. And I wanted to put his email—and, Deputy Speaker, we have received many, many emails. In fact, it's hard to keep up with some of the emails; there's so many coming in in respect of all of the cuts, but certainly, the last notice of 700 layoffs from Manitoba Hydro.

I think what I want to do, and I know the minister is chirping over there that it's not true—it is true, Deputy Speaker. What I want to do for Neil, because I do plan on sending Neil a copy of Hansard—what I want Neil to know is that today, at a little bit after 4 p.m., that while I was reading his letter into the official Hansard record, several of the PC caucus members were chirping about, laughing. The minister is trying to disabuse some of the things that we're putting on the record here today. I think that Neil and every other Manitoban like Neil should know that not only today at five or three minutes after 4 p.m., that every single time that we stand up in this House and we try to make the Pallister government to account and be accountable to the decisions that they're making and accountable to the decisions that they say not one diddly squat about, they should know that they chirp and they laugh and they don't listen to anything that Manitobans have to say.

They don't care. The PC caucus absolutely does not care that their boss is making decisions that are destroying people's lives. And here they are. And, again, right now, they're laughing. I don't know how folks actually vote for people opposite. I actually don't understand how people opposite get into such sacred positions like being that of an MLA when you're supposed to be fighting for all Manitobans, not just your rich friends. But here we are. We're in a situation, in a global pandemic—we're in a global pandemic and members opposite are laughing. They're laughing—

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

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We're proud to stand up and support the opposition, the NDP, in their efforts to have the Legislature send this to the PUB for revisions.

It's absolutely clear to us that this decision to force up—or, try to force Manitoba Hydro to lay off

700 highly qualified, difficult-to-replace Hydro workers is a disastrous and damaging decision with no upside. It's wrong for Manitoba Hydro to even consider laying these workers off. And it is much worse that the Pallister government is asking them to do it.

The fact is that, just as the NDP did in the past, the PCs are erasing the line between government and independent Crown corporations so that they can use their budgets—the budgets of Crown corporations to supplement revenues for the Government of Manitoba. And that is simply unacceptable, that we're actually putting—willing to put at risk 700 people's livelihoods and put at risk Hydro and its ability to function in order—so that, really, to spare the Premier (Mr. Pallister) the embarrassment of a further credit downgrade.

Hydro has already undergone massive cuts. It's an essential business. It is profitable, and the layoffs are targeting workers who are highly trained and hard to replace. And it's important to recognize that Hydro has already undergone a series of layoffs. I quote from the—their resignation letter of the entire Hydro board—with the exception of a former member of the Legislature, Sandy Riley—wrote: we note once more that Hydro has already taken an important step as part of its plan. Senior management ranks were reduced by 30 per cent, our overall management ranks by 25 per cent and our total workforce by 15 per cent. We also established wage freezes throughout the company. These tough measures are important, saving \$65 million annually. They will improve the cost structure of the corporation, though they cannot address Hydro's core financial challenge, which is a massive balance sheet issue.

That massive balance sheet issue is because—is not due to Hydro being a burden on government. The fact is, is that this government, like the NDP government before it, has been taking \$400 million a year in capital taxes, in water rentals and in debt fees. Debt that—Manitoba Hydro could easily be self-supporting, and it could be paying off its own debt and it would have billions of dollars lower debt if it weren't for the fact that the Manitoba government has used it as a piggy bank for years and years and years.

And I will note there was a point when the—there's—I have a newspaper story here from 2003 when Premier Gary Doer wanted big changes at the Public Utilities Board because he objected to its independence, that at the time Hydro had not raised

residential or commercial rates and Doer basically wanted to replace the entire board of directors, saying the status quo was not acceptable.

So the—there is a long history and a long and sad history of governments trying to attack the independence of the PUB, which exists to preserve and protect Manitoba Hydro, and has undermined Manitoba Hydro's independence, its financial status and its ability to pay its own bills.

Like everyone else in this House, we've received dozens, if not hundreds of letters from concerned workers who have warned us that this unacceptable because there is no shortage of work at Hydro. I spoke with Sandy Riley when he was chair of the board of Hydro, and one of the things he said about these cuts I just read about was the fact that he did not want to go any further, that they did not want to take further risks that would leave Manitoba Hydro unable to do its job.

And I've spoken with workers who said that the storm in last October, when it occurred, it was one of the first times ever that Manitoba Hydro has had to call for crews for help from other jurisdictions was because before that, they always had enough staff.

That's a hundred million of repairs that need to be done. There are major projects that are under way. The idea that somehow this is—that it is the Premier's job to tell Hydro how to run its business is fundamentally wrong.

It is political interference. The—it is wrong for the Premier to be standing up and demanding the—an arm's-length Crown corporation for cuts with—there are absolutely no evidence of benefits, and this is what's critical. We've been told over and over that it's supposed to be self-evident that these cuts are going to help or be necessary.

There has never been a single credible argument from this government about how this is going to help anyone—not anyone. It makes absolutely not sense. Fundamentally, there is tons of work to be done. I will add among—I also received another letter from an electrician which I'd like to read a portion of.

He says: all through the COVID-19 pandemic, Manitoba Hydro employees have been and still are working full time. There is no shortage of work. In fact, last week, we hired 26 temporary employees to assist with our peak work. Should Hydro defer some projects—not the mega projects like Birtle, Keeyask or the Manitoba-Minnesota line—due to budgetary constraints, freed-up workers can always be redirected

to the backlog that has already resulted from the last round of reductions in manpower: 18 per cent in 2017.

And I will repeat that: freed-up workers can always be redirected to the backlog that has already resulted.

Clearly, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is attempting to divert money earmarked for workers who are truly unemployed and suffering through no fault of their own. In effect, he will funnel assistance away from those whose real need is the result of unemployment caused by an actual decline in business. Food and beverage service employees, store clerks, delivery drivers are but some of the obvious examples.

The Premier will then have federal monies subsidize his artificially constructed unemployment at Manitoba Hydro. His claim is that this will help offset Manitoba's coronavirus spending, but what should be abundantly clear is that any infusion he might make to the province's bottom line will come only at the cost of increasing federal indebtedness.

And, while the federal government has shown its willingness to take on an even greater debt burden during these times, it has done so with a clear purpose in mind: assisting Canadians in need, not bolstering provincial coffers at the expense of those who are suffering.

* (16:10)

Since Premier Pallister has been a—very public about his intention if I or any normal—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I just want to remind the member from St. Boniface to—when you—talking about somebody, any members of the Chamber here, if they—rather, by their position or their constituency.

Mr. Lamont: My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was carried away by the verbatim nature of the letter.

Since the Premier has been very public about his intention, if I or any normal citizen were to use funds for other than their intended purposes, we'd be charged and face heavy fines. He says, I urge you to bring this matter to the floor of the Legislature, and I'm very pleased to do so.

But I just want to sum up. There have been a number of factually incorrect statements that have been placed on the record today about the state of Manitoba's finances, the state of Manitoba Hydro's finances. There has been not a single credible justification put forward for why any of these cuts at

Hydro need to take place, and, further, there has been no explanation, plan or projection of what—the damage this is going to do to Manitoba Hydro, it's ability to deliver services or the impacts on the economy.

These are all—and for the government to be making these decisions—drastic decisions affecting the livelihoods of thousands of Manitobans—is absolutely outrageous because there is nothing—we haven't heard a single credible piece of information to back up any of these decisions. We have repeatedly heard—we repeatedly have releases from this government which have been debunked and challenged because they've—an example of the Treasury Board report, which misrepresented an economist's statement over the levels of debt in this province.

The fact is: Manitoba Hydro is not a burden. It is not a debt that we need to worry about. It is—if it is, it's because of the action—it is because of the reckless actions of this government which has—which ignored—which—I will bring it around. I will bring—which ignored the warnings of the nine members of Hydro who retired. As they said, we've never been permitted to make a presentation to Cabinet or the caucus to explain the problems we face at Manitoba Hydro. Otherwise, maybe they'd be—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for St. Boniface—the member for St. Boniface, I was—just wanted to ask if you were—if you were actually were tabling the quotes, or—but you're just actually quoting from the—from a literature. Were you quoting? Are—you want tabling—you want to actually table the report?

I guess the member from St. Boniface is going to table report. Okay, the honourable member for St. Boniface, tabling the report—or, tabling the literature.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you.

I know the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen), already had a copy of it because it was sent to him when the entire board resigned, but I will read the relevant quote: We believe this is irresponsible. The previous government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, sorry. Order. Order

The member—order. Order.

The member from St. Boniface doesn't need to read it, but he just needs to table it. So the report being tabled—the literature be tabled.

Is—the member for St. Boniface, are you concluded in your speech?

Mr. Lamont: No. I'll finish by saying that the behaviour of the government to this date has been to treat Manitoba Hydro as a piggy bank. The level of political interference is off the charts even compared to the previous interference under the NDP government and, if they proceed with these cuts, it will needlessly put—throw hundreds of people out of work, cause—and cause completely unnecessary suffering while endangering the future of Manitoba Hydro.

We support the NDP and their measure.

Thank you.

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I rise today in enthusiastic support of this motion, and I think I'll start with my comments reviewing a little bit of the history about how we got here and why this motion is necessary.

When the Pallister Conservative government took office in 2016, they had been left the second fastest growing economy in Canada, and it was the fastest growing non-oil based economy in Canada. We had the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada. We had record immigration into Manitoba, and the government took what was probably the most balanced economy in the country, one that would weather most storms because it was so balanced, and had this very toxic ideological belief that somehow the public sector in a small province like ours was too large and that it had to be reduced.

And they included in that a private company—including Hydro because it was owned by Manitobans. And so they set out to slash and cut and slash, and the initial loss to Manitoba Hydro was 900 jobs. We know that there was many more jobs in other parts of the public service: thousands. We know that they set out to reduce the public service for the Manitoba provincial government by 8 per cent; exceeded that. It's over 14 per cent now.

We know that in certain areas like tax collection, they have vacancy rates of up to 27 per cent because, you know, if you're a government, why collect taxes and why hire people to do it? And that's obviously this philosophy that they've been holding onto.

The net effect of that is that we have now dropped—before the pandemic, we are now in the bottom half of Canadian provinces for economic growth. And before the pandemic, we had seen the

second lowest unemployment rate spike up with now massive unemployment. We also saw a spike in youth unemployment, with young people no longer having jobs available to them.

We also saw, for the first time, all the gains that we made through immigration reversed with now newcomers leaving our provinces. They're voting with their feet.

So all this did was slow down the Manitoba economy, and prior to the pandemic, the government's own numbers were that we were going to have flat, almost anemic growth and—less than 1 per cent—and some, Conference Board of Canada and others even predicted lower growth. So we were in a vulnerable position before all of this hit. This government made Manitoba's economy very vulnerable.

The second aspect of—sorry—trend of this government is they don't want to answer for their actions. They're not really big on transparency. They're not really big on accountability, and they want to make sure that decision making is centralized.

So we've seen, over the years, various boards, agencies amalgamated, phased out and more and more decision making has been left with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his—well, I should say the Premier. It's probably not even his Cabinet. I doubt that his Cabinet even gets much of a say.

We've seen the Public Accounts committee has rarely even met since this government has been elected. We've seen them drag their feet about hiring a replacement for the Attorney General. We've seen critical committees like the poverty reduction committee where this government won't even allow a report, a yearly report to get tabled and won't allow the committee to actually do its work and actually ask questions.

And, you know, it's obvious because the answers that come out of it would be horrible because we've seen since 2016 poverty increase in Manitoba. We've seen since 2016 social inequality increase in Manitoba. We've seen health-related issues based on poverty increase since 2016.

So obviously the government doesn't want the public to be talking about this, hearing about it and asking them the tough questions. And then we've seen, since the pandemic, this government doesn't even want to come to the House.

We're at a point now where, I think, in the last week there's been one new case. The government's

announcing tomorrow further speeding up of the re-opening of our economy, yet somehow we can't sit more than one day a week for half a day in this House.

And this government has been refusing to go back to work and to have question periods, to have Estimates. They have, you know, obviously been spending money, but they haven't provided any fiscal update or—*[interjection]*

* (16:20)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: Or they have refused to create an all-party committee to review the finances during this exceptional time, and that's fine, which just simply means that the government is going to be completely on the hook and responsible for whatever poor decisions that they're making now without the broader influence of all Manitobans sitting around the table.

So that comes down to the latest crazy and reckless and irresponsible move, is that we are now in a recession and, of course, with the government further cutting, what that will lead to is a depression, and they will make things worse. And it has become an economic cliché from both the left and the right that when you are in those type of circumstances you invest in jobs. And, with Hydro, they are now eliminating 700 more jobs on top of the 900 that they already did.

And that's just one job holder. Think about how many people that that job supports—the children and spouses and the money that goes into the economy, the money that those people will not spend because they're fearful that they're going to run out and how that is going to put less money into the Manitoba economy. It will contract it even worse.

Not only that, the survivors of this latest job purge from the government are going to be on eggshells because they know this government's not done. They know this government has this mean-spiritedness and believes in cutting jobs and harming Manitoba workers and they're going to be very careful about what they spend and how and what they do because they don't know if they're next, because they know that this government doesn't have their back. They know that this government doesn't actually support the work that they do and that this government somehow views them as a burden and treats them that way.

And that's the message that this government's irresponsible and reckless cuts are sending to

Manitobans, that in a time of crisis we are not all in this together and that the government is picking winners and losers, and, unfortunately for Hydro and workers and their families, they're on the losing end of this government's priorities and their mean-spirited value system.

So this motion would allow, until, of course, this government weakens the Public Utilities Board, an independent body to review what's going on and say, wait a minute; stop. You can't support these crazy cuts with any sort of evidence or rational-based reasoning, and it's just reckless and—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: This government—you know, I know they—I know the answer to this—they don't believe in transparency; they don't believe in—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: But surprise us, you know. We'll appeal to your better angels and you can agree today and vote for this. Don't tie the hands of the Public Utilities Board. Say, go ahead; we've got nothing to hide and air it out. Let's let Manitobans look at this and let an independent body decide. And, if the government's decision is so wise, well, then that will come out. But, if it isn't, which we say it's not, we also think that will come out.

And so I implore this government to support this motion. It's obviously the right thing to do, and I'm sure they'll—the members opposite will be able to feel good about themselves for once and that might be a nice change.

So, in closing, I certainly ask that the members opposite support this motion.

Thank you.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans count on governments to provide jobs during a recession, and we know we're in a recession.

More than ever, Manitobans need jobs to sustain their families. In one day alone, they instituted the biggest budgetary cut in Manitoba history—\$860 million in cuts to the public service. This resulted in \$86 million in cuts to Manitoba Hydro workforce operations, and that has major impacts in the North, which I represent.

This is going to impact when there's outages in remote communities. It's going to take longer to get power restored, and we're hearing reports that it's

going to be a bad forest fire season. Manitoba Hydro plays key roles in forest fire protection.

So how is this going to affect the North? Why is this government continuing to put northern lives at risk? They're putting northern lives at risk with their expansion to the Keeyask dam project and not meeting with their First Nations partners. And once again, I invite the minister, if he is confident in the policies and the procedures and the safety measures in place, for him to spend a shift cycle at Keeyask. *[interjection]* So you'll join me on the plane tomorrow to Keeyask?

So with these dangerous cuts to Hydro, this has also had impacts on the communities I represent like Gillam. With the cuts to Manitoba Hydro, Gillam has had to close the recreation centre for the remainder of the year. Hydro workers in Gillam may lose their housing because of these cuts if they're laid off. I hope the minister will ensure and protect the Hydro workers that are—get laid off and ensure they don't lose their housing.

If this government feels confident in the cuts, they should be supporting and championing this going to the PUB. They should be showing, yes, this is the right decision, and willing to take it to the PUB and defend their choices. But once again, this government is hiding behind COVID-19 and pushing through their cuts and privatization agenda.

This isn't about saving money, this is about the road to privatization. And I would urge the minister and the government to stop. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Adams: Last week, we sent a letter to the PUB asking them to hold hearings, and they said that if the—that if there was the will of the House, that they would hold a hearing. Well, it is this—will of this side of the House, so I would urge the members opposite to support this motion. If they have nothing to hide, then put all the cards on the table.

Transparency is the key to functioning all—for all governments to function, ensuring Manitobans trust the representatives who govern them. However, the government is impeding with this and not allowing—by limiting the number of days that we're sitting. We're only here one day a week for half a day. Have us here more days. Answer the questions.

Last year, this government pushed Manitoba Hydro and other Crown corporations to yet again cut

positions by 8 per cent. This was ordered after Crown corporations exceeded overall by 15 per cent.

Evidence—we know Manitobans need power during this time, and more Manitobans are using residential power. Residential power is up by 9 per cent. So why cut if Manitoba Hydro is seeing an increase in revenue of 9 per cent?

This is not okay. Governments need to be standing up and protecting Manitobans, not cutting and putting them at risk. They're jeopardizing Manitobans and they're jeopardizing our economy. Yet the Pallister government continues to pave the way. They don't seem to care about what Manitobans think, what Manitobans feel.

I have countless Hydro workers emailing me concerned about their job, their future. And not just for themselves, but for their coworkers. I have emails from Hydro members that have been on the job for 20 years that are concerned about their younger step crew members and are wanting to make sure that I stand up and speak for those people.

It is imperative that a government stands up and protects Manitoba Hydro. This is a publicly-owned utility, and we've seen in other jurisdictions when you put—Crown corporations get privatized, that costs skyrocket. All we have to do is take a look at Ontario and what the Liberals in BC were doing with their Hydro. As they started to try and privatize that, costs went up 'exponentially.' With MTS, after this government—after the PCs privatized MTS, bills doubled. And there's large parts of the province that don't have access to cell phones or high-speed Internet, and I would argue that's largely because the government of the day privatized it. And then, when Filmon retired, he joined the board. So maybe our Premier (Mr. Pallister) is looking for a second job when he's—retires.

Not only will Manitobans lose the jobs they so desperately need, but they will lose the expert service. When these expertly trained Hydro workers lose their jobs, they're going to be moving on, and they could be leaving this province. And we will lose highly skilled, highly trained workers that this province so desperately needs.

* (16:30)

The Public Utilities Board is a critical independent body that Manitobans rely on, that protect the—our interests and can hear the concerns. In 2017, Manitoba Hydro wanted to impose a 7.9 interest—increase in rates. That's unacceptable.

This government is once again putting northerners at risk, asking northerners to in—because that increase would've had a major impact on the North, as we spend more time needing to heat our homes. The Public Utilities Board has proven time and time again that they're here for Manitobans, not this government.

This government has once again shown their lack of due diligence and lack of transparency, and they need to stop. They need to stop and think and put Manitobans first. And I am here to stand with my colleagues on this side of the House and call for an—to have the—this motion supported. Not only is it misguided to cut government jobs unnecessarily during a severe economic downturn, these cuts will almost certainly have effect on quality of service in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

As I stated, this will have delayed impacts if there—when there's hydro outages in remote communities. It'll take longer to get there; it'll take longer to restore. And these communities rely on their power. A lot of these communities are remote. and they—if they lose their power, they have no way to access the outside world.

These communities need to have this government stand up and protect—needs to stand up and have their government listen to them and stop the cuts to Manitoba Hydro and protect the workers of Manitoba Hydro.

In the community of Gillam, majority of the entire town is employed through Hydro, so it'll have an even larger impact on Gillam if and when they lose—with the layoffs because it's going to mean people leaving the community, and we need—they need their workers there.

When you're—when this government is cutting, they're not looking at how it impacts the North; they're looking at how it'll make it easier to privatize. So will the minister be honest today and admit that he is on an agenda to privatize Hydro?

Okay, well, Hydro is an expert in regarding service levels for electricity, heat, natural gas in Manitoba. Hydro is—given that within the Public Utilities Board's jurisdiction and power to supervise and make orders to protect levels of safety, service to Hydro—to the public, we request immediately to convene a hearing to examine and investigate these concerns before the cuts can take place.

Will you delay the cuts so the due diligence and oversight can be done? We believe through the investigation it'll confirm what we believe, that the government does not need to make these cuts at these times. With the care-outs that were laid with the emergency measures orders, majority of the industrials' sector using hydro industrials maintained open and a large portion of people that stayed home; their power usage increased. I know for myself, my dishwasher went from running every two days to almost every day. My stove was on a couple of times a day, cooking both lunch and supper for my family. Both the computer, TV and, well, actually, large parts of the day there were two computers on, as my oldest son would be going through and doing online learning. my younger son would've been watching TV or on—doing some sort of schoolwork there. So it's as power increased, it has gone up, and I don't believe Hydro has lost money during this pandemic. I would almost say that Hydro has gained money and has been—increased their revenue, and I think a Public Utility Board hearing would show that.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I'm—gives me great pleasure to stand up and put a few words on the record in support of our leader here in this opposition day motion that calls on this government to actually get the Public Utilities Board to hold an immediate extraordinary hearing into the proposed \$86 million in cuts that this government says has to happen.

This government has done nothing since this pandemic has happened except cut people's jobs, which is the wrong direction. They should be employing people and contributing to the economy. Instead, what are they doing? They're laying off 700 people, cutting those positions at Hydro. That's 700 families here in our province.

Last year, Madam Speaker, 9,000 people left our province because of this government's lack of jobs in this province, so I want to, you know, tell this government that Manitobans count on them to provide jobs and they don't want to be, you know, sitting at home. They want accountability from, you know, this minister. This minister stood up earlier, and I want to quote him. He said: This government will get it right.

How can the minister think that cutting 700 jobs at Manitoba Hydro is getting it right? Does he not stand up for jobs for Manitobans? He is a minister in this province, yet he takes direction from a premier—fails to stand up for these very workers, these very workers who stood in this gallery where they were

thanked by this minister and that government for their quick response in a snowstorm, and, I might add, a snowstorm that had more workers from other provinces coming into this province to help. And our Public Utilities Board, you know, they said they'll hold a hearing, but this government has the authority to institute that tomorrow. They can do that.

They're saying \$86 million needs to be saved. Well, that was in their election-day promise. Is that coincidence or not? You know, Manitobans deserve to have a job when a job is needed. We're in a COVID-19 pandemic. How many people are sitting at home not able to pay their job—their rent? How many businesses had to shutter their doors because they can't pay their rent because they have no revenue come in?

Many of those families are families that had one of their partners working at Hydro. Well, guess what? Now neither of them have revenue. And this government thinks that that's the right direction to go?

You know, this government is not listening to Manitobans, and I want to read a letter to you from a constituent: Dear Bernadette Smith—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Just a couple points there. Even in using your own name, the member should not be using it. Plus, also, if the member's reading from a letter, she needs to table three copies of that letter, okay.

Mrs. Smith: I'm very upset that the provincial government is using COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for public sector cuts, including layoffs at Manitoba Hydro. I am shocked that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is forcing job cuts at Manitoba Hydro. To meet Pallister's demand for cutbacks and—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Smith: The Premier—sorry.

Madam Speaker: I think the member's just realized what her error was. When referring to members in the House, it is either by their positions or their constituencies.

Mrs. Smith: I apologize for that.

I am shocked—oh, to meet the Premier's demands for cutbacks, Hydro has said it will need to lay off 700 people or 13 per cent of the workforce. There are reports that even if public entities find other ways to provide the savings demanded by the Premier from

now until the fall, they must still make workforce reductions.

There is no downturn in demand for Hydro, Madam Speaker, meaning that layoffs are not justified or sustainable. This is outrageous.

Why does the Premier want to punish the average person? Over 84,000 Manitobans are out of work or underemployed. The government can't directly do much more—do much about many of the job losses but it can support public sector jobs. It makes no sense to take from Hydro workers to re-allocate for COVID response or recovery. This will just hurt people and our chances for a speedy recovery. The provincial government is doing some of the right things, such as investing in subsidies and programs to fill gaps left by federal benefits, but these efforts are reversed by the Premier's austerity programs cut to community groups and outright attacks on the public sector.

* (16:40)

Hydro is deemed an essential service and we are all relying on our public energy to get through this pandemic. Many people who have been able to keep working are doing so from home and need reliable, affordable energy. Businesses and industries that have stayed open or are slowly reopening are relying on Hydro to be there when they need it.

Hydro should not have to wait one more minute trying to deliver these ill-conceived job cuts. Hydro has gone through a lot under this government, so much that many people are wondering if the government values are safe, reliable, affordable public energy at all.

I have these additional reasons for opposing job cuts at Hydro. Manitoba Hydro work has not diminished. It is always increasing. Hydro continues to hire contractors, claiming it has insufficient human resources to accomplish the work that it needs to do. Unlike other businesses, everyone has been doing work, has been working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other layoffs came as a result of decreased business. The way to fight off unemployment in other sectors is not to add to the unemployment rolls by laying off fully employed workers at a successful corporation. Economics—'economimics'—economics from all over have noted that Manitoba's economy is in a precarious position and needs to be bolstered, not fully hampered—further hampered. An additional 700 unemployed will further reduce spending, reinvestment in the economy while taking away

resources from those who are truly in need, though—or through no fault of their own.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has yet to give any concrete supportable evidence that Manitoba Hydro has suffered decreased economic activity. If this is a true case, why will he not substantiate his claims by providing irrefutable proof? His statement, and I quote: I think reality is Hydro provides many services to the public sector that it does not to provide to such a degree right now because the private sector in Manitoba is dysfunctional. End of quote. Has not been corroborated by either Manitoba Hydro or the government.

Manitoba Hydro reduced its staffing levels by 18 per cent in 2017. By its own admission—this is Bruce Owen's quote, who's a Hydro spokesperson—and he stated on May 1st, 2019, that the corporation believed, and I quote: That further staff reductions would significantly increase the risk of public and employee safety, of system reliability and, as well, as our ability to provide reasonable levels of service to our customers.

Today, one year later, the same utility that's managed to keep pace with just the 'mimum' number of employees is suddenly capable of reducing its staff complement by another 11 per cent? Taking Hydro at its word, it will be impossible to maintain safety, reliability and service to Manitobans. Please let me know what you are doing to stop job cuts at Hydro and of other public entities.

Yours truly, Jennifer Lidgett.

And I'm going to table this.

So, again, another Manitoban who is not supportive of this government cutting services to Manitobans, services that Manitobans need. If there's another snowstorm, if there's another natural disaster where we need Hydro workers to come out, where are these Hydro workers going to come from?

So I implore this government to support this opposition motion and call a hearing into the proposed \$87 million in cuts to Manitoba Hydro.

Miigwech.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I'm grateful for the opportunity today to rise in the House and put some words on the record in regards to the opposition day motion brought forward by the representative for Fort Rouge.

I'm just going to read, again, the opposition day motion, Madam Speaker. We're getting toward the end of speaking to this matter, and so I just want to recap the motion in full.

So it reads: That pursuant to section 27(1) of The Public Utilities Board Act, the Legislative Assembly requests that the Public Utilities Board immediately hold an extraordinary hearing into the proposed \$86 million in cuts for Manitoba Hydro's operations and workforce, including up to 700 layoffs that have been directed by the provincial government, and request the provincial government's directive be suspended until the PUB's hearing has taken place.

Madam Speaker, I think when we talk about the realities of these proposed cuts and the importance of transparency surrounding these cuts and the opportunity for folks to have their voices heard on this issue, and for the government to be as transparent as they should be to all Manitobans in regards to this, it's critical that we talk about the impact, the real impact, and the lived experience of Manitobans who are facing these cuts.

The—Manitobans count on the government to provide jobs, and during an unprecedented global pandemic now, more than ever, Manitobans count on this government to ensure that their jobs are secure and that during unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety, 'precarity' and unsuredness, that this government provides stable and secure reassurance in terms of people's abilities to provide for themselves and their families and, in many cases, Madam Speaker, their communities.

Madam Speaker, I think it's really important that when we talk about the specific \$86 million proposed in cuts for Manitoba Hydro and—that would result in up to 700 layoffs, we also talk about the impact that this has, as I've already said, on a human level. But the way that it's been essentially packaged by this government, we're talking about a government and a caucus on the other side of the House that has intentionally contributed to the psychological and emotional distress of Manitobans.

We're talking about a Premier (Mr. Pallister) and a government that would intentionally announce and threaten outrageous numbers of job cuts, percentages cut from institutions, from Hydro, from organizations, threaten to claw back dollars and cut funding during a global pandemic, Madam Speaker, and intentionally contribute to the distress of folks who are already experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and distress.

And so I don't think that we can separate the—this type of announcement from the intentional way this kind of news is delivered and the lack of transparency surrounding these announcements and the way that these announcements have been delivered, Madam Speaker.

It is, to be quite honest, Madam Speaker, it's—I find it insulting. And I've heard from constituents in Union Station and from Manitobans broadly, how insulting it is that the Premier would celebrate in this House and throw around numbers that we don't even have clear information around—2 per cent only in cuts, under 3 per cent from some agency or some entity that's providing this information that we don't have any clarity around, that nobody other than the Premier seems to have clarity around—that he would celebrate and brag about those numbers after intentionally throwing out numbers that threw so many Manitobans and so many organizations into complete and utter chaos and fear and levels of anxiety that, for many, many folks that I've heard from, were simply not manageable, that when you're trying to provide for yourself, for your family, for your communities, when you're trying to, for those folks who have been able to maintain employment as essential service workers and front-line providers, that when they're simply trying to do their jobs and get from point A to point B safely and as healthy as possible and protect themselves and their families, that also having to endure what can only be described as, you know, psychological gameplay by this Premier and this government in—all in the name of being able to celebrate numbers in terms of job cuts and in terms of cuts to services is simply unconscionable.

* (16:50)

And I think it's really important that we identify that for what it is exactly, and that—I, you know, I personally recognize that this ask of us that the government provide some transparency, I have very little faith given this government's track record that that will happen. But this motion seeks to do just that, Madam Speaker, and I encourage members opposite to get on board and pass this motion.

Thank you.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I just want to put a couple of words on the record. I listened very carefully while the minister was speaking, and it seems that every time one of the members of—opposite speaks, it's a different story.

The Premier said that while this has got to have these cuts because he's going to redirect the money to health care. When that was proven multiple times to not be possible, now the minister comes up with a different story. And I just want to really reiterate what my colleague from Thompson said, that this—these cuts can have devastating effects on the North. We've seen already, a year or so ago, leaf—or Lynn Lake, the power was off. Their lone technician was away—in South Indian Lake, I believe it was at the time—out of communication because, I'm sure you've heard me say, there's no cell phones in the North, so it extended the period.

Now imagine, if you will, that that lone person is not available anymore. A year—two years ago, I guess, I wrote a letter about Snow Lake, because they heard a rumour that their lone technician was going to be cut. And the minister at the time wrote back and said not this year. So really, all along, these cuts to the Hydro workforce have been this Premier and this government's mandate, to devastate what's going on with the workforce at Hydro and ultimately contract it out and ultimately privatize it.

We see pole inspections going on now that could be done by Hydro workers, but that's contracted out to somebody else. So, Madam Speaker, we're on to what this government is about. They're trying to hide under the blanket of COVID. They're trying to limit our ability to question them on it by refusing to meet more than one day a month—or, one day of the week, I'm sorry.

So we know that everything that they've said about these cuts, it all rolls around and slowly comes out that what they've said is not correct. Really and truly, if the members opposite wanted to be making a significant cut, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) should layoff all of his MLAs because they won't stand up and speak for their constituents. They won't stand up and speak for Manitobans. So there's a good place the Premier could cut right there.

We're doing our job standing up and speaking. So, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I want to say we should all stand today and support the Leader of the Official Opposition's (Mr. Kinew) motion. And let's get things back on the go here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further members wishing to speak in debate?

Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is the opposition day motion in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Do members wish to have the members read?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: I heard a yes, so I will read it.

THAT, pursuant to section 27(1) of The Public Utilities Board Act, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba requests that the Public Utilities Board immediately hold an extraordinary hearing into the proposed \$86 million in cuts from Manitoba Hydro's operations and workforce, including up to 700 layoffs, that have been directed by the provincial government, and further requests the provincial government's directive be suspended until the PUB's hearing has taken place.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Madam Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Madam Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): A recorded vote, please.

Madam Speaker: A recorded vote having been called, call in the members.

The question before the House is the opposition day motion.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Adams, Fontaine, Kinew, Lamont, Sala, Smith (Point Douglas), Wiebe.

Nays

Cullen, Ewasko, Isleifson, Johnson, Martin, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Nesbitt, Pivniuk, Reyes, Teitsma, Wharton.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 7, Nays 12.

Madam Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, could you canvass the House, please, and see if there's leave to call it 5 o'clock?

Madam Speaker: Is there a will of the House to call it 5 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on May 27th.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

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