



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 26, 2026

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: And just before we get started, there are some guests in the gallery that I'd like to introduce. Draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Darcy Furber; Pam Furber; June Furber, Darcy's mom; Ron Oliver; Fran Oliver; Joe Furber; Emma Bradley. And they're guests of the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott).

And on behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 54—The Smoking and Vapour Products Control Amendment Act

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), that Bill 54, The Smoking and Vapour Products Control Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 54, The Smoking and Vapour Products Control Amendment Act. This bill is intended to create restrictions on the flavour—on the sale, rather, of flavoured vapour products that are appealing to children and are often a gateway to tobacco use. Proposed amendments will limit access to flavoured vapour products other than tobacco to age-restricted retailers in major urban areas prescribed in regulation.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Manitoba Chambers of Commerce

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation): Honourable Speaker, today I rise to recognize Small Business Month and celebrate the important chambers of commerce representing Manitoba's multicultural and multilingual business sectors.

Manitoba is truly fortunate to be home to a vibrant and diverse network of chambers that reflect the richness of our communities. These organizations bring together entrepreneurs, business leaders and professionals from a wide range of cultural and linguistic 'backgrounds', creating spaces where ideas can be shared, partnerships can be built and opportunities can grow. Their work not only strengthens individual businesses but also contributes to the broader social and economic fabric of our province.

These chambers play a critical role in supporting economic development in minority and under-represented communities. They help break down barriers, both visible and invisible, foster mentorship and connections and create meaningful pathways to success, driving innovation, supporting entrepreneurship and contributing to the creation of good, sustainable jobs across our province. Their impact extends far beyond business; it is felt in stronger, more connected communities and in more inclusive economy for all Manitobans.

Importantly, these organizations also serve as advocates. They ensure that the voices of their members are heard in conversations about economic policy and development. They bring forward unique perspectives and lived experiences that help shape a more equitable and more responsive approach to growth. By doing so, they help to ensure that Manitoba's economy works for everyone and that no community is left behind.

Today, we are proud to welcome some of these outstanding organizations in the Chamber with us. We would like to recognize the Black Manitoba chamber of commerce, which champions Black-owned businesses and promotes economic empowerment within the Black community.

I also want to acknowledge the Manitoba Queer Chamber of Commerce, which supports 2SLGBTQ+ entrepreneurs and fosters inclusive economic participation.

The Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce plays an important role in strengthening business ties and supporting entrepreneurs while advancing trade and investment opportunities.

The Punjabi Chamber of Commerce continues to play a key role in connecting and supporting Manitoba's Punjabi business community, while La Chambre de commerce francophone de Saint-Boniface strengthens and promotes francophonie economic development in Winnipeg.

Each of these chambers represents a wealth of talent, resilience and ambition. Their leadership and dedication are helping to build a more inclusive, dynamic and prosperous Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, as our business community looks to the future, realizing diversity as our strength happens by working alongside these chambers. So together we are investing in a stronger economy and building one Manitoba.

I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing all organizations that support small business during Small Business Month and throughout the year, including the invaluable contributions of cultural chambers of commerce, and in thanking them for the work they do every day to make Manitoba a better place to live, work and grow.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in response to the minister's statement recognizing the important role chambers of commerce play in communities across Manitoba.

From the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce to the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and the many local chambers serving communities across our province, including the many cultural chambers we have with us in the gallery today, these organizations have long been a powerful voice for local businesses, entrepreneurs, workers and economic growth.

I especially want to recognize the new Piney Regional Chamber of Commerce, which represents communities, businesses and farmers in the southeast corner of Manitoba. Organizations like this help ensure rural Manitoba has a strong voice advocating

for infrastructure, investment and opportunities that allow communities to grow and succeed.

Honourable Speaker, this topic is also personal to me. I grew up attending chamber meetings with my grandparents and later with my parents. I remember travelling to this Legislature as a young person and watching local business leaders advocate directly to ministers for infrastructure projects and economic development opportunities that would ultimately help shape the future of our region.

What chambers of commerce contribute often goes far beyond what people see publicly. They bring people together. They organize communities around common goals. They create partnerships between businesses, municipalities, volunteers and governments. And through that collaborative voice, they help deliver real results that strengthen Manitoba's economy and communities for generations to come.

At a time when Manitoba faces economic challenges and increasing competition from other provinces and jurisdictions, organizations that advocate for business confidence, investment and economic opportunity are more important than ever.

At a time when we see Manitoba's economy struggling to grow under the increasing regulatory and tax burdens of this government, chambers are picking up the slack and championing economic growth in our communities.

I want to thank the volunteers, board members, staff and local business leaders across Manitoba who dedicate their time to chambers of commerce, and continue to work to build stronger communities and a stronger province.

Thank you.

* (13:40)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Knights of Rizal Winnipeg Chapter

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Honourable Speaker, I rise to recognize the Knights of Rizal Winnipeg Chapter as they mark an important milestone in 2026: the 75th anniversary of Republic Act 646 and the 35th anniversary of the Winnipeg chapter.

In Spanish, they are called Orden de Caballeros de Rizal. In Filipino, they are called Mga Maginoo ni Rizal. Maginoo [*gentleman*] in Filipino means someone who is honourable, respectful and displays chivalry.

The Knights of Rizal are an internationally recognized order founded to honour the life and ideals of Dr. Jose Rizal, the national hero of the Philippines. At only 35 years old, Rizal was executed by firing squad in 1896. But in his brief and extraordinary life, Rizal inspired people to rise up together and become a nation.

He travelled and studied in Europe and Asia. He was an ophthalmologist, social worker, farmer, social entrepreneur, public works engineer, town planner, school founder, scientist, novelist, poet. His writing and death ultimately inspired Filipinos to fight for independence from hundreds of years of colonial rule. And Rizal's writing is foundational to the country's heritage and inspires many to this day.

For 75 years, the Knights' organization worldwide has promoted education and community leadership. And here in Winnipeg, the Knights are community pillars. Together with the indomitable Ladies of Rizal, the Winnipeg chapter has brought community together through charitable work, youth mentorship and cultural events.

One of their cherished traditions is the annual Rizal Youth Recognition Awards, which has celebrated young leaders in our community since the late 1990s.

The Knights also share Filipino heritage in Manitoba, including through the installation of the Dr. Jose Rizal statue and Rizal park in Winnipeg. This monument stands as a lasting reminder of the importance of education and civic responsibility.

I want to recognize the many members, past and present, whose dedication has strengthened both the Filipino community and the city of Winnipeg as a whole.

To the Knights of Rizal Winnipeg Chapter and the Ladies of Rizal, thank you for 35 years of leadership, commitment to building community and uplifting future generations.

I ask that my guests' names be included in Hansard.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mohammed Alli, Linda Alli, Jess Carlos, Arthur Domingo, John Gano, Aldrin Gragera, Kenn Green, Evelyn Green, Julie Javier, Clarita Nazario, Bernardo Pasco, Dolores Refvik, Vivian Santos, Ray Sator, Ronald Mervin Sison, Akio Utsunomiya.

Eddy De Sousa

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate the remarkable career of Eddy De Sousa, who will be retiring this September after more than four decades of dedicated service to the people of Manitoba. I really thank Eddy for being able to get on his coffee break to join us today for this private member's statement, and I thank his employer for doing so. Also, he's joined today by his three daughters and his four grandchildren, and I see some colleagues up there as well. Welcome.

Eddy began his career with the provincial government in 1983 at the Woodsworth Building. From there, he continued his work at the archives building before eventually becoming a familiar and trusted presence here at the Legislative Building. Over the years, Eddy has played an essential role in maintaining the spaces where democracy unfolds, ensuring that his historic institution continues to serve Manitobans with dignity and care.

Eddy and I first met after the 2016 election. We all can appreciate that when a government changes and new members are elected, there's a lot to do. Eddy would jump into action, working with all members to settle into their new offices. No job was too big or too small for Eddy. Whether it was moving furniture around the building, to hanging pictures to perfection, the words, no; or, I cannot do that were not in Eddy's vocabulary.

Beyond his work, Eddy is known for proudly cheering for both the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Winnipeg Jets, but we know he really has a heart for the Toronto Maple Leafs. More importantly, he is a devoted family man and is looking forward to spending more time with his grandchildren during retirement.

Honourable Speaker, on behalf of all members of this House, I extend our sincere gratitude to Eddy De Sousa for the—for his years of hard work, commitment and quiet dedication. We wish him a long, happy and well-deserved retirement.

And I also ask for his family members to be entered into Hansard.

Thank you. Please join me in thanking Eddy.

Angela De Sousa, Jenny De Sousa, Julia De Sousa, Maddak De Sousa Pineda, Theo De Sousa Pineda, Banks Rondeau, Kinsley Rondeau.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Order, please.

Just before the next speaker, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us Jenny De Sousa, Angela De Sousa, Theo De Sousa Pineda, Maddak De Sousa Pineda, Julia De Sousa, Kinsley Rondeau, Banks Rondeau, and, of course, the popular Eddy De Sousa. We welcome you here today, and they're guests of the honourable member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

And we do welcome you all here today.

Catholic Women's League Annual Convention

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, I rise to celebrate the 2026 Manitoba provincial Catholic women's league annual convention which will take place in Fort Richmond in June at Mary, Mother of the Church.

This annual gathering creates sacred spaces where people come together in mutual support and understanding. Importantly, the gathering showcases the profound dedication of the women who serve Fort Richmond with joyous hearts.

The Catholic women's league calls its members to witness the love of God through active service and social justice. Their host parish, Mary, Mother of the Church, began in 1979 and now serves over 2,000 diverse families, acting as a true anchor for our community.

The Catholic women's league stands as a living testament to the power of grace in action, helping others to rise with renewed strength and clarity of heart. They guide countless individuals towards a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. They offer not only practical assistance, but also spiritual and emotional refuge, reminding us that no burden need be carried alone.

This spirit was on full display when I joined them for their moving Red Sand Project service. Together, we placed red sand into the pavement cracks as a reminder that we must never allow the marginalized victims of human trafficking to fall through the cracks of society.

As they gather to break bread and strengthen their bonds this spring, I am reminded of Psalm 133:1: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity.

I ask my colleagues to join me, thanking the Catholic women's league for their unwavering dedication, leadership and radiant service to Manitoba. And I ask my guests' names be entered in Hansard.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Julie Fernando, Bernadette Ferreira, Doris Ibhawa, Father Jean-Baptiste Nguyen, Maria Poworoznik, Kim Ranson, Deborah Woodbeck.

Brady Oliveira and Alex Blumberg

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I rise today to recognize two outstanding residents of the Roblin constituency whose unwavering compassion and selflessness have made a profound impact in our province and the lives of thousands of vulnerable animals: Winnipeg Blue Bombers running back Brady Oliveira and his partner, realtor and rescue advocate Alex Blumberg.

I had the distinct pleasure of meeting this inspiring couple at the Winnipeg Pet Rescue gala last fall. It was during our conversation there that I learned they were constituents of mine in Roblin, and I can truly attest to what lovely, down-to-earth people they are.

While many in our community know Brady for his power on the football field as a CFL All-Star, especially now as he works hard in training camp for the upcoming season, he and Alex are equally well known as a local power couple for animal welfare. For nearly two decades, Alex has dedicated her life to rescue work, volunteering globally and utilizing her platform to champion the voiceless.

Brady joined this mission in 2020 after a life-changing moment rescuing his own dog, Nellie. Later that same year, Brady even made local headlines by pulling a woman and her dog from the dangerous currents of the Red River at Maple Grove Park.

From wading through freezing floodwaters to save animals in flooded Manitoba communities to spending their winters organizing mass sterilization and vaccination clinics in remote villages abroad, Brady and Alex have consistently put themselves on the front lines of animal rescue.

Their tireless, hands-on work balancing a high-stakes football season and a demanding real estate career while managing a revolving door of foster animals in their own home is the subject of the new original series, *Must Love Dogs*. The docuseries shines a vital spotlight on the harsh realities, heart-break and beautiful triumphs of Manitoba's animal rescue community.

* (13:50)

Brady and Alex have shown that true community leadership extends far beyond professional accolades. Their relentless dedication reminds us of the profound impact that compassion and hands-on service can have in our province.

I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing Roblin's own Brady Oliveira and Alex Blumberg for their extraordinary advocacy, leadership and their unwavering commitment to protecting vulnerable animals.

Darcy Furber

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to recognize Darcy Furber, an incredible Kildonan-River East resident.

I ask for the names of my guests to be entered into Hansard.

I first heard about Darcy in a local community group forum, where another neighbour shared a post highlighting his incredible accomplishments on and off the golf course.

Darcy lives with retinitis pigmentosa, an incurable eye disorder.

Darcy began golfing at a young age, earning municipal and provincial titles before receiving a golf scholarship at—the University of Southern Mississippi. There he competed on their NCAA Division I golf team.

After returning home to Winnipeg, his vision progressively declined until he lost his sight completely, eventually no longer able to play. Darcy's brother, who also joins us in the gallery today, encouraged him to return to golf after 15 years away from the game.

Honourable Speaker, after his comeback, there was no stopping Darcy. He is now an eight-time Manitoba Blind Golf champion—[*interjection*] There's more: a four-time Canadian Blind Golf champion and a World Blind Golf champion. [*interjection*] It's—this is a true story.

In 2025 alone, he won the Manitoban, Western Canadian, Canadian and World Blind Golf championships. Let that sink in, Honourable Speaker: Manitoba, Canada and world champion all in the same year.

Recently, Darcy was named the recipient of the Honouring Excellence, Achievement and Recognizing Togetherness award, otherwise known as HEART, from Manitoba's accessible sport community, and he was also recognized as Sport Manitoba Athlete of the Year.

In 2024, he was inducted into the Manitoba Golf Hall of Fame for his collective accomplishments.

Honourable Speaker, Darcy's story reminds us all that life might throw us curve balls or golf balls, in this case, but talent and passion can never be diminished.

Please join me in celebrating him.

Emma Bradley, Darcy Furber, Joe Furber, June Furber, Pam Furber, Fran Oliver, Ron Oliver.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to moving on, there's some more guests in the gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery from Parkland school 11 grade 9 students under the direction of Travis Friesen, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

We welcome you here today.

Also seated in the public gallery, we have with us Kim Ranson, Doris Ibhawa, Deborah Wooddeck [*phonetic*], Bernadette Ferreira, Maria Poworoznik, Julie Fernando, Father Jean-Baptiste Nuygen [*phonetic*], who are guests of the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen).

And we welcome you here today.

* * *

The Speaker: And then more sad news. Unfortunately, another page is working her last shift today.

We have Sehajveer Kaur Sidhu, who will be graduating from Maples Collegiate this June. Throughout her high school experience, she has excelled in both athletics and academics while leading several initiatives in her school and community, advocating for fellow students through student leadership. She is student co-chair with Seven Oaks School Division board of superintendents and trustees, where she has further projected student voice, ideas and initiatives.

Through a student advocacy club at her high school, she advocated for accessible menstrual products within her school community, a project that has spanned over six months of surveys, awareness and logistics, and was awarded the community hero award by the Winnipeg Police Service.

In addition, as president of the Maples Collegiate Sikh Heritage Committee for the past several years, she has made significant contributions as a young

student in educating and fostering understanding during Sikh Heritage Month through events such as art displays, elementary and middle school workshops and other community initiatives.

As she closes this crucial chapter of her life and graduates this June, she hopes to carry her passion for public service and leadership into pursuing law in the United Kingdom at the University of Leicester. She will be taking a three-year leave from her current role as a serving member of the Canadian Armed Forces for the duration of her education. She hopes to obtain her Bachelor of Laws and then return to Canada to serve as a lawyer and become an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces.

As she prepares for this new chapter in her life, she is also deeply grateful for the experience she has gained as a page at the Legislature.

One of her favourite moments in the Chamber was arriving for a shift and seeing Indigenous artifacts and art pieces permanently displayed. For her, it was a deeply significant moment, one she will always carry close to her heart. As a Sikh, and as someone whose ancestors experienced the loss of their homeland, the Sikh Empire, during colonization, she has grown up with an awareness of historical loss and its lasting impact. That understanding has also been shaped by the ongoing pain within the Sikh community, particularly from events such as the 1984 in India, where justice has yet to be fully realized. Because of this, she feels a profound connection to the experiences of Indigenous peoples of Canada, whose communities have endured generations of systemic harm, the violation of fundamental human rights and policies that have been recognized as acts of cultural genocide.

She believes it is of the utmost importance that the contributions, history and culture of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island are acknowledged, recognized and respected, and that meaningful reconciliation continues to be pursued with honesty and accountability, as this is their land. Seeing these histories and hardships being recognized within the Chamber is deeply meaningful to her; it serves as a reminder that truth can be acknowledged, and that justice, even if it is delayed, is possible. It inspires her with the hope that one day her own community will also receive the recognition and justice it continues to seek.

As a serving member of the Crown, her aim is to embody the Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve, while striving to bring oneness and unity wherever

she goes, grounded in remembrance of the past and a daily commitment to truth and reconciliation.

She would also like to express a heartfelt thank-you to many MLAs present in the Chamber today, who have been inspiring role models since she was 13 years old. They encouraged her to step into youth leadership, advocacy and government. When she first entered this Chamber three years ago to perform at the first Turban Day at the Manitoba Legislature, she imagined what it would be like to work within these walls. Today, she stands here with gratitude, still amazed that she is living that reality.

She would like to thank Rob and Dave for giving her this opportunity and being exceptional mentors and leaders throughout her time as page.

She will always carry this Chamber with her, along with all that she has learned here. She understands the impact of legislation can have on individuals' lives and hopes to uphold and protect the rights of all people. She hopes that in the future, she will make meaningful contributions to society while having a positive impact on others' lives. She prays that God will always guide her and everyone present in this Chamber to serve, and she prays that this sacred Chamber continues to be blessed with prosperity.

And we wish you all the best in your future.

And I would be remiss if I didn't recognize that her parents have joined us in the public gallery. We welcome you here today, and—

* (14:00)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Basic Personal Income Tax Rate Call for Exemption Increase

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Everyone has now seen the true colours of this Premier (Mr. Kinew). He is not a serious Premier, and he's all about picking winners and losers: unions versus non-unions, big grocery store chains versus local restaurants, sending millions of dollars to Trump versus supporting local, opening a drug consumption 'fite' versus opening a recovery and 'addictions' treatment site.

On this side of the House, we are serious and we are ready to work with the NDP to help all Manitobans. Instead of helping all Manitobans, the Premier wants to make personal attacks, laugh and bark.

Why will this Kinew government not listen to our call to increase your basic personal exemption to \$30,000, giving your family back up to \$3,000 a year?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): Honourable Speaker, I don't know about you but I am feeling so hopeful about Manitoba's future.

Sehajveer, congratulations on everything you've accomplished in your young age; we wish you all the best on your journey. You are going to continue to make a huge impact no matter where you go and I just want to say congratulations to your family. My goodness, you must be so, so proud. Thank you for raising the next generation of leadership in Manitoba in such a beautiful way. Congratulations.

Honourable Speaker, you know, we've put together why it is the PCs have been getting in the way of passing BITSA, and it's something that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has raised recently. It's the fact that they don't want to close the bare trust loophole. That's a loophole that benefits the PCs after selling their headquarters to what should be the Leader of the Opposition.

So, Honourable Speaker, are they going to get onside with—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on a supplementary question.

Passage of BITSA Legislation Late-Night Legislative Sitting

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Wow. What a terrible answer. I'm asking this Premier about raising the basic personal exemption, and they have nothing to say about that. This is not a serious government. A premier that laughs and barks in this Chamber is not serious.

On top of not being serious, he's not even listening to you. We've heard from Manitoba Nurses Union, Manitoba Teachers' Society, association of Allied Healthcare Professionals, Manitoba Heavy Construction Association and many other associations that this Kinew government is not listening. Not only do the NDP not want to listen to you, the NDP don't even want to work. The NDP voted against passing their own budget bill last night because they would have to work late into the night.

Why is the NDP so afraid of hard work, so much so that they refuse to sit late—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —to vote on their own budget bill?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): Honourable Speaker, nobody believes the Leader of the Opposition, and you want to know why? Because on this side of the House we're focused on making life more affordable for Manitobans. On that side of the House there is a leader who got a \$500,000 cheque to be a candidate for the PCs while Manitobans were struggling, Manitoba businesses were struggling.

Honourable Speaker, that's their record. They have a former premier who forgot about \$31 million, just forgot that she had \$31 million to claim. We're focused on passing a law that's going to make life more affordable, take the PST off all groceries. They're getting in the way of that because that same law is going to close a loophole that benefits the sale of their PC headquarters. They need to get onside with Manitobans, get onside with affordability and pass BITSA today.

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

Basic Personal Income Tax Rate Call for Exemption Increase

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): There you have it. There's the proof: more personal attacks, nothing about working together, nothing about listening to Manitobans. It's an absolute shame.

And the facts don't lie. The Premier is offering you pennies, where we, on this side of the House, are offering you thousands of dollars back of your hard-earned money.

When the time came to debate this last night, to vote on it, to sit late into the evening, what did the NDP say? No. They did not want to work late into the evening to make your life more affordable. The NDP don't even believe in their own budget. Why should Manitobans?

Will the Premier admit yesterday that he was wrong? Will he agree to work with—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —our PC caucus? Will he finally listen to Manitobans to make life more affordable—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —by supporting our call for an increase to your basic personal exemption so you and your family can get back \$3,000 of your hard-earned money?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): Honourable Speaker, you've just heard the Leader of the Opposition accidentally say what Manitobans and this side of the House already know: BITSA makes life more affordable for Manitobans.

So why are they playing games? Why is the Leader of the Opposition playing games?

Honourable Speaker, he's playing games because they sold the PC headquarters to the person who's actually supposed to be the leader of the opposition in the PC Party and that this BITSA bill closes the bare trust loophole. That money that they want to get on the backs of Manitobans—that's unacceptable. BITSA closes that loophole, makes life more affordable for Manitobans, takes the PST off groceries.

They need to get out of the way, stop putting their interests ahead of Manitobans' and support BITSA today.

The Speaker: Order, please.

If I could get the clock stopped.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have some guests in the gallery who have to leave before we're done here. So we have seated in the public gallery 22 guests from Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure under the direction of railway crossing safety technologist Melanie Spencer. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

We welcome you all here today.

* * *

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

Nurse Practitioners—Billing for Services Concern for Health Transfer Payments to Manitoba

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Health-care experts have been sounding the alarms for months, but this Kinew government refuses to listen. Manitobans are waiting longer than ever for surgeries and procedures. Manitobans are waiting longer than ever in ER departments. Wait times today at St. Boniface were 14 hours; Grace, 10 hours and the Health Sciences Centre, over nine hours. Front-line workers are being assaulted at work and afraid to go to work. For the first time in the history of this province, three hospitals are greylisted under any government.

And now we have learned that because this Kinew government has refused to properly work with nurse practitioners, some Manitobans are actually being billed for health-care services that should be publicly covered under the Canada Health Act.

This issue was raised over a month ago, and yet there's been no action from this Premier (Mr. Kinew) or Health Minister. The federal government has mandatory mechanisms for violations of the Canada Health Act, meaning that this Kinew government will forgo health transfer payments.

Why is the Premier—

The Speaker: Honourable member's time is expired.

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, you know, our government was the only government in many years to actually sit down and meet with nurse practitioners in this building. I met with nurse practitioners very early on after becoming the Health Minister, and they made that really clear. Subsequent failed Health ministers under the PCs didn't bother to meet with them ever.

And the Leader of the Opposition was around the Cabinet table when Manitoba was fined for violating the Canada Health Act. It is our government that got those dollars, 350,000 of them, returned to our province for supporting public health care.

We believe in public health care. We're going to protect the Canada Health Act. We're going to make health care better for all Manitobans and fix the damage that the PCs, including the leader, did to Manitobans' services.

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

Mr. Khan: The Health Minister can live in the past all they want. We're talking about right now. It's been over a month, and there's been no action by this NDP government or Health Minister.

Manitobans are tired of the smoke and mirrors by this NDP. When serious problems arise in health care, the government responds in the exact same way they are today: denying it, deflecting, living in the past and hope Manitobans stop paying attention.

The issue surrounding nurse practitioners has now been public for over a month, yet this government has done nothing. That's not leadership; that's negligence.

The federal government has clear, mandatory provisions under the health-care act, and this NDP government is recklessly putting Manitobans' health transfer payments at risk.

Why is this government so obsessed with optics and political theatre instead of delivering real results for Manitoban patients and health-care workers?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, political theatre and optics—that's what the Leader of the Opposition is all about.

This is a leader who has gotten in the way of passing BITSA in this House to make life more affordable for Manitobans. This is a Leader of the Opposition who wants to protect the funds that are the sale of the PC headquarters and not allow this bill to close the bare trust loophole. That is why the Leader of the Opposition and the PCs have not gotten onside and supported BITSA.

We care about Manitobans. We're investing in fixing health care. We're investing in the front lines. And we're always going to protect the Canada Health Act. Why don't they get on the side of Manitobans, support BITSA today and let us do the work of fixing the mess they made to health care?

*(14:10)

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

Health-Care System Government Management Record

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): It's really a shame: yet more personal attacks now from the Health Minister. I'm asking serious questions about health care.

Will the Minister of Health stop with the games, stop with the personal attacks and answer the simple question? The biggest problem facing this Kinew government is that Manitobans no longer trust anything they have to say. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) and Health Minister claimed they hired 231 net new paramedics, but the union came out and released and said they actually have a net loss of 34 paramedics.

Now the same thing is happening in nursing. Nurses on the front lines and unions representing them say that the nurses are nowhere to be seen that this NDP failing government claims to have hired.

Manitobans don't need more spin. They don't need more exaggerated announcements. They need real results.

So I ask the Premier: Why won't his NDP government come clean about what is really happening on the front lines and admit what everyone knows, is that health care is worse under this NDP government?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, yes, of course, accountability would feel like a personal attack to the Leader of the Opposition, right? Of course, asking the Leader of the Opposition to be accountable to his decisions around the Cabinet table to cut health care, cut services and fire hundreds of nurses, of course, to the Leader of the Opposition that would feel like a personal attack.

On this side of the House, Honourable Speaker, we take the responsibility of fixing the damage they did to health care very seriously. We take very seriously the responsibility of making life more affordable for Manitobans. That's why we've been asking the opposition and the Opposition House Leader to get onside with Manitobans, pass BITSA so we can continue doing the work of making life more affordable and fixing the damage they did to health care. He needs to get onside with Manitobans, with our government, today.

Health-Care Wait Times Increase Concerns

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): One thing that Manitoba health-care workers and patients can all agree on is that this NDP government has fallen woefully short of every meaningless election promise they made, and not only have they broken their promises to Manitobans, they have allowed things to get so much worse under their watch.

ER wait times are at record highs. In fact, the new median wait time under this NDP government has doubled. It takes twice as long now to see a doctor in the ER under the NDP as it did under the previous PC government.

How much higher are ER wait times going to get under this minister's watch?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, I don't think Manitobans would call a commitment to search the 'landfull' a meaningless commitment. I don't think Manitobans would think it's meaningless to invest in women's health care instead of cutting and attacking it like the PCs did for seven and a half years. I don't think Manitobans would think that meaningless action is action to protect trans vulnerable youth in Manitoba.

Those are all promises that we made to Manitobans. Those are all commitments we're delivering on for Manitobans, and those are all commitments that the member for Roblin are calling meaningless to Manitobans.

I think Manitobans would wholeheartedly disagree with that member.

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

Mrs. Cook: I'll tell the minister what's meaningless: What's meaningless is promising to hire 200 paramedics and falling dismally short of that. It's promising to lower ER wait times and, instead, allowing them to double. It's promising to lower diagnostic wait times and, instead, allowing them to quadruple. In the last year alone, wait times for a CT scan at the Grace have more than quadrupled to 46 weeks today. The wait time for an ultrasound at St. B is now 35 weeks, almost quadruple what it was a year ago, and the wait time for an MRI at HSC has more than quadrupled to an astounding 53 weeks. That's just in the last year.

Why is it that the longer the NDP are in charge, the longer Manitobans have to wait to access diagnostic tests?

MLA Asagwara: Manitobans, do you think—or, Honourable Speaker, I don't think Manitobans believe it's meaningless that, under the PCs, we were the worst jurisdiction in all of Canada to be able to see a primary-care provider, a doctor. And now we are leading Canada in Manitobans being able to see a doctor. Nine out of 10 Manitobans can see a doctor in this province.

I don't think Manitobans believe that it's meaningless that we are reopening the ERs that were closed by the PC caucus when they were in government.

Honourable Speaker, I don't think Manitobans believe it's meaningless that we have over 4,000 net-new health-care workers, over 1,400 of them being nurses. And I don't think that Manitobans believe it's meaningless that over 7,000 hip and knee surgeries are being done—

The Speaker: Honourable member's time has expired.

Stop the clock, please. Stop the clock, please.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have some more guests in the gallery that have to leave right away.

We have, seated in the public gallery, 22 guests from Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, under the direction of Railway Crossing Safety Technologist Melanie Spencer. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Union Station.

And we welcome you all here today, too.

Nurse Vacancy Rates Parkland and Northern Manitoba

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): We know that the longer the NDP are in charge, the worse things get for health-care workers and patients alike. Nursing vacancies in the North and the Parkland have soared. There's a 73 per cent vacancy rate in Thompson, prompting a state of emergency from the Northern Health Region.

On top of dire staffing shortages in Dauphin and Swan River, last week this minister couldn't even answer when I ask them what the current vacancy levels are at those regional centres. If they claim to have hired so many health-care workers, why are vacancies in the North and in Prairie Mountain at crisis levels?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans know that the government they can trust to invest in their health care and make it better is this NDP government. They know that. They know that if you want to see cuts, chaos, closures and disrespect of health-care workers, just look to the PC caucus; just look to the member for Roblin, who was advising Heather Stefanson to fire nurses and cut services across health care.

Just look to the members opposite who represent rural Manitobans but allowed for a PC government to cut rural health-care services for seven and a half years. Their record on health care is shameful, and we are doing the work of fixing the damage that they did. But I will take no lessons from a member on that side of the House who was advising—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —Heather Stefanson to treat nurses, doctors and health-care workers with the utmost contempt and disrespect.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Portage Regional Health Centre Request for MRI Services

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): With the new Portage hospital that was built on time by our PC government and now delayed opening by this NDP government, we have been bringing forward petitions with thousands of signatures from all over Manitoba for more than two years, requesting MRI services at the new facility. Under this NDP watch, wait times for diagnostic services are at an all-time high and people in Manitoba are waiting months and months for appointments, if they can get them at all.

Why does this NDP Health Minister continue to punish by not putting an MRI in the new Portage regional health facility?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, I had the distinct pleasure and privilege of being in Portage la Prairie just last week to announce that for the first time ever in that community's history, they are going to have breast health services, including mammography care, right in Portage la Prairie, at the new hospital.

And Honourable Speaker, that step was taken in partnership: in partnership with the Portage hospital foundation, in partnership—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —with Mayor Knox, in partnership with advocates like the Pink Ladies—who are awesome, by the way.

Honourable Speaker, we work together to get things done for Manitobans, particularly Manitoba women. The member for Portage la Prairie would do himself a favour and just work with our government instead of being against all the good things happening in—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a supplementary question.

Diagnostic Services for Portage la Prairie Fundraising Contributions by Organizations

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Speaking of the issue of breast care, this would not—have never come up by the NDP government until our MLA for Roblin made it a priority to reduce the age of testing. Portage hospital foundation and the Pink Lady snowmobile club contributed three quarters of a million

dollars to make mammography services a reality in Portage la Prairie.

* (14:20)

My question is: Without this three-quarters-of-a-million-dollar contribution, would the new mammography services still be going ahead today?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Oh, my gosh, Honourable Speaker, what a telling question from the member for Portage la Prairie: Oh, no, the government's working too well with partners. Oh, no, God forbid the government work with community advocates.

Honourable Speaker, how embarrassing for the member for Portage la Prairie. He wants to give credit to his critic instead of giving credit to Jenny, who is a breast cancer survivor, who lives in the community of Portage la Prairie and works there; instead of giving credit to the Pink Ladies; instead of giving credit to the foundation; instead of giving credit to Dr. Nostedt, who was the advocate that I met with who brought forward the need for mammography—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —services.

We work with partners. We listen to women.

Shame on you.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

MLA Bereza: If this NDP government is willing to take three quarters of a million dollars from the great Portage hospital foundation for the much-needed mammography unit, does this mean that Manitobans can expect it will also take the generous gift of \$5 million that has been offered by the Portage foundation, which has been set aside for a new MRI in the Portage regional health facility to help reduce the out-of-control wait times for diagnostic services by this failed NDP government?

Will they take the—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, we work with our partners. We listen and work with experts. We work with community. We listen to women. We are investing in making sure that we have the health-care services at every corner of this province for now—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara:—and in the future.

Honourable Speaker, it's—the member's approach is an embarrassing one. It is one that is clearly rooted in what the approach is of his entire caucus, and that is division. For him to be opposed to us working with our partners, it's embarrassing and it's unbecoming.

We're going to continue to work with the foundation, with the experts, with all of our partners, to make sure that we are moving health care in a sustainable and an appropriate direction for all Manitobans.

I want to thank the experts in Manitoba who we're working with, and we're going to keep enhancing—

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

Just—[interjection]—order, please. Stop the clock.

In a previous answer, we need to always be cautious that we're directing our comments through the Chair. So I would just caution the honourable minister on that.

Health-Care Wait Times Increase Concerns

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Manitobans are waiting longer than ever under the NDP to get the care that they desperately need. Wait times for critical diagnostic tests have doubled, tripled and quadrupled since just last year. Health-care delays have caused the tragic deaths of six Manitobans and hospitals across rural Manitoba continue to be closed with little to no notice to residents. Manitoba is trending in the wrong direction when it comes to access to health care.

So why has health care gotten so much worse under this minister's watch?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, we recognize as a government, there's a lot of work to do to fix the damage the PCs did to health care, particularly in rural communities.

You know, the former government, including when the Leader of the Opposition, who continues to heckle me, was around the Cabinet table, they cut the rural physician recruitment and retention fund; millions of dollars dedicated to retaining and recruiting doctors to rural communities across Manitoba and northern communities. We've restored that fund, and we stood up capacity so that we can work directly with rural communities to recruit the health-care professionals that they desperately need.

Now, again, we know there's a lot more work to do. We're taking steps in the right direction, but we're going to keep at this work and stay committed because that's the leadership and the commitment that Manitobans deserve. They didn't have it for seven and a half years under the PCs.

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

Carman Memorial Hospital Timeline for Return of Surgical Services

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): If this minister believes they are taking the steps in the right direction, then Manitobans are going to be waiting longer and longer, because that is the trend that is happening under this NDP's watch.

Hospitals across rural Manitoba continue to be closed with little to no notice to residents. Southern Manitoba families are tired of being ignored by the NDP government. The Carman Memorial Hospital is frequently closed. Surgeries have been suspended indefinitely because of an ant infestation that happened in 2024, another shocking example of a health-care system that is falling apart.

So what is the NDP's plan for the Carman Memorial Hospital and what is the timeline for returned surgical access and surgical surgeries?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I welcome that question from the member opposite. I'm surprised it actually took her this long to ask the question. This has been in the Daily Mail, it's been in the New York Times. There've been a lot of people covering this ant issue. It's a serious problem that is being actively addressed. We've ensured that all Manitobans who need those surgeries are getting the surgeries that they need while this is being rectified.

I do want to let her know, this is actually an issue that predates our government, but we're taking the necessary steps with our partners to address it in a meaningful and very serious way, while also adding capacity to rural communities, including her own, to hire, train and retain the health-care workers of today and tomorrow.

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

Mrs. Stone: Unfortunately for my constituents, I have had to ask this question again because when I asked it last week, this minister did not give an answer.

So I'll ask the minister very clearly if they can provide the timelines for when surgical services will return to Carman Memorial Hospital.

MLA Asagwara: Yes, I want to reassure the member and her constituents and Manitobans that everyone is working as quickly as they possibly can to address this issue. It is an issue that unfortunately has reared its head before. It's a serious issue, quite frankly, Honourable Speaker. So that work is being done to ensure that this is addressed for the long term.

We're also making sure that folks can get their surgeries and the care they need still in a timely manner, appropriately. I want to thank Dr. Buchel, who's the province's lead for surgery, for working with our partners across the province to make sure people are getting care as quickly as possible, and for working with us to ensure that we're recruiting and retaining the surgeons and clinicians that we need to deliver this service across more rural communities.

Brandon Regional Health Centre Staff Vacancy Levels

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Last fall, under this NDP minister's watch, the Brandon Regional Health Centre was unable to provide surgical services for a 24-hour period. This didn't appear to alarm anyone on the NDP benches because Brandon is just a novel tour destination to travel to once or twice a year. To my constituents, though, my loved ones, my friends—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Balcaen:—and my neighbours, it's home. Last fall should have been the straw that broke the camel's back.

So why has the minister done nothing to address this staffing crisis at Brandon Regional Health Centre?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): The member's wrong. He would be welcome. It's easy. Send me an email. Give me a call. Ask about it. Happy to provide those answers. We have successfully recruited and retained doctors, nurses, health-care aides, allied health-care professionals, paramedics. In fact, we were just there recently announcing 32 training seats for paramedics. They're going to serve his community.

So we're fixing the damage that his caucus did to health care, including in rural Manitoba, including in

Brandon, and we're investing in making sure that we've got more capacity there moving forward.

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

Mr. Balcaen: The emails did get sent; they went completely unanswered by the NDP caucus. I've spoken with staff at the Brandon Regional Health Centre who give it their all each and every day. These rock stars aren't asking for praise or recognition or even more money. What they're asking for is a little bit of help. They're asking for coverage so they can rest and recover and reverse the burnout that they're already experiencing. The emergency department is in a crisis of their own right now with a 60 per cent vacancy rate with no relief in sight.

Why has this minister continually ignored the health-care needs of Manitobans' second largest city?

* (14:30)

MLA Asagwara: The member is just simply incorrect. We have a number of us—right?—our entire caucus, really, has spent time in Brandon, has spent time at the hospital. We've communicated with doctors.

Actually, I want to take this moment to thank the doctors and nurses at Brandon Regional Health Centre for their advice and their input in terms of what we can do with their regional health authority to better support them. Their suggestions have been put into action. As a result, we have more folks working on the front lines, and as a result, for the first time, we have medical doctors being trained in Brandon. We have medical doctors training in Brandon that are going to serve rural Manitoba and the Westman.

So we are going to do the work of listening to our partners and our friends in Brandon, making the investments for now and for the future—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Balcaen: The longer the NDP are in power, the worse things get for staff at the Brandon Regional Health Centre.

It has been seven months and no one from the NDP has made ERs or surgical capacity a priority here in Brandon. Unfortunately, staff are working short on every single shift caring for patients, but no one from this government is caring for that staff. ER doctors are

expected to take emergency room patients, take care of them, while still obligated to respond to the wards when a code is called, pulling double or even triple duty.

Why does the minister expect staff and patients at BRHC to bear the burdens of this minister's lack of accountability?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, in addition to the fact that we have medical residents who are training in Brandon for the first time ever in this province—it's about 20 of them, actually, who are training there now—we've got cross-trained lab technologists who are also training. We've dedicated rural seats for folks from Brandon so that they can train, get their education and go back and serve their communities.

Honourable Speaker, we're doing the work that should have been done for seven and a half years. We're recruiting doctors and training doctors in Brandon. We're recruiting and training health-care providers of all kinds in Brandon.

But we know there's much more work to do. The most serious threat to health care in Brandon and the Westman is every single member on that side of the House.

Budget Implementation Act Call for the Passage of Bill 53

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are clear. They're looking for relief at the grocery store. They're looking for relief on their property taxes. They're looking with help on the cost of living.

So I'm hoping the Finance Minister can tell us why the members opposite are doing everything in their power, day in and day out, bending over backwards, yapping away, preventing Manitobans from getting that relief.

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I want to thank my amazing colleague for the question. Manitobans know that if the members opposite actually cared about affordability, they would stop blocking BITSA and pass it today.

Pass the PST off groceries. Pass the \$1,700 Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit to help Manitobans with the cost of owning a home. Pass relief for renters and working families instead of blocking these savings with political games, Honourable Speaker.

The members opposite want Manitobans to forget what happened under their watch. Inflation hit record highs. Gas prices skyrocketed. And instead of lowering costs, they were busy finding new ways to hike hydro rates on Manitobans.

So why don't the members opposite get out of the way and let the government do what Manitobans elected us to do—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Association for Community Living Funding for Employment and Housing Supports

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Well, Honourable Speaker, yesterday this group, the government side, didn't want to work past 5 o'clock, so they denied leave, as usual.

So, Honourable Speaker, can the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) explain how Association for Community Living organizations are expected to do more with less under this Kinew government?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): The member for Lac du Bonnet knows that that's not accurate, and we've increased our budget to support those community groups.

What I will say is accurate, for the record, is that members opposite are getting up, day in and day out, to waste everybody's time and to delay Manitobans getting the affordability measures that we are putting in place for them, to help families, to help Manitobans, to help seniors—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Fontaine: —to help youth to be able to take youth—transit for free, to help the most low income get free child care.

That's what the members opposite are doing, day in and day out, while they're collecting their \$100,000 salary. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Ewasko: Association for Community Living organizations, who support our community members living with disabilities, are now being forced by this minister to sell their group homes, shut down supportive employment options and to stop taking new community members who require the support that they so desperately need, all due to the reduced

financial commitment by this minister and the Kinew government.

I'm asking the Minister of Families to stand up today, apologize to Association for Community Living organizations, clients and families.

MLA Fontaine: Again, tragically, the member for Lac du Bonnet is putting erroneous facts on—in the Chamber here today. We are supporting community organizations. We're supporting Manitoba families and Manitobans with disabilities at record levels. That is the fact that the member opposite does not want to put forward here.

But what's also a fact is that the Manitoba PCs don't care about Manitoba families. They don't care about individuals. They don't care about homeowners. They don't care about seniors. They don't care about renters. They don't care about the most low-income Manitobans that need free child care. They don't care about youth who have the opportunity to get free transit. They don't care about anybody but themselves.

And so—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, I have a constituent who is an adult who needs additional supports. He has benefited from working with supportive employment options.

Unfortunately, his parents have passed away, and now that organization is being told by this Minister of Families, the minister in charge of Accessibility, that the organization, which is there to support community, should not take any more clients.

Can the minister speak to that family and community watching today and tell them why?

MLA Fontaine: It's unfortunate that the member for Lac du Bonnet continues to put erroneous facts on the record.

The reality is—[*interjection*]

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Fontaine: —is that Budget 2026 includes more than \$18.6-million increased funding for Community Living disABILITY Services. That's the fact.

Now, I know that the member for Lac du Bonnet continues to get up. What—nobody knows why he's even still here. We're all waiting for him to acknowledge his

resignation and that he's not running again. But before he decides to not run again, I would suggest to him to talk to his colleagues and support BITSA today. Stop standing in the way—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Neepawa Health Centre Request for CT Scanner

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): The NDP can be critical of petitions, which is odd, because not only are these direct calls from—action for Manitobans, but we've seen, if we repeat a call to action enough, the NDP occasionally act.

Many Manitobans petitioned for 'mammocracies'—mammography services in Portage and, eventually, this minister caved and listened. Same when it came to lowering the breast cancer screening age, though Manitobans demand more.

Now Manitobans are petitioning for a CT scanner in the Neepawa hospital.

Why does this government refuse to listen to them?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, our government is doing the work of listening to Manitobans. I want to be really clear: we listen to Manitobans. We work with Manitoba experts and front-line providers.

I think it's strange that, on that side of the House, you see MLAs who want to give each other credit for the advocacy and the voices of Manitobans. That's the wrong focus. That's the wrong approach.

We sit down with Manitoba families. We sit down with front-line providers. We sit down with experts. And we jointly make decisions in how to strengthen and improve health care. That's the approach we're going to continue to take.

* (14:40)

That's not the approach we saw for seven and a half years, and we're fixing the damage that they caused as a result of that.

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

Ms. Byram: In Prairie Mountain Health, CT services are only provided in Brandon, Dauphin, Swan River, with week-long waits for needed diagnostic. This—the time is right to bring these needed—this needed access to our region.

It's an hour and a half to Dauphin and it's an hour to Brandon—only if there are good roads—and Swan River is over three hours away.

Why is the minister opposed to reasonable access to services for my constituents?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, our government is taking the approach that no matter where you live in Manitoba, you should have access to the services you need as close to home as possible. And that means that we have to work with our experts and our partners to stand up the human resource workforce that is needed to deliver those services.

That member can ask members in her own caucus why they didn't bother to plan for the human resource workforce of Manitoba for seven and a half years. And, in fact, they did the opposite. They fired health-care workers, they cut the services that Manitobans count on, and they fired the people that were necessary to develop those plans.

We are doing the work of making sure that we're training the right number of Manitobans for health care. We are training more Manitobans now for health-care jobs in this province than we ever have before—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

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

Ms. Byram: According to this government's own data, over 2,500 residents are waiting for a CT scan right now in my region, almost 24,000 in all of Manitoba. And, somehow, this minister argues a new CT scanner would not be used.

Yet this minister is refusing to listen to our residents, our local council, our local doctors who say the service would improve health care across the region.

No hospital in Winnipeg is without a CT scanner. Why does this minister have different services—standards for their constituents than my own?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I want to be really clear about something. The member opposite is asking about a hospital that was designed under the previous PC government. The member opposite, like the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza), stands up in this House and asks us repeatedly to please do the thing that we didn't do for seven and a half years when we had government, please do the

work that we refused to do for our own constituents—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —for seven and a half years.

And you know what, Honourable Speaker? We will. We will do the work you refused to do for seven and a half years. We will listen to health-care workers. We will listen to Manitobans. We will invest in health care because that's what Manitobans deserve and didn't have for seven and a half years under all of you.

Shame on you.

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

I would just once again remind members to make sure they're always directing their questions and answers through the Chair and not directly across to one another.

The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Programs for Adolescents with Disabilities

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): All right. Honourable Speaker—*[interjection]*—oh, thank you. Thank you.

Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) Children with disabilities often require child care beyond the age of 12. Children with disabilities aged 12 to 17 face a gap in publicly available care programs.

(2) The adolescent—the current adolescent-care service model creates undue hardship on caregivers.

(3) While developing children may be entering into extracurricular activities, school clubs or spending time with friends independently, children with disabilities have reduced opportunities for such social and recreational opportunities due to the lack of spaces.

(4) The current self-managed adolescent-care models place additional workloads onto already stressed families, requiring parents to seek all alternative options and prove their need for care.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

(5) The current adolescent-care system, as part of overall respite and support available to families, is failing families of children with disabilities, as identified in the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Bridging the Gaps report.

(6) To date, none of the nine recommendations it contains have been completed beyond 50 per cent.

(7) The recommendations in this report touch on many of the issues facing families, with adolescent care being but a small component of their overall needs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to fully implement recommendations in the Bridging the Gaps report.

(2) To urge the provincial government to immediately implement official policies and procedures that are more respectful and collaborative, which also minimize harm faced by families seeking help from children disability services; and

(3) To urge the Minister of Families to arrange for a full review of employment supports provided by Children's disABILITY Services for children with disabilities aged 12 to 17, including direct consultation with impacted families and to explore a full spectrum of options to support families, empowering them to choose solutions that best fit their needs.

This petition has been signed by Cheryl Luke, Lisa Vandepoele and Stephanie Labourne [*phonetic*]-Lambourne and many, many other Manitobans.

Education Property Taxes

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, 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's decision to cancel the Education Property Tax Credit and the property tax offset grant has enabled and encouraged school divisions to introduce massive tax increases.

(2) These massive increases have been felt by all Manitobans and compounded by arbitrary and punitive changes to the education property tax rebate, and those changes have made many Manitobans ineligible to receive the \$1,500 rebate.

(3) Secondary property owners are subject to taxation without representation as they are ineligible to vote for trustees who set the rates; yet, second

property owners are still required to pay full education taxes in their division.

(4) Additionally, families can only claim the reduced Education Property Tax Credit on their primary residence.

(5) These increases and the revocation of rebates were done with no consultation, punishing Manitobans who maintain family cabins by tying education taxation to assessed property values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove education funding and taxation from property taxes and find a fair and equitable way to fund education in Manitoba.

This is signed by Dan Gibson, Bill Hurtig, Brenda Hearson and many, many more Manitobans.

* (14:50)

Programs for Adolescents with Disabilities

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Honourable Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) Children with disabilities often require child care beyond the age of 12. Children with disabilities aged 12 to 17 face a gap in publicly available care programs.

(2) The current adolescent-care service model creates undue hardship on caregivers.

(3) While developing children may be entering into extracurricular activities, school clubs or spending time with friends independently, children with disabilities have reduced opportunities for such social and recreational opportunities due to the lack of spaces.

(4) The current self-managed adolescent-care models place additional workloads onto already stressed families, requiring parents to seek all alternative options and prove their need for care.

(5) The current adolescent-care system, as part of overall respite and support available to families, is failing families of children with disabilities, as identified in the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Bridging the Gaps report.

(6) To date, none of the nine recommendation-'nec'-recommendations it contains have been completed beyond 50 per cent.

(7) The recommendations in this report touch on many of the issues facing families, with adolescent care being but a small component of their overall needs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to fully implement recommendations in the Bridging the Gaps report.

(2) To urge the provincial government to immediately implement official policies and procedures that are more respectful and collaborative, which also minimize harm faced by families seeking help from Children disABILITY Services.

(3) To urge the Minister of Families to arrange for a full review of employment supports provided by Children's disABILITY Services for children with disabilities aged 12 to 17, including direct consultation with impacted families and to explore a full spectrum of options to support families, empowering them to choose solutions that best fit their needs.

This petition was signed by Laurie Keith, Krissie Hlady, Amy Thompson and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Green Valley School Expansion

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I wish to present the following petition.

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

(1) The residents of La Vérendrye and other areas around Manitoba are extremely frustrated and concerned by the provincial government's decision to cancel the school expansion project for Green Valley School in Grunthal.

(2) In 2021, the PC provincial government committed funding to expand Green Valley School for a new gymnasium and classrooms.

(3) The school is so crowded that three mobile classrooms were added to alleviate overcrowding in classrooms.

(4) In order for construction to begin, the school removed all three portable classrooms, leaving Green Valley in a further critical state of overcrowding.

(5) As a result of overcrowding, parents are choosing to home-school their children due to safety

concerns and the challenges associated with overcrowding.

(6) The current Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning have said they are committed to investing in education.

(7) The concerns of residents of La Vérendrye and the surrounding area are being ignored by the provincial government.

(8) The lack of space in the school is affecting the quality of education and extracurricular activities for students.

(9) Minister and Premier have a duty to respond to the educational needs of children and youth identified by rural communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning to immediately bring back the three portable classrooms to help alleviate the stress and overcrowding classrooms; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to reinstate the expansion project for Green Valley School.

This petition has been signed by Nicole Regey, Katharina Gutierrez and Bernie Forez [*phonetic*].

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Placement Vetting for Elderly Persons Housing

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba Housing will be placing homeless people and people with multi-layered mental illnesses and addictions into what has always been known as seniors housing.

(2) Manitoba Housing is placing people in elderly persons housing, EPH, buildings without vetting them.

(3) There is no minimum age limit stated on the Manitoba Housing information page for elderly persons housing buildings.

* (15:00)

(4) The tenant service co-ordinator and/or the building manager of elderly persons housing buildings should be given the right to deny applicants based on their first-hand knowledge of the applicant being homeless, having multi-layered mental illnesses

and/or addictions, or any other reason that they are aware of that could cause potential harm to the residents.

(5) Proper vetting should include a criminal record check, a vulnerable persons record check and the consent of tenant service co-ordinator and/or the building manager of the elderly persons housing building.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness to use seniors housing for it—for what it was intended: the seniors.

(2) To urge the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness to require a minimum age of 55 years for residence in all elderly persons housing, EPH, buildings.

(3) To urge the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness to engage in proper vetting of all applications of people desiring to live in elderly persons housing buildings.

This petition has been signed by Naomi Nemez, Peyton Corder, Jenna Machan and many other fine Manitobans.

MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): I wish to present the following—*[interjection]* Do you want me to stand up?

I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Thanks to the investment made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction for the new Portage regional health facility is well under way. The facility and surrounding community would greatly benefit from added diagnostic machinery and equipment, but specifically the addition of an MRI machine.

(2) An MRI machine is a non-invasive medical imaging technique that uses a magnetic field and computer-generated radio waves to create detailed images of organs and tissues in the human body. It is used for disease detection, diagnosis and treatment monitoring.

(3) Portage la Prairie is centrally located in Manitoba and is on the No. 1 Highway in the Southern

Health or Santé Sud Health Authority. Currently there is only one MRI machine in the RHA.

(4) An MRI machine located in the Portage regional health facility will reduce transportation costs for patients as well as reduce the burden on stretcher services and ambulance use. It will bring care closer to home and reduce wait times for MRI scans across the province.

(5) Located around Portage la Prairie are the Dakota Tipi, Dakota Plains, Sandy Bay and Long Plain First Nations reserves. Indigenous peoples in Canada disproportionately face barriers in access to services and medical care. An MRI machine located in the Portage regional health facility will bring care closer to their home communities and provide greater access to diagnostic testing.

(6) Located in close proximity to the new Portage regional health facility is the Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

(7) The average wait time for Manitobans to receive an MRI scan is currently six to eight months. Having an MRI machine in the Portage regional health facility will reduce—will help reduce these wait times for patients and provide better care sooner.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support the investment and placement of an MRI machine in Portage regional health facility in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

This petition is signed by Brenda Isbister, Bryce Moar, Kail Sissons and many, many more Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Programs for Adolescents with Disabilities

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Children with disabilities often require child care beyond the age of 12. Children with disabilities aged 12 to 17 face a gap in publicly available care programs.

(2) The current adolescent-care service model creates undue hardship on caregivers.

(3) While developing children may be entering into extracurricular activities, school clubs or spending time with friends independently, children with disabilities have reduced opportunities for such social and recreational opportunities due to the lack of spaces.

(4) The current self-managed adolescent-care models place additional workloads onto already stressed families, requiring parents to seek all alternative options and prove their need for care.

(5) The current adolescent-care system, as part of the overall respite and support available to families, is failing families of children with disabilities, as identified in the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Bridging the Gaps report.

(6) To date, none of the nine recommendations it contains have been completed beyond 50 per cent.

(7) The recommendations in this report touch on many of the issues facing families, with adolescent care being but a small component of their overall needs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to fully implement recommendations in the Bridging the Gaps report.

(2) To urge the provincial government to immediately implement official policies and procedures that are more respectful and collaborative, which also minimize harm done by families seeking help from Children's disABILITY Services.

(3) To urge the Minister of Families to arrange for a full review of employment supports provided by Children's disABILITY Services for children with disabilities aged 12 to 17, including direct consultation with impacted families and to explore a full spectrum of options to support families, empowering them to choose solutions that best fit their needs.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this petition has been signed by Kim Urias, Dana Mingo, Carla Genik and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

* (15:10)

Medical Assistance in Dying

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Persons struggling with mental health as their sole condition may access medical assistance in dying unless Parliament intervenes.

(2) Suicidality is often a symptom of mental illness, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadians between the age of 10 and 19.

(3) There have been reports of the unsolicited introduction of medical assistance in dying to non-seeking persons, including Canadian veterans, as a solution for their medical and mental health issues.

(4) Legal and medical experts are deeply concerned that permitting Canadians suffering from depression and other mental illnesses to access euthanasia would undermine suicide prevention efforts and risk normalizing suicide as a solution for those suffering from mental illness.

(5) The federal government is bound by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to advance and protect the life, liberty and security of its citizens.

(6) Manitobans consider it a priority to ensure that adequate supports are in place for the mental health of all Canadians.

(7) Vulnerable Manitobans must be given suicide prevention counselling instead of suicide assistance; and

(8) The federal government should focus on increasing mental health supports to provinces and improve access to these supports, instead of offering medical assistance in dying for those with mental illness.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to stop the expansion of medical assistance in dying to those for whom mental illness is the sole condition; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to protect Canadians struggling with mental illness by facilitating treatment, recovery and medical assistance in living, not death.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Phoenix School

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Phoenix School, a kindergarten to grade 5 school located in Headingley, has experienced consistent enrolment growth over the last several years. Enrolment is expected to reach 275 students in the next two years.

Because the school is now over capacity, the school division has had to install portable classrooms on site as of fall 2024.

For several consecutive years, the top capital priority of the St. James-Assiniboia School Division has been the renovation and expansion of Phoenix School.

In 2022, the Phoenix School expansion and renovation project was approved to proceed to the design phase. The project included, among other amenities, a new gymnasium, two new classrooms, a multi-purpose room and room for 74 child-care spaces.

In June 2024, the school division received notice from the provincial government that the project has been deferred. There is no guarantee if, or when, the project will move forward.

There are currently hundreds of children on a wait-list for child care in Headingley. The daycare operator in Phoenix School has been told that they will continue to have space within the school for the 2024-2025 school year only, that further expansion of child-care space within the school is not possible and that space may be reduced moving forward due to the shortage of classrooms. If new space is not constructed as planned, many families may be left without child care.

It is critical that the expansion and renovation of Phoenix School proceed as planned in order to support the needs of students, teachers and families in the growing community of Headingley.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to proceed with the planned renovation and expansion of Phoenix School without further delay.

And this petition is signed by Taylor McMillan, Kelli Leveque, Jasmin Spence and many, many other Manitobans.

Intersection of PTH 75 and PR 305

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The intersection of Provincial Trunk Highway 75, PTH 75, and Provincial Road 305, PR 305, at Ste. Agathe, has become an increasingly dangerous for motorists and pedestrians.

(2) Over the past seven years there have been at least 20 accidents at this location, resulting in injuries and fatalities.

(3) This intersection is heavily used by community members, commuters and commercial traffic, making safety improvements critical.

(4) Immediate action is needed to mitigate accidents and prevent further loss of life.

(5) An in-service road safety review was completed in 2022, which included recommended improvements but no action plan.

(6) Immediate action and implementation on the maintenance issues and short-term strategies identified in the 2022 study are needed.

(7) Development of an action plan with timelines for the medium-term strategies identified in the 2022 study is required.

(8) Installation of traffic lights or a controlled signal system will make the intersection safer.

(9) Additional strategies, such as reduced speed limits approaching the intersection and the addition of rumble strips to alert drivers of the upcoming intersection, will save lives.

(10) Construction of dedicated turning lanes to reduce collision risk and other traffic calming designs will help reduce collisions, injuries and fatalities at the intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to undertake safety improvements at the intersection of PTH 75 and PR 305 at Ste. Agathe.

(2) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to prioritize measures that will reduce accidents and fatalities, including, but not limited to those outlined in the 2022 in-service road safety review.

This is signed by Tyler Wallace, Sammir Ahmed, Rahul Pasad [*phonetic*] and many, many other Manitobans.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The intersection of Provincial Trunk Highway 75, PTH 75, and Provincial Road 305, PR 305, at Ste. Agathe, has become increasingly dangerous for motorists and pedestrians.

(2) Over the past seven years, there have been at least 20 accidents at this location, resulting in injuries and fatalities.

* (15:20)

(3) The intersection is heavily used by community members, commuters and commercial traffic, making safety improvements critical.

(4) Immediate action is needed to mitigate accidents and prevent further loss of life.

(5) An in-service road safety review was completed in 2022, which included recommended improvements but no action plan.

(6) Immediate action and implementation of the maintenance issues and the short-term strategies identified in the 2022 study are needed.

(7) Development of an action plan with timelines for the medium-term strategies identified in the 2022 study is required.

(8) Installation of traffic lights or a controlled signal system will make the intersection safer.

(9) Additional strategies, such as reduced speed limits approaching the intersection and the addition of rumble strips to alert drivers of the upcoming intersection, will save lives.

(10) Construction of dedicated turning lanes to reduce collision risk and other traffic calming designs will reduce collisions, injuries and fatalities at the intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to undertake safety improvements at the intersection of PTH 75 and PR 305 at Ste. Agathe, and

(2) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to prioritize measures that will reduce accidents and fatalities, including but not limited to those outlined in the 2022 in-service road safety review.

And, Honourable Deputy Speaker, this petition is signed by Karine Koop, Josh Koop, Natalie Gradine [*phonetic*] and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Programs for Adolescents with Disabilities

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Children with disabilities often require child care beyond the age of 12. Children with disabilities aged 12 to 17 face a gap in publicly available care programs.

(2) The current adolescent-care service model creates undue hardship on caregivers.

(3) While developing children may be entering into extracurricular activities, school clubs or spending time with friends independently, children with disabilities have reduced opportunities for such social and recreational opportunities due to the lack of spaces.

(4) The current self-managed adolescent-care models place additional workloads onto already stressed families, requiring parents to seek all alternative options and to prove their need for care.

(5) The current adolescent-care system, as part of overall respite and support available to families, is failing families of children with disabilities, as identified in the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Bridging the Gaps report.

(6) To date, none of the nine recommendations it contains have been completed beyond 50 per cent.

(7) The recommendations in this report touch on many of the issues facing families, with adolescent care being but a small component of their overall needs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to fully implement recommendations in the Bridging the Gaps report.

(2) To urge the provincial government to immediately implement official policies and procedures that are more respectful and collaborative, which also minimize harm faced by families seeking help from Children's disABILITY Services.

(3) To urge the Minister of Families to arrange for a full review of employment supports provided by Children's disABILITY Services for children with

disabilities aged 12 to 17, including direct consultation with impacted families and to explore a full spectrum of options to support families, empowering them to choose solutions that best fit their needs.

This petition has been signed by Cory Sanderson, Nicole Gretchen and Michele Gauthier.

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life, and this tragedy was entirely preventable.

(3) While the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction, provinces have been given the responsibility for the administration of justice, allowing for meaningful provincial action on bail reform to ensure public safety.

(4) Other provinces have taken proactive steps to strengthen bail enforcement, but Manitoba has not used all the available tools to address this issue effectively.

(5) Provincial government has the ability and the responsibility to advocate for and implement measures that protect its citizens by ensuring that repeat violent offenders are not released into our communities without proper safeguards.

(6) Immediate action is required close gaps in the justice system that allow dangerous criminals to remain free, which puts innocent Manitobans at risk.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to take immediate and decisive action on bail reform to address serious deficits in enforcement by utilizing all available provincial mechanisms to strengthen warrant enforcement, increasing bail supervision and opposing release of offenders, thus ensuring that repeat violent offenders are held accountable and that public safety is prioritized over leniency; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

And this petition has been signed by Kevin Wishart, Regina Lopratto, Jace Mynott and many other fine Manitobans.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

* (15:30)

(3) While the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction, provinces have been given the responsibility for the administration of justice, allowing for meaningful provincial action on bail reform to ensure public safety.

(4) Other provinces have taken proactive steps to strengthen bail enforcement, but Manitoba has not used all the available tools to address this issue effectively.

(5) The provincial government has the ability and the responsibility to advocate for and implement measures that protect its citizens by ensuring that repeat violent offenders are not released into our communities without the proper safeguards.

(6) Immediate action is required to close gaps in this justice system that allow dangerous criminals to remain free, which puts innocent Manitobans at risk.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to make—to take immediate and decisive action on bail reform to address serious deficits in enforcement by utilizing all available provincial mechanisms to strengthen warrant enforcement, increasing bail supervision and opposing release of offenders, thus ensuring that repeat violent offenders are held accountable and the public safety is prioritized over leniency; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

This is signed by Jamie O'Brien, Karen O'Brien, Dale Kirton and many, many more wonderful Manitobans.

Thank you.

Education Property Taxes

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): 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's decision to cancel the Education Property Tax Credit and the property tax offset grant has enabled and encouraged school divisions to introduce massive tax increases.

(2) These massive increases have been felt by all Manitobans and, compounded by arbitrary and punitive changes to the education property tax rebate, have made many Manitobans ineligible.

(3) Residents of the rural municipality of Victoria Beach are currently subject to a 26.6 per cent increase on their 2025 property tax bills as they fall within the catchment of the Lord Selkirk School Division.

(4) Victoria Beach residents are paying a disproportionate rate per pupil, totalling almost \$300,000 in taxes collected per student in the RM.

(5) Secondary property owners are subject to taxation without representation as they are ineligible to vote for trustees who set the rate but are still required to pay.

(6) Additionally, families can only claim the reduced education property tax rebate on their primary residence.

(7) These increases and the revocation of rebates were done suddenly and with no consultation, punishing Manitobans who maintain family cabins by tying taxation to property values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately reverse these unfair and punishing tax policy changes and restore education property tax rebates for all Manitobans.

This petition is signed by Jerzy Zielinski, Rob Dryden, Jocelyn Keith and many, many more fine Manitobans.

School-Supported Lunch Programs in Brandon

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, and the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Parent councils across the Brandon School Division have united as the Brandon Parent Council Collaborative to collectively advocate for safer, more sustainable lunch programming and to change the legislation to be equitable and inclusive for all students.

(2) Parent-led lunch programs have historically operated under a model that is no longer reflective of current societal and family realities, with most households having all adults working outside of the home.

(3) The geographic expansion of school catchment areas, combined with school-of-choice enrolment has increased the need for accessible, school-supported lunch programs for all students, not just those classified as bus students.

(4) Students are increasingly dependent on school for midday nutrition, supervision and emotional stability, making the lunch period a vital part of the school day that impacts safety, readiness to learn and overall well-being.

(5) There is widespread willingness among educational assistants to support lunch programs if formalized through the Brandon School Division.

The Speaker in the Chair

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to acknowledge lunch programming as a core component of the school day, deserving of proper planning, staffing and oversight by the school division, not volunteers, parent-led councils; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to change school policies so that they are equitable for all students, not just those classified as bus students.

(3) To urge the provincial government to change school policies to designate the 60 minutes in the middle of each day as a period of education, not child care.

And, Honourable Speaker, this petition was signed by Marilyn Jago, Jason Young, Himanshu Shah and many, many other fine Manitobans.

MRI Machine for Portage Regional Health Facility

The Speaker: The member for Turtle Mountain.

And I would ask, does the member have a headset yet?

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Yes, I do.

The Speaker: Okay, then the honourable member for Turtle Mountain.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, I've always had a headset; I'm not quite sure why it's not working on this technology here, so.

I—Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

* (15:40)

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Thanks to the investment made under the previous PC provincial government as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, construction for this new Portage regional health facility is well under way. The facility and the surrounding community would greatly benefit from added diagnostic machinery and equipment, but specifically a addition to an MRI machine.

(2) An MRI machine is a non-invasive medical imaging technique that is used—uses a magnetic field and computer-generated radio waves to create detailed images of organs and tissues in the human body. It is used for the die—disease detection, diagnosis and treatment monitoring.

(3) Portage la Prairie is centrally located in Manitoba and is on the No. 1 Highway in the Southern Health/Santé Sud Health Authority. Currently there is only one MRI machine in that RHA.

(4) And an MRI machine located in the Portage regional health facility will reduce transportation costs for patients as well as reduce the burden of stretcher services and ambulance use. It will bring care closer to home and reduce wait times for MRI scans across the province.

(5) Located around Portage la Prairie are the Dakota Tipi, Dakota Plains, Sandy Bay and Long Plain First Nations reserves. Indigenous peoples in Canada 'disproportionally' face barriers of access to

services and medical care. An MRI machine located in the Portage regional health facility will bring care closer to their home communities and provide greater access to diagnostic testing.

(6) Located in close proximity to the new Portage regional health facility is the airport—south—Southport airport. This aerodrome has a runway length that is more than adequate to support medical air ambulance services. This would provide the opportunity to transport patients by air from more remote communities to access MRI imaging services.

(7) The average wait times in Manitobans to receive an MRI scan is currently six to eight months. Having the MRI machine in the Portage regional health facility will help reduce these wait times for patients and provide better care sooner.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support the investment and placement of an MRI machine in the Portage regional health facility in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

This has been signed by Kathy Twiss, Judith Jeffries and David Jeffries and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: No further petitions?

The—grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Can you please call all stages of Bill 53.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 53—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now resume debate on the reasoned amendment to second reading of Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, standing in the name of the honourable member for Turtle Mountain, who has three minutes remaining.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Honourable Speaker, it's my honour to bring forward, to talk about the reasonable amendment fill—Bill 53, The Budget Implementation Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

Like I said before, like summering—summarize that I had yesterday about, you know, the reason why we're putting this forward is the—basically, this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provided real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately needed.

And I used many of examples of what we're facing right now, especially with our youth. Our youth is the ones that are going to be most impacted by not providing better tax relief when it comes to people who are just starting out.

Right now, many—we have one of the highest education systems in Canada, and right now, Manitoba is probably up there with the rest of the provinces. But with an educated population and more of a—growing economies of other places of this country and the tax burden that these young people face here, it shows that.

I remember back in the '90s, you know, one of the concerns that I remember the Filmon government was concerned about is the brain drain. That was one of the things that they wanted to address in one of the elections that they had is because so many young people were moving out of the province.

We saw that with Saskatchewan. I remember, early 2000s, I used to do a course there. It was called a strategic coaching program. And I remember, in Regina, that's where I actually attended this coaching program. And, for every quarter, we would go to Regina. And, back that time, it was really depressing there because so many people, so many young people were leaving the province. The population was decreasing. The population of Saskatchewan was under—well under a million people and shrinking.

And that was the impact in those days, and I believe it was an NDP government. And the fact is, I—Saskatchewan was really concerned about the amount of people that were leaving the province of a long-time Saskatchewan NDP government, that down—when Brad Wall came in as the new Saskatchewan Party, they really did a lot of opportunities to compete with Alberta and reducing the taxes, much like we did when we came into government, as the PC Party came into government back in 2016.

So many people were leaving Saskatchewan to go to Alberta, but now Saskatchewan is a place that a lot of people are moving back to, especially from Alberta. Young people are going back there. You see that in the cities and Regina, is—the smaller cities around Saskatchewan.

And, right now, I'm really concerned with this not having affordability for young people to have some tax relief, and especially the amendment that we put forward of \$30,000 personal exemption that you put \$3,000 more in people's pockets.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Thank you for the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, and, of course, the reasoned amendment brought forward by my good friend and colleague from Red River North.

The budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act—because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

And, Honourable Speaker, I want to begin with just one simple point with this. Manitobans are hurting. Families are under pressure. Seniors are under pressure. Young people trying to buy a first home are under pressure. Renters are under pressure. And small businesses are under pressure.

Everywhere we go in this province, Manitobans are telling us the same thing: life costs more; their government is doing less. That is the context in which we are debating this legislation here today, because this bill is not simply a technical tax statute amended—amendment bill. It is the implementation vehicle for a budget that claims to address affordability while continuing to take more money out of the pockets of Manitobans through rising taxes, bracket creep, school taxes, fuel costs, hydro increases and debt-fuelled spending. That is why this bill deserves more than a rushed process. It deserves some scrutiny, deserves some input. And, of course, Manitobans, Honourable Speaker, deserve honesty.

The government wants Manitobans to believe that Bill 53 is an affordability bill. But Manitobans know the difference between meaningful relief and political marketing.

The government boasts about removing PST from certain prepared grocery items and increasing tax credits by small amounts years down the road. Meanwhile, education property taxes continue to rise, hydro rates continue to rise, MPI costs continue to rise, fuel costs continue to rise, housing costs continue

to rise, income taxes quietly continue to rise because the government cancelled indexation.

* (15:50)

This government is taking hundreds of dollars away from families while offering pennies back at the checkout line. This is not affordability; it's—this is misdirection. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) has spent months talking about pennies on snack foods and rotisserie chickens while families are watching hundreds and thousands of dollars disappear from their household budgets every year.

Taking tax off of junk food, non-healthy foods—when we're in a world here of diabetes and all this and we're taking tax off of junk food, why can't we make healthy food more affordable? Families don't—they don't build financial security on a cheaper bottle of pop. They build security through lower taxes, stronger paycheques, affordable utilities, affordable housing and confidence into the future. This legislation doesn't provide that at all.

Honourable Speaker, one of the most troubling aspects of this government's record is its cancellation of indexation on tax brackets and the basic personal amount. It matters because inflation pushes workers into higher taxation even when their purchasing power isn't improving, and that is called bracket creep. It is a hidden tax hike. Manitobans know exactly what it feels like. People receive small raises just to keep up with inflation, and the government is taking more of it.

The NDP promised during their election campaign that they would index tax brackets. They promised affordability. They promised a middle-class tax cut. Instead, they cancelled indexation and quietly increased the tax burden on working Manitobans. This is not an affordability plan; it's a tax increase disguised through inflation. And every year this continues, Manitobans will fall further behind.

Honourable Speaker, our caucus has put forward a serious proposal, a meaningful proposal, a proposal that would provide real affordability relief right now, immediately. We have called on this government to significantly increase the basic personal amount. Ultimately, we believe Manitoba should move toward a \$30,000 basic personal amount, which would be one of the highest in Canada. Even a meaningful first step would make a tremendous difference, because unlike this government's tiny targeted tax tweak, increasing the basic personal amount would help every working Manitoban. It would mean up to \$1,535 more per year for individuals, more than \$3,000 annually for two-income households.

Honourable Speaker, that's real money. That's groceries. It's rent. It's child care. It is fuel. It's winter clothing for the kids. It's mortgage relief. It's putting their kids into activities—hockey, baseball, curling, soccer, dance, whatever it may be. It's something families would actually feel. When Manitobans have more money in their pockets, they spend it in their communities or they be volunteering or donating to their charities and organizations. It supports local businesses, supports jobs, stimulates the economy. It's not only good social policy; it's good economic policy.

Now, let's compare our proposal with what's actually on Bill 53. The government is increasing the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit from \$1,600 to \$1,700, but Manitobans don't receive that increase until 2028—2028, Honourable Speaker. Families are struggling now. They're struggling today. Seniors are struggling now, and young families are struggling now.

Meanwhile, assessment values continue climbing every year. The government is collecting dramatically more in education property taxes while pretending a delayed \$100 increase somehow solves affordability. Revenues from education property taxes have exploded. Forecast revenues have gone from roughly \$667 million to just a few years ago—from—just a few years ago, to nearly \$1.1 billion now. That's an increase of over \$400 million annually.

Where's that money coming from? It is coming from Manitoba homeowners, taxpayers. It's coming from seniors, from working families, from people on fixed incomes, from Manitobans who are already stretched thin and to the limit.

This government wants applause because it may give back a small fraction years later. Honourable Speaker, I believe that Manitobans are a lot smarter than that. The government has built much of its affordability messaging around removing PST from certain grocery-related items. But even this measure has significant problems. First, most groceries were already PST exempt. Second, the savings for many families will be minuscule. Third, the legislation creates unfairness within the food industry itself.

We have already heard concerns raised by Restaurants Canada, and their argument is simple and reasonable. If identical prepared food is sold in a grocery store, it becomes PST exempt. If the exact same meal is sold in a restaurant, PST still applies. That creates unequal treatment between competitors. It distorts the marketplace and it unfairly disadvantages restaurants, one of Manitoba's largest employers. Restaurants support over 42,000 jobs right here in this

province. Many of those jobs are held by young Manitobans. Many are entry level opportunities. Many are family-owned local businesses already operating on razor thin margins. Public policy should not pick winners and losers, but that is exactly what this NDP government is doing.

We also have to talk about the fiscal picture behind this legislation. The government forecasts another deficit approaching half a billion dollars. Manitobans have heard these projections before, and this Finance Minister has repeatedly missed his own targets by massive amounts. Last year's projected deficit nearly doubled. The government has added billions to Manitoba's debt in less than three years.

And what do Manitobans have to show for it, Honourable Speaker? Longer ER wait times, rising taxes, rising hydro bills, rising costs of living, a stagnating economy and reduced private capital investment. Debt matters. Interest costs matter because every dollar spent servicing debt is a dollar that cannot go toward health care, education, infrastructure or tax relief. And this government spending trajectory is unsustainable.

Another major concern with this budget, this legislation, is the lack of a serious economic growth strategy. Where is the long-term-growth plan? Where's the mining strategy? Where's the exploration strategy? Where are the incentives for business investment? Where are the payroll tax reforms? Where are the measures to support entrepreneurs and job creators? We see very little in this budget.

Instead, private capital investment is declining. Businesses are expressing their concern, stakeholders are expressing their disappointment and Manitoba risks falling further behind other provinces competing for workers, investment and opportunity. If we want stronger public services, we need a stronger economy to support those services. Government can't tax and borrow its way to prosperity.

* (16:00)

Bill 53 also contains provisions related to the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology. Manitobans deserve some answers. This government allowed MITT to deteriorate into crisis. Now it wants new powers to appoint administrators and redistribute assets. This raises some serious concerns about the future of post-secondary education and trades training right here in our province. At a time when Manitoba desperately needs skilled workers, the government is overseeing instability in one of our important training institutions. It's deeply troubling—excuse me.

So we proposed in the previous amendment that the subject matter Bill 53 be referred to committee so Manitobans could have their voices heard, because legislation of this important deserves transparency, deserves accountability and it deserves public input. Over the last two years, this government has repeatedly bundled major legislative changes into omnibus budget implementation bills and pushed them through with minimal scrutiny. It's not healthy for democracy. It's not respectful whatsoever for Manitobans. And that is not how major fiscal legislation should be handled.

Last year, our caucus proposed legislation that would require meaningful public committee review of budget implementation bills, and this NDP government rejected it. Why? Because this government does not welcome scrutiny when it comes to its own legislation. Manitobans deserve to speak: municipal leaders deserve to speak, business groups deserve to speak, homeowners deserve to speak, restaurants deserve to speak, taxpayers deserve to speak and stakeholders deserve to speak.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans deserve better. The core issue here is trust. The government promised affordability. Instead, what did Manitobans get? You got bracket creep, higher taxes, higher debt, higher hydro rates, higher school taxes and token affordability measures that fail to meet the moment. Families are asking for meaningful relief, not slogans, not photo opportunities, not tiny delayed rebates. They want relief.

And that is why our caucus has put forward a constructive solution, a meaningful increase to the basic personal amount, a proposal that puts real money back into Manitobans' pockets immediately, a proposal that strengthens affordability while stimulating the economy, a proposal that rewards the work that Manitobans work hard for every day.

And, Honourable Speaker, we have been clear. If the government chooses to improve this legislation by bringing forward meaningful affordability measures, particularly around this basic personal amount, we're prepared to work constructively, but we will not rubber-stamp legislation that fails our Manitoba families. We will not pretend that pennies equal affordability while taxes continue rising elsewhere.

We support this motion brought forward because Manitobans deserve transparency. They deserve meaningful affordability relief. They deserve responsible fiscal management and a government that respects their intelligence. This legislation does not meet that

standard. Manitobans need real relief, not small changes. Families need relief they can actually feel. And if this government is serious about affordability, well, this is certainly a test.

Now, I intend to take my time today because I've got quite a bit of it left yet, because Manitobans deserve more than a rushed debate on a bill that touches virtually every household, every taxpayer and every homeowner, every renter and every small business right here in this province.

This bill matters, and the reality facing Manitobans today demands some serious discussion because everywhere we go in this province, Manitobans are telling us the same thing: life is getting harder. People are working longer hours and they're falling further behind. Families who used to feel middle class no longer feel secure. Young people wonder whether they will ever own a home, never mind a car. Seniors on fixed incomes are worried about staying in their homes. Small businesses are struggling with rising costs, rising payroll pressures, rising utilities and weaker consumer confidence. And at the centre of all this affordability, that's the issue. This is the challenge facing Manitoba families.

That is why this legislation matters, because Bill 53 is not simply a housekeeping bill; it's an implementation bill for this government's entire budget agenda, reflects the values of this government, reflects the priorities, and, unfortunately, Honourable Speaker, it reflects a government that fundamentally misunderstands what Manitobans are going through today.

Manitobans need real relief. Manitobans are not asking for miracles. They're asking for fairness. They're asking for a little bit of breathing room, asking to keep more of what they earn. They're asking for a government that understands the pressures that they are facing. People are making impossible choices right now: Do we pay the hydro bill first or buy groceries first? Do we repair the car now or do we wait another month? Do we cut extracurricular activities for the kids? Do we reduce our retirement savings? Do we take on more debt just to keep up?

These are not abstract policy decisions; these are real conversations happening around Manitoba kitchen tables every single day, and yet this government responds to those concerns with tiny tax tweaks and political talking points. Manitobans need relief they can actually feel, not symbolic gestures, not headlines, not delayed promises years into the future, real relief, immediate relief and meaningful relief.

This budget takes more than it gives. The government has tried to brand this budget as it if—as an affordability budget, but when Manitobans actually examine the numbers they see something very different. They see a government taking far more than it gives back. The government talks endlessly about removing PST from certain prepared grocery items, but at the exact same time, education property taxes are rising, hydro rates continue to rise, fuel costs are rising, income taxes are rising through bracket creep. Debt costs are rising and overall affordability is worsening.

The government wants Manitobans focused on pennies at the checkout line while hundreds of thousands of dollars disappear elsewhere from household budgets. Manitobans are not fooled by this, Honourable Speaker. Families know when they're falling behind, and they are falling behind.

Let's talk about the reality of bracket creep. I want to spend some time discussing—it's one of the most enforced—important affordability issues that is in this province right now, and that is bracket creep, because this issue deserves far more attention than it's gotten. Frankly, Manitobans may not even realize that it's happening to them.

This government cancelled indexation of tax brackets and the basic personal amount. That means that inflation now quietly increases every single year—increases taxes every single year. A worker may receive a modest raise simply to keep pace with the inflation, but because tax brackets are no longer indexed, more of that income gets taxed. So even though prices rise everywhere, like groceries, rent, fuel, child care, utilities, government keeps taking a larger share. This is a hidden tax increase, Honourable Speaker, and it's particularly harmful during periods of high inflation.

* (16:10)

The NDP promised they would protect affordability. Instead, they implemented a policy that quietly taxes inflation. It hurts low-income earners. It hurts middle-income earners. It hurts seniors. It hurts young workers trying to get ahead. And the worst part is that it compounds year after year. Every year this government refuses to restore indexation, Manitobans will pay more. Every year, families lose ground, and this government barely even acknowledges it.

Just a list of broken promises, Honourable Speaker. Manitobans remember the promises this government made. They promised affordability. They promised

a middle class tax cut. They promised to index tax brackets. They promised not to increase costs. But what have Manitobans experienced instead? Again, higher hydro rates, higher school taxes, higher fuel costs, higher debt, higher borrowing, higher taxes through bracket creep. And now we have a budget bill pretending to offer affordability while continuing many of the very policies that caused affordability pressures to worsen in the first place. That's why Manitobans are frustrated, and you may sense a little bit of it in my own voice right now, because they feel misled.

Our proposal, Honourable Speaker, we put forward a serious alternative, a practical alternative, a meaningful alternative. We've called on this government to significantly increase the BPA. Ultimately, we believe Manitoba should move toward the \$30,000 basic personal amount. And think about what that means for ordinary Manitobans. It means more take-home pay in their back pockets. It means lower taxes, stronger household budgets, greater economic activity, more fairness for workers. A single working Manitoban could save up to 1,500 bucks a year. And you know what, what does \$1,500 get you? That's just a little more than \$100 a month. It's not even a tank of gas anymore.

Family with two earners save \$3,000. But it's still—it's not symbolic; it's transformative and it's meaningful. Affordability relief, it's a start, it helps. That's the difference between carrying debt or paying it down, falling behind or catching up, cancelling activities or keeping kids enrolled, struggling every month and finally having some breathing room. This is the kind of policy Manitobans are asking for, Honourable Speaker.

Why does tax relief matter? Sometimes government forgets where the money comes from, Honourable Speaker. Government revenue doesn't just fall out of the sky and appear magically. It comes from workers, it comes from our businesses, it comes from the taxpayer.

And when governments overtax productive people, the economy weakens, families spend less, businesses invest less, growth slows. Letting Manitobans keep more of their own earnings is not reckless; it's responsible, it's pro-growth, it's pro-worker.

And, importantly, it creates economic activity, because families spend money locally. They repair their homes, they buy their goods and services, they support local restaurants, they support retailers and they support small businesses. Creates jobs,

creates—that generates tax revenue organically. Strengthens the economy from the bottom up.

Honourable Speaker, another major issue with this legislation is the government's handling of education property taxes. This government can try to spin the numbers all it wants, but Manitobans know their property tax bills are climbing dramatically. The numbers are staggering. Education property tax revenues have risen from approximately \$667 million to nearly \$1.1 billion; it's over \$400 million being collected annually. That money is not coming out of the sky, falling from nowhere, magically appearing; that—it's coming from Manitobans. It's coming from the homeowners. It's coming from our seniors. It's coming from our middle-class families and for people on fixed incomes, for people already struggling with inflation.

And what does this government offer in return? A delayed increase in Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit years into the future. That doesn't solve the problem. It barely acknowledges the problem.

Seniors are being hit real hard here and I want—specifically want to talk about that because many seniors in Manitoba are deeply, deeply worried right now. These are the people that helped to build this province. They spent decades paying off their mortgages. They planned carefully; they budgeted responsibly, and now they're watching their property taxes rise, their hydro bills rise, food prices rise, insurance costs rise and health-care pressures worsen. Many seniors are asset rich but income poor. Their homes may have appreciated in assessed value, but their income has not kept pace and this government continues collecting more and more from them. It's not fairness; it's pressure.

Many seniors are beginning to wonder whether they can continue living independently in their own homes. That should concern every member right here in this House.

Let's talk about their PST changes specifically, because this government has built much of its affordability messaging around this policy. Groceries were already PST exempt. Savings for many households will be relatively miniscule. Policy creates serious fairness concerns. Restaurants Canada that I mentioned have already raised those concerns.

Small businesses need more support. They're struggling. Many expected far more from this budget. They expected payroll tax relief; they expected investment incentives, regulatory reform, stronger economic development policies. Instead they received very

little. Manitoba Chambers of Commerce expressed disappointment. Canadian Federation of Independent Business raised concerns.

Businesses want to invest. They want to grow; they want to hire, but they also need confidence and right now confidence is pretty weak here, Honourable Speaker. Private capital investment is declining. That should concern every single member in this House, as well, because without investment there is no jobs. Without jobs there's no growth. Without growth government revenues stagnate while their debt continues to rise.

Honourable Speaker, I got so much more I can say about how this budget does not make it affordable for Manitobans, but thank you for the opportunity for what I did.

House Business

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): On House business.

The Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

MLA Fontaine: Pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for McPhillips (MLA Devgan). The title of the resolution is Removing the PST from Groceries by July 1st.

The Speaker: It's been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business, pursuant to rule 34(7), will be the one put forward by the honourable member for McPhillips, and the title of the resolution is Removing the PST from Groceries by July 1st.

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The Speaker: Now, resuming debate.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business.

The Speaker: The honourable Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Johnson: Could you please canvass the House for leave to not see the clock until all questions have been put at second reading for Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

The Speaker: Is there leave to not see the clock until all questions have been put at second reading of Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to the amendment on Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, otherwise known as BITSA. And I want to begin with a very straightforward point: Manitobans are looking for relief that is real, immediate and meaningful. What they are not looking for is another NDP government press release claiming victory while families continue falling further behind every single month, because that is exactly what this legislation represents.

* (16:20)

Bill 53 is being marketed by the government as an affordability package. But when Manitobans examine the details, they quickly realize that the measures inside this legislation are extremely limited compared to the financial pressures families are facing every day. This NDP government continues to talk about affordability while simultaneously presiding over higher taxes, higher assessments, higher utility costs, higher fuel costs and rising household expenses across nearly every category of daily life.

Honourable speaking—Speaker, legislation of this scale deserves scrutiny. Legislation affecting taxes, property owners, renters, municipalities, small businesses, restaurants and Manitoba industries should not simply be rushed through this Chamber with minimal public input and limited accountability. Manitobans deserve the chance to be heard. And, frankly, after the last several years of omnibus BITSA legislation and rushed legislative tactics from this NDP government, Manitobans have every reason to demand greater transparency.

Honourable Speaker, affordability is the defining issue for Manitoba families right now. Across this province, people are under enormous pressure. Families are trying to stretch paycheques that no longer stretch far enough. Seniors on fixed incomes are watching the cost of living rise faster than their pensions. Young Manitobans are questioning whether they can even afford to buy a home or build a future here in this great province. Small businesses, which are the backbone of the Manitoba economy, are dealing with rising operating costs while consumer spending weakens.

And, Honourable Speaker, all of this is happening while this Kinew government insists that tiny, targeted tax measures somehow amount to a serious affordability strategy. But Manitobans know the difference between symbolic gestures and meaningful relief. They know the difference between a headline announcement and real savings that actually help pay the bills at the end of the month. And they know this Bill 53 falls short.

Let us talk honestly about what this legislation actually offers. The government's signature affordability announcement is the removal of PST on selected prepared foods sold in grocery and convenience stores. That is what they have centred this entire affordability narrative around. But most groceries in Manitoba are already PST exempt. The government is talking about a narrow category of prepared foods and snack items, while Manitobans are facing rising costs in every other part of their lives: hydro bills are higher, gas prices are higher, insurance costs are higher, property taxes are higher, mortgage payments are higher, rent is higher. And after all of that, this government says Manitobans should celebrate saving a few cents on a snack or a few dollars at the checkout line.

Honourable Speaker, families cannot build a future on pennies. That is the problem with this entire bill. The government is offering Manitobans pennies in relief while taking dollars away through every other avenue available to them. A few cents saved on a prepared food item does not offset hundreds more in education property taxes. A small PST exemption does not offset rising hydro bills. A tiny reduction at the grocery checkout does not offset bracket creep quietly taking more from every paycheque. And a delayed rebate years from now does not help a family trying to make ends meet today.

That is why Manitobans increasingly feel like this government is completely disconnected from the financial realities families are living with. People are not worried about whether they save 50 cents on a prepared salad, they are worried about whether they can afford their mortgage renewal. They are worried about whether they can afford to fill their vehicle with gas. They are worried about hydro increases. They are worried about rent increases. They are worried about property tax notices showing up in the mailbox every year with higher numbers attached to them. And, Honourable Speaker, while all of that is happening, this Kinew government keeps presenting tiny, targeted tax changes as though they are transformational affordability measures.

Honourable Speaker, they are not. Manitobans know they are not. One of the biggest concerns I continue hearing from Manitobans is that this government talks constantly about affordability while ignoring the cumulative effect of all the other costs it continues to impose on households, because affordability is not determined by a single tax exemption in isolation. Families experience affordability as the total cost of living. They experience it through monthly bills, through grocery receipts, through utility payments, through mortgage renewals, through insurance premiums and through the amount left in their bank account at the end of the month.

And, right now, far too many Manitobans—for far too many Manitobans, there is less and less left over. That reality cannot be hidden behind carefully crafted announcements or selective statistics. Manitobans know when life is becoming less affordable, because they live it every day. They see it when they renew their mortgage at their bank or credit union with dramatically higher interest rates. They see it when they open their hydro bill during the winter months. They see it when basic household necessities continue rising in price faster than their wages. And perhaps, most concerning of all, many Manitobans no longer feel confident that things will improve any time soon. That erosion of confidence matters, because affordability is not only an economic issue, it is also a quality-of-life issue.

When families lose confidence in their ability to plan for the future, it changes decisions across the board. Young couples delay buying homes. Families postpone having children. Graduates leave the province searching for better opportunities elsewhere. Small businesses hesitate to expand or invest. And communities begin to stagnate. That is why affordability policy must be serious, comprehensive and rooted in long-term economic growth. Unfortunately, this legislation does not reflect that kind of serious structural thinking. Instead, it reflects a government focused heavily on political optics and narrow announcements designed for short-term headlines.

* (16:30)

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans deserve better than this government. They deserve policies that improve economic conditions in measurable and lasting ways. Last year, this NDP government removed indexation from tax brackets and the basic personal amount. That means inflation automatically pushes Manitobans into paying more income tax over time. Even when workers receive modest wage increases

simply to keep pace with inflation, government takes a larger share. That is bracket creep. And make no mistake, bracket creep is a tax increase. It quietly increases the burden on workers, seniors and middle-income families every single year.

This Knew government promised Manitobans a middle-class tax cut. Instead, they increased the effective tax burden by eliminating indexation. And now, after increasing taxes through bracket creep, they are presenting tiny targeted PST exemptions as affordability relief. Manitobans see through that. They understand when government is taking substantially more than it is giving back.

Honourable Speaker, nowhere is that contradiction more obvious than in the area of education property taxes. This government continues to collect dramatically increasing amounts of revenue through education property taxation, while pretending small future rebates somehow offset those increases.

Just a few years ago, education property tax revenues were projected at approximately \$667 million. Now those property tax revenues are approaching \$1.1 billion annually—\$1.1 billion. That is an enormous increase. And you might ask, who is paying for it? Homeowners, seniors, families, small business, property owners, people all across this province who are already struggling with inflation and rising living costs.

Every year, Manitobans receive property tax notices showing rising assessments and rising taxes. Every year, more families fall behind. And every year, this government talks about affordability while taking hundreds of millions of dollars out of their pockets through property taxation. Then this Knew government turns around and says they will eventually increase the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit by another \$100. Not now, not this year, not even next year; years down the road.

Honourable Speaker, affordability delayed is affordability denied. Families struggling today cannot pay today's bills with promises scheduled years into the future. And let us remember the scale of what this government is asking Manitobans to celebrate: a \$100 increase next year while education property taxes have risen—risen by hundreds of millions of dollars overall. That is pennies compared to the dollars being taken out of Manitobans' pockets every single year. For many homeowners, annual property tax increases alone will completely wipe out that future rebate increase.

So when Manitobans hear this government claim they are delivering affordability relief, many simply shake their heads because they know the math does not work. This government keeps trying to sell Manitobans pennies while collecting dollars. That is why, Honourable Speaker, so many people are frustrated, because families feel squeezed from every direction. They see more money leaving their household every month, while government insists things are improving.

Honourable Speaker, another issue that deserves discussion in this debate is Manitoba's competitiveness relative to other provinces, because affordability and competitiveness are directly connected. If Manitoba becomes less competitive economically, families ultimately pay the price. Businesses invest elsewhere. Workers leave for higher wages and lower taxes. Young professionals build careers in provinces where they see stronger opportunity. And, over time, the tax base weakens while economic growth slows.

That should concern all of us. Manitoba already faces serious challenges when competing for investment, skilled labour and economic growth. We are competing not only with neighbouring provinces but with jurisdictions across North America. And, in that environment, government policy matters enormously. Tax policy matters. Regulatory policy matters. Energy policy matters. Investor confidence matters.

Yet, instead of focusing on making Manitoba one of the most competitive jurisdictions in Canada, this Knew government continues moving in the opposite direction. Businesses consistently warn about rising costs, increasing uncertainty and the cumulative burden of government policy decisions. And small businesses, in particular, are feeling squeezed from every direction.

Many local businesses are still recovering from years of economic instability and inflationary pressure. They are dealing with higher wages, higher supply costs, higher borrowing costs and weaker consumer spending. At the same time, they are expected to absorb additional government costs and administrative burdens. Then government introduces small, selective tax exemptions and expects businesses to celebrate.

But, Honourable Speaker, business owners understand economics better than this NDP government seems to. They understand that long-term affordability requires long-term economic growth. It requires productivity. It requires investment. It requires confidence. And it requires a government that creates

stable and competitive conditions for economic expansion.

That is one reason why our Progressive Conservative team continues emphasizing broad tax relief and economic growth rather than narrow, targeted interventions. Because a stronger economy benefits everyone. A growing private sector creates jobs. Higher investment generates opportunity. Competitive tax policy attracts workers and businesses. And, ultimately, a stronger economy gives families more financial security than temporary selective rebates ever could.

Honourable Speaker, our PC caucus has proposed a very different approach. We believe affordability relief should be broad-based, immediate and meaningful. We believe Manitobans should be allowed to keep more of what they earn, and we believe government should stop trying to micromanage affordability through narrow, selective tax policies that create confusion and unfairness.

That is why we have proposed significantly increasing the basic personal exemption. Our proposal would move Manitoba toward a \$30,000 basic personal exemption. That would put real money back into Manitobans' pockets. Not symbolic savings, not selective exemptions; real relief. For many families, that could mean thousands of dollars annually remaining in household budgets. That means help paying rent, help paying mortgages, help covering groceries, help dealing with hydro bills and transportation costs.

* (16:40)

And, unlike this government's selective affordability measures, broad-based tax relief helps every working Manitoban. It helps nurses. It helps teachers. It helps tradespeople. It helps truck drivers. It helps young families starting out. It helps seniors working part-time to keep up with rising costs. That is how you create meaningful affordability relief.

And there's another important point here. Broad-based tax relief also supports economic growth. When Manitobans keep more of their earnings, they spend that money in their communities, at local businesses, at retailers, at family-owned shops, at service providers. That economic activity supports jobs and strengthens Manitoba's economy organically. Unfortunately, this Kinew government appears far more interested in selective tax carveouts and targeted announcements than in creating truly—than creating a truly competitive economy.

Honourable Speaker, there are numerous other provisions within this legislation that also deserve careful examination. There are changes related to film tax credits and administrative requirements. There are provisions concerning bare trusts and beneficial ownership taxation. There are new powers involving accommodation taxes on short-term rentals. There are changes involving school division borrowing and securities issuance. There are amendments related to carbon storage legislation. There are provisions affecting post-secondary institutions.

I would submit that these are not minor house-keeping measures. These are substantial policy changes with real implications for industries, taxpayers, municipalities and Manitoba institutions. Yet, this government repeatedly treats BITSA legislation as though it should simply pass with limited scrutiny because it is tied to the budget.

That is not how strong democratic institutions should function. Legislation deserves proper debate. Stakeholders deserve proper consultation and Manitobans deserve transparency from their government. Unfortunately, this government has developed a pattern of avoiding accountability whenever possible. Over the last several years, they have repeatedly packed BITSA legislation with unrelated measures and attempted to move legislation through quickly with minimal public engagement. Committee hearings have been limited, debate has been restricted and opposition concerns have often been dismissed outright. That is not healthy for democracy.

The role of opposition parties is not simply to rubber-stamp government legislation. Our responsibility is to ask questions. Our responsibility is to identify weaknesses in legislation. Our responsibility is to stand up for Manitobans when government policy falls short.

And, Honourable Speaker, this legislation falls short because, despite all of the government's announcements about affordability, this bill does not meaningfully reduce the overall financial burden facing Manitoba families. The cost of living remains too high. Taxes remain too high. Housing remains increasingly unaffordable. Young people continue leaving for provinces with stronger economic opportunities. And businesses continue warning about Manitoba's declining competitiveness.

That should concern every member of this Legislature regardless of political affiliation, because affordability is not only about current costs, it is also about whether Manitoba remains a province where

people can build successful futures. Right now, many Manitobans are questioning that future, and what is this government's answer? More selective tax policy, more targeted exemptions, more announcements designed around political messaging rather than structural affordability improvements.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are practical people. They understand that affordability cannot be solved through slogans. They understand that governments cannot continue increasing costs in one area while claiming affordability success in another. And they understand that real affordability relief must be broad, fair and substantial enough to actually make a difference in household budgets.

And that is why our PC team continues advocating for meaningful reductions in the overall tax burden facing Manitoba families. Because Manitobans need room to breathe financially again. They need confidence that hard work will still allow them to get ahead. They need a government focused on competitiveness and growth instead of symbolic political announcements. They need policies that strengthen Manitoba's economy rather than weaken it through uncertainty and selective taxation.

Honourable Speaker, I want to emphasize the importance of the amendment before us today. Sending this legislation to committee is not obstructious—obstruction, is it—it is accountability. Committee review allows Manitobans to participate directly in the legislative process. It allows experts, businesses, municipalities, industry representatives and ordinary Manitoba citizens to raise concerns and suggest improvements. That process makes legislation stronger.

And frankly, if this government is confident in its policy choices, then it should welcome this—that scrutiny instead of resisting it. Let Manitobans speak. Let homeowners discuss rising education property taxes. Let families explain the real pressures they are facing. Let seniors speak about fixed incomes being stretched thinner every year. Let businesses discuss competitiveness concerns. That is how democratic accountability is supposed to work.

Honourable Speaker, our caucus has been very clear throughout this debate. We are prepared to work constructively. We are prepared to support meaningful affordability measures. And we are prepared to move legislation forward when government demonstrates a willingness to provide real relief for Manitoba families.

But, Honourable Speaker, this legislation in its current form does not achieve that objective. This bill relies far too heavily on symbolic measures that fail to address the broader affordability crisis facing this province. And Manitobans deserve better. They deserve a government that recognizes the seriousness of the pressures families are under. They deserve a government willing to reduce the overall tax burden rather than simply rearranging it. They deserve a government focused on long-term competitiveness and economic growth. And they deserve a legislative process that values transparency, scrutiny and public participation.

At the end of the day, affordability is measured very simply. It is measured at kitchen tables across Manitoba. It is measured when families sit down each month and try to make the numbers work. It is measured when seniors decide whether they can afford to remain in their homes. It is measured when young Manitobans decide whether their future exists here or somewhere else. And right now, too many Manitobans are concluding that things are becoming harder, not easier.

That is why this amendment matters, because before this legislation moves forward, Manitobans deserve the opportunity to speak for themselves. They deserve transparency. They deserve accountability. And most importantly, Honourable Speaker, they deserve affordability measures that are actually equal to the challenges they face every single day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Order, please.

Before recognizing any other members to speak, I have an announcement to make. Unfortunately, due to the short notice, we will not be able to have ASL interpretation after 5 o'clock this afternoon.

* (16:50)

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I appreciate the opportunity to rise this afternoon and put just a few words on the record with regard to the reasoned amendment and Bill 53, or The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act. And I appreciate having had the opportunity to listen to my colleagues talk about this bill. And, again, you know, it's interesting that we're not hearing any members of the NDP speak to this and haven't heard from them for some time.

And at the same time, though, they are, as the members opposite like to point out, they are earning—the backbench is earning \$112,000 a year and the front bench is earning \$173,000 a year.

And so—but we certainly haven't heard from them for quite some time. So hopefully that changes. I don't know; past behaviour indicates that's probably not going to happen. But I would I would implore them to put a couple words on the record, since I know that Manitobans surely have some thoughts on a \$27-billion budget that has a lot to do with health care and education and infrastructure and crime and a vast range of activities across this province. It has an impact on the daily lives of Manitobans, their families and their ability to pay their bills.

I want to say, Honourable Speaker, that, you know, it's important for us in this Chamber to understand that economic growth is about people. It is about the young person starting their first job. It's about the small-business owner trying to grow their company. It's about the family hoping their children will be able to build their lives right here in Manitoba. When our economy is strong, opportunity spreads across communities. More businesses open their doors, more people find good jobs, families gain the stability and confidence they need to plan for the future.

And Manitoba has the talent, the resources and the hard-working people needed to succeed. But what we need now is leadership that focuses on practical results and long-term opportunity. And that means supporting local businesses, encouraging investment and making sure Manitoba remains a place where families and entrepreneurs can succeed.

And that's why I think so many Manitobans across the province were disappointed by the NDP budget put forward this year. You know, we certainly heard from stakeholders from across the spectrum who were disappointed, even some who were, you know, most people would say, well, hey, those should be allies of the NDP. Are those not this government's friends? Are they not political allies? Why are they criticizing this government?

And it's interesting to listen to those criticisms and just realize how far off the mark this NDP government is with their budget. Again, when it comes to health care, when it comes to fulfilling the promises related to health care or crime, education and especially affordability, providing real tax relief for Manitoba families, it really does fall short. It's been a rinse-and-repeat budget, padded with multiple

reannouncements contained in the previous budget to make it look like they're actually doing something, to make it look like this government is implementing—has a plan and is implementing an agenda, when clearly they are not.

But what we do know, what this provincial budget does show, is that federal transfers now make up a record 36 per cent of all provincial revenues, or \$9.7 billion.

So, on a \$27-billion budget, that's \$10 billion a year that comes from—this year—that comes from the federal government. And that's a huge concern.

Obviously, this government is very—is spending a lot more than what it is taking in. And Manitobans don't want us to be here, you know? We want a government that—Manitobans want a government that seizes opportunity and takes advantage of opportunities and, like I said, the assets that we have, that we enjoy here in Manitoba.

And yet, what we're seeing is just way more spending, government spending, but getting less in terms of results. When it comes to health care, this government is spending almost 2 and a half billion dollars more, and yet health ER wait times have doubled under this NDP government. That's just one example.

So we're seeing this pattern of an NDP government, again, that spends more while Manitobans get less and, you know, that's really, really disappointing because we're at a unique moment in history now where I think Manitobans and Canadians are looking at government, as I said, to take advantage of our unique opportunities.

We're a relatively small population inhabiting a pretty large area—geographic area. And we've got, here in Manitoba, we've got—you know, we're an agricultural powerhouse. We've got significant mining potential. We have so many natural resources that we've been blessed with. We've got massive lakes and fresh water and we've got access to tidewater through the Hudson's Bay.

And, you know, we are the keystone province. We are located in the centre of the country. We are a transportation hub and a province that has significant potential. And so we want a government that capitalizes on those assets, on those unique features and propels Manitoba forward. And when that happens, Manitobans will know it because we'll see opportunities. We'll see the economy booming.

We'll see wages rising, and Manitobans will feel that on the kitchen table and in their pocketbooks.

And yet that's not what's happening. We have a have-not government that has got its hand out constantly for more in transfer payments from Ottawa, and not only that, this \$10 billion out of the \$27 billion, \$10 billion comes from Ottawa, but then there's \$1.6 billion or so now that is actually overspending. That's just pure overspending. And that's their deficit which, by the way, let's remember, was forecast to be \$800 million last year. Today it's \$1.6 billion.

You know, and perhaps that was to be expected, them massively blowing their deficit projections out of the water and missing their budget targets, because in their very first year in office, they inherited a \$373-million PC budget surplus, and in the very first year in office, they turned that into a whopping \$2-billion deficit. So that's incredibly significant.

Affordability, as we all know, is a primary concern for Manitobans, with half of all households within \$200 of insolvency each month. This budget does nothing to address a reduction in personal income taxes. Saving 15 cents on a two litre of soda certainly doesn't build an economy. We've seen almost no assistance for the very business community that sustains much of our social programs, nothing when it comes to payroll or business tax or even a reduction in regulations and red tape. This budget has nothing in it to support our farmers who are facing tariffs, fuel and fertilizer pressures.

And consumers see these things when they go to the grocery store. These factors all show up in the price on the grocery shelf. Private capital investment down almost 3 per cent, which is a sign of low confidence. And, of course, the egregious Manitoba jobs agreement or forced unionization agreement by this NDP government is adding millions upon millions of dollars to the cost of public projects like schools, hospitals, roads and bridges. And so that's obviously an impediment to economic growth in our province.

As I said, health-care spending is up almost 2 and a half billion dollars since the NDP took office, and yet ER wait times remain at record levels. In fact, they're rising. There's new records falling seemingly every day. You know, 14, 15-hour waits here in the city is now the norm. And ER wait times, as I said, have doubled. They were—averaged about 2.3 hours across the seven years that the previous PC government was

in power, and today, the number is twice that. Wait—ER wait times are twice that amount.

* (17:00)

So we're clearly heading in the wrong direction. And this is all happening while the NDP refused to look at policy changes like Debbie's law, which was—which has been championed by my colleague—a PC colleague on this side of the House, by the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook). So—and, again, nothing really to move Manitoba to a have-province status.

And, you know, I think it's interesting, too, the other—it's interesting, too, when you listen to what the credit-rating agencies have to say and what the banks are forecasting for Manitoba and for our economy, for what their view is of the government's budget projections. And I am reminded of this relatively recent article put out by the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) former employer, the CBC. The headline is: Credit-rating agency says Manitoba's budget plan doesn't seem to line up with its own growth projections.

So Moody's raises cautionary note. And I think it's interesting because, you know, the Finance Minister and the Premier, when the credit-rating agencies aren't happy and don't feel confident in the fiscal direction that the provincial government has us on, well, what happens is they downgrade the—Manitoba's credit rating. And that has the impact of raising the interest rates, the amount that Manitobans pay in interest on our debt.

So, actually, what they have to say is pretty important and when they issue a note, it's worth looking at. So I just want to say, you know, with regard to Moody's report, that, again, they're raising questions about the Manitoba government's plan to reduce the deficit this year and balance the budget next year.

Moody's, in a report issued in April, said the Province's plan—to slash annual deficits last estimated at more than \$1.6 billion for the fiscal year that ended in March—does not appear to line up with the government's own economic growth projections.

Economic growth leads to more tax revenue. The budget expects slow but steady economic performance with real gross domestic growth of 1.3 per cent in 2026 and 1.7 per cent in 2027, although we note that the rapid pace of projected fiscal improvement appears inconsistent with this slow growth.

Moody's also raises a cautionary note about the budget's projections for a big turnaround and profit at

the Crown-owned Manitoba Hydro. For the last two years, government budgets have predicted a net income at the utility. In both years, the utility ended up not making money, ended up losing money. Manitoba Hydro ended up losing money in the last two years despite this NDP government's rosy projections, largely due to drought and reduced water levels used to generate power.

In fact, Manitoba Hydro's net loss was last pegged at \$502 million for the fiscal year that ended last March. And this year, the government is predicting a net income of \$140 million. So the Moody's report says that the Province's forecast of a rapid fiscal improvement relies in part on its expectation of a significant year-over-year improvement in Manitoba Hydro's performance.

However, recent forecast misses by the public utility—by Manitoba Hydro—indicates significant uncertainty around its fiscal contribution. You know, it's interesting. Again, a pattern of behaviour by this NDP government of rosy projections and then completely missing those projections. And so we see that again with bad planning.

For instance, when it comes to the emergency preparedness budget, I mean, in their very first year in office, they cut that budget by 50 per cent. And then last year, we had the worst wildfire season on record, you know. And, again, sadly, two Manitobans lost their lives. Some 30,000 were displaced from their homes.

And, you know—I know, representing an area in southern Manitoba, that we sent a lot of—there were a lot of volunteer firefighters, I should say, from our communities that—and across Manitoba—that went up to help fight in that effort. And it truly was a one Manitoba effort. So it was all Manitobans pitching in and helping each other like we do.

But that said, the government, despite—I mean, they cut the budget—the emergency preparedness budget—by 50 per cent. And then last year, they end up spending over \$350 million in the worst wildfire season on record. I mean, talk about bad planning.

And so it's not only Manitoba Hydro—repeated, consecutive years of projecting profit and then actually realizing a loss. But also when it comes to the emergency-preparedness budget, not being adequately prepared for the wildfire season that we did experience. And I just certainly hope we're not in a position like last year, again this year.

So I think it speaks to bad planning on the part of this government, bad fiscal management. And those things all have impacts. I mean, that's reflected in our deficit. That reflects in the debt—the overall debt in this province, the amount of interest we pay, of the size of government, the amount of tax money you have to collect from Manitobans. Because two plus two is always four, and someone's got to pay that. And all the money that the government collects actually comes from Manitoba taxpayers. That's really where the money comes from. So it's up to Manitobans to pay these bills. I mean, the government can make the fiscal commitments; the government has the power to spend that money; the government has the power to levy taxes and, you know, to coercively take that money from Manitobans who work hard to earn it.

But I think it's incumbent—given those facts, it's very incumbent upon government to be prudent and to be wise with how they spend that money. And I think just to take it for granted that Manitobans will always, you know, be there to work hard and pay taxes and contribute and not look for greener pastures elsewhere, not look to Saskatchewan or Alberta or other provinces—I think is pretty unwise on the part of this government, to simply just tax people into oblivion and chase away opportunities and to instigate the kind of capital flight out of this province that we are seeing and to actually, actively disincentivize investment in our province, which is what they're doing.

So I think it's very incumbent upon government to be very prudent with the power to tax, to make sure that the tax burden on Manitoban families, on businesses, is as small as possible, as—and that government should be as least intrusive as it can be in order to allow those Manitobans and Manitoba businesses to be able to take advantage of opportunities and to grow and hire more people, create more jobs, generate more wealth and generate more tax revenue, you know, to pay for the social programs that we all—social services that we all depend on. So that's important, and I think the government should tread lightly when it comes to exercising that power.

And that means—you know, given that Manitoba is a higher tax environment in Manitoba, that they should—especially at this moment in time where many Manitoba families are feeling squeezed, they should be looking at providing real tax relief. And we are not seeing that. And we've been calling for weeks—calling on this NDP government to provide real income tax relief, specifically by raising the basic personal exemption to \$30,000 from the current \$15,000.

In fact, it was the previous PC government that took the basic personal amount and raised it to \$15,000. It was the previous PC government that brought in income tax indexation, and it's this government that did away—this NDP government—that then did away with income tax indexation and made changes to income taxes that saw them, in their very first year in office, net an additional \$82 million in income tax revenue, you know.

And they made changes to education property taxes, that—it's kind of a shell game with them; they're very clever politically with how they do it, but they are essentially taking away hundreds of millions of dollars more in tax revenue than if they had just left the previous PC government's tax-saving measures in place and allowed Manitobans to keep more of their hard-earned money.

* (17:10)

So that's why we are here today advocating—as PC MLAs representing our constituents and all Manitobans—advocating for real tax relief for Manitoba families who desperately need it.

So I just—I think it's, again, as we talked about the credit rating agency, TD Bank also came out the other day and said that they've trimmed their 2025 real GDP growth tracking for Manitoba, reflecting downgraded expectations for utilities and trade-exposed industries like manufacturing, driven by falling exports of energy, agricultural machinery and goods, as well as pharmaceutical products.

You know, it's interesting—they say too that, at the same time, construction sector output growth should slow this year. Notably, the recently released survey of capital spending intentions points to weakness in non-residential investment in 2026—certainly, bill 13 won't help with that.

And so it's clear that Manitoba is not keeping pace with its peers, particularly in western Canada, and is increasingly falling behind the national average. This is not a narrow issue within one sector, but a broad-based economic trend visible across nearly every major indicator. And this is not a matter of political interpretation, but it is grounded in verifiable data across growth, investment, productivity and employment, as they point to a consistent pattern of under-performance.

Forecasts from major financial institutions continue to place Manitoba below its western peers and below the national average. This confirms that Manitoba's economic challenges are not cyclical, but

structural in nature. Business investment growth in Manitoba is significantly below both the national rate and neighbouring provinces. Capital is choosing to go elsewhere, which is a clear signal of weaker competitiveness and confidence. Investment follows opportunity, certainty and return, and Manitoba is not currently providing those conditions. The result is reduced capital inflows, which directly limits future growth potential.

You know, there's a number of measures that—on this side of the House, that we've brought forward, such as legislating a Workers Compensation Board surplus rebate policy put forward by my colleague, the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook). And this is a—it's a small measure in the grand scheme of things, but an important one.

And, you know, given that Manitoba's Workers Compensation Board remains significantly over-funded with a current funding level of approximately 165 per cent, well above the 130 per cent upper threshold, this is something that would really help small- and medium-sized enterprises. But, again, the bill was voted down or talked out by this NDP government.

When it comes to apprenticeship ratios and skills training, the NDP imposed a one-to-one apprenticeship ratio which led to the first decline in new apprentice registrations in several years in Manitoba.

And, in fact, those numbers are—there was a decline in new apprentice registrations from 3,128 in 2023 to 2,730 in 2024. Total active apprentices fell from 11,878 to 11,628, the first decline in several years.

And, again, as I mentioned earlier, the Manitoba jobs agreement, which severely limits competition, excludes and actively discriminates against 88 per cent of the Manitobans who work in the construction workforce in Manitoba, building our schools, hospitals, roads and bridges—the 88 per cent of the 60,000 Manitobans in that sector, that comes to 53,000 non-unionized Manitobans. Those are Manitobans who've chosen not to be part of the union.

And yet, the government's forced unionization agreement leaves those 53,000 Manitobans out in the dust, because it actually says in the Manitoba jobs agreement in black and white that unioned Manitobans are to be hired—given preferential treatment over non-union Manitobans, and that certainly doesn't jive—I mean, that is blatantly discriminatory and doesn't jive with what we hear about one Manitoba, a vision of one Manitoba.

But when we're talking about investment in this province, you know, I thought it was interesting the other day, reading the—an article in the Free Press that said Manitoba falls well back of Canadian peers in securing international investment. Manitoba lags behind other provinces in attracting international investment. The Winnipeg Economic Development and Tourism agency says they counted six announcements of global investment projects in Manitoba last year, as compared to Saskatchewan, who saw—which saw 13; Alberta and British Columbia pulled 68 each, while Ontario and Quebec drew 278 and 95 respectively. Both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick also announced more projects. Despite being smaller than Manitoba, they announced more projects than Manitoba: 19 in Nova Scotia and eight in New Brunswick.

Alberto Velasco-Acosta, Winnipeg Economic Development and Tourism vice-president, said that we are not getting a fair share of all the wins coming to Canada. Isn't that an indictment on this NDP government? And that's a reflection of their record.

My colleague, the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth), has pointed out that exports from Manitoba have declined 27 per cent, and it's interesting at the same time we see that, a decline in Manitoba's exports of 27 per cent, that we see Saskatchewan building permits up 29 per cent. I mean, if that doesn't paint a picture of capital flight, then I don't know how else, you know, one could—to get this NDP government to see that. And, certainly, they refuse to see that.

Jennifer Patterson, a business—I'll read this here: continuing to fall behind other provinces in attracting foreign companies will lead Manitoba to being out of sight. Velasco-Acosta went on to say: It'll negatively impact the province's economic growth.

Jennifer Patterson, a business investment manager for the City of Hamilton, preached the importance of listening to investors and having, in her words, an ecosystem of support. And she actually said this is another area where Manitoba struggles. She said the companies want to know about waste water infrastructure capacity, rezoning timelines and utility servicing.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Time is money, she says, and if we can't give them that clarity quickly, they'll go elsewhere. Sounds a lot like the mayor of Winnipeg, who's been ringing that alarm bell as well about how that—the—this NDP government's failure to thus far to support phase 3 of the

Winnipeg water treatment plant has dire consequences for growth and for economic growth in Winnipeg and across the province. Kathy Valentino of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities has said similar things in that vein as well.

So these are all—these all point to an NDP government that is not capitalizing on Manitoba's unique potential, Manitoba's assets, and I think is a sign of a government that is missing the mark at a pretty important time in history, at a point in time in history where Manitobans and Canadians are looking for a government that moves, that gets things done; for governments that don't just talk, but governments that actually act and can execute on projects and actually build. And we're not seeing that with this NDP government.

We are seeing vastly more spending, we are seeing higher taxes and we are seeing Manitobans get less. We are seeing crime get worse. We are seeing health-care wait times double and just a really dismal picture, and that's a huge concern. And so I hope I get another chance to speak at some point on this.

The Deputy Speaker: And the member's time has expired.

* (17:20)

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I'm happy to stand here today and put some words on the record regarding the—Bill 53 and our amendment. It's straightforward. It reflects what Manitobans themselves are saying right across the province here, and I am just going to read the amendment.

The motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word that and substituting the following: This House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

And that is something that we're all hearing across the province here just this weekend. I'm sure all of us have had those conversations. We're reading about it. We're seeing it in our media. This debate isn't simply about one tax measure or one section of legislation. It is about whether this government has truly delivered a budget that provides meaningful affordability relief for Manitobans who are struggling every day here in the province. With the rising cost of living, we see those challenges right across the board, and the answer from Manitobans is this budget has failed on that.

It falls short on providing any relief for Manitoba families.

Right across the province, many are under pressure unlike we've seen in years. Manitobans are stretching every dollar further and further just to keep up. They're paying more for groceries, more for fuel, more for rent, more for transportation, more for the utilities, more for school taxes and more for nearly every basic necessity.

People are worried. Seniors on fixed incomes are worried. Young families are worried. Young people are putting off having families, given the affordability crisis. Single parents are worried. How are they going to provide for their children? Small business owners are worried. How are they going to continue to pay the rent when they don't have the sales there, due to people not able to spend and—have any extra money to spend in their business.

Crime implicates a lot of small businesses right now here, too, across our province. And farmers—we have farmers who have, you know, increased input costs to their production. We have tradespeople that are worried, and I'll get into that a little bit here, too, later on, honourable Deputy Speaker.

I think this speaks to the fact that every Manitoban, every working Manitoban is worried about the affordability crisis that we are faced with here. Yet this government continues to present small symbolic measures or gestures as though they're transforming and making real—coming up with real affordability solutions. But Manitobans deserve much more than that. They deserve meaningful relief, something substantial.

Over the last number of weeks and months, I've spoken with many constituents throughout the area in my constituency, right across Manitoba. This past weekend alone, discussing the affordability measures, the struggles many are having and disappointment with many of the people I talk to about: What is this crackerjack, cheesy PST savings going to do for a family who's got big grocery bills? This doesn't save them anything but mere pennies. *[interjection]* Yes, I heard that frustration this weekend. Crackerjack was a word that was used. That's why I used it. That was coming from a constituent.

I talked to tradespeople and the impact that this will have on those individuals—rising costs. Contractors, I chatted to them; they are uncertain. This budget has done nothing for them alongside the tariffs that we've seen. There's such uncertainty here.

So families, tradespeople, contractors are all very uncertain about their future here in Manitoba. And, again, small-business owners spoke about the challenges of staying open and managing to keep their costs low.

This government is making decisions without properly consulting the people who actually are affected, whether it be on the front line or families. And it concerns—or it extends beyond Bill 53 really, where, you know, consultation matters. And we've heard that time and time again. Committee matters, democracy matters; and Manitobans are asking for that. They want to be able to have a voice. They want to be able to speak to what happens here in the province of Manitoba. And this NDP government has eliminated that opportunity for many trades, businesses and families to come and speak and be a part of—or at least have input on what affordability looks like to them.

This Legislature exists so that these issues can be debated, reviewed, challenged and maybe even improved—and examined thoroughly before it becomes law. That process is not an inconvenience, it is actually accountability and an opportunity to be transparent about what is coming forward, and having open dialogue is important.

But, again, time and time again, we've watched the NDP government bypass this important part of legislation where it's committee and consultation, and push legislation through without scrutiny or limited opportunity for Manitobans to be heard.

We've seen it repeatedly since they've taken office. Bills brought forward without proper stakeholder consultation, policies announced before the impacts are really understood or even learned about for that matter. Legislation introduced only for the government to come back later, backtrack and say, you know what, we maybe got it wrong. We maybe should have done a little bit more consultation; or, we neglected to hear from certain stakeholders. You know, revising legislation after there's been backlash, I guess, so to speak.

And now we're seeing it with BITSA here. This government has increasingly turned this into a vehicle where they can move policies and changes all at once while limiting the proper examination from the public and having that opportunity to provide input and scrutiny.

And Manitobans want the opportunity. They want the opportunity to appear before committee to discuss

these matters that impact their day-to-day life, impact their livelihood in some cases, like I've mentioned, their business, their agriculture operation, maybe even their education.

The government rushes legislation through and expect Manitobans simply to accept it, and that's why we've brought forward this reason-reasoned amendment. This House hasn't received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill, Bill 53, actually provides real, meaningful relief on the affordability crisis.

This government boasts about removing PST from snack foods, like Cracker Jacks and your potato chips and pop and—your junk food is what this really covers—and prepared grocery items as though this represents a major affordability relief. This puts mere pennies—mere pennies—on families who are really, really struggling right now in today's economy here in the province.

Manitobans all—they know the reality. They know that this is really not going to help pay their rent in most cases. It's not going to help register their vehicle. This PST savings on groceries is not going to save them—the crisis that many families are seeing. They may save just mere pennies on grocery purchases, but they'll also get hit harder elsewhere.

* (17:30)

And let's talk about where they might see that. They'll see it with their hydro rates, as those rates increase. We've seen it at the tanks when we go to fill up with fuel; gas prices are increasing. Those that own property across the province, you've already seen the increase in your education property taxes. If you haven't seen it yet, you will—if you haven't got your tax bill. Insurance costs continue to rise, and I've already talked about the fuel costs. And that also impacts on transportation costs regardless of whether you drive or not; you will be paying extra if you are using public transportation.

At the same time, this government cancelled the indexation of tax brackets, basic personal amount. This creates what many have described as a stealth tax increase through bracket creep. We know that doesn't, again, help with the affordability crisis here in Manitoba. And Manitoba families, again, are feeling the pinch. They understand the math. They know when they are paying hundreds or even thousands more in taxes and expenses overall while receiving only minimal savings in return.

Families are struggling. We've seen an increase in those that need to go to food banks right across the

province. Harvest Manitoba—I know in my own community we've seen a significant increase in that, and that's because families can't afford—they can't afford to feed their families, even clothe them in some cases.

And this government continues—and has promised Manitobans they would not raise taxes, but guess what? They broke that promise. They promised to index tax brackets, but they broke that promise. They promised affordability, but yet, Manitobans are continuing to pay more.

And that's why we—our PC team has proposed something that would provide relief—meaningful relief. We proposed increasing the basic personal amount, and doing this over time with an immediate increase toward at least \$21,000 and a long term of 30. That could, honourable Deputy Speaker, put money back in the hands of families—money back—real money back on the kitchen tables of those here in our province.

And, honourable Deputy Speaker, that solution provides not just selective relief, not symbolic relief, but that is actual, real relief that many families could see immediately. It'll be relief for workers, it'll be relief for seniors and relief, actually, for all Manitobans. Every one of us could see relief, and many of those that are struggling.

Imagine what that would mean, honourable Deputy Speaker, for a two-income household trying to afford groceries. That could give them extra money for school supplies, fuel, maybe help pay their rent or their mortgage, maybe license that vehicle that they've not been able to afford to license in the last number of months. Our solution provides a real relief for many families.

Unlike the selective approach of this government, broad-based tax relief benefits everyone fairly; we're not picking winners and losers. That would be everybody. It allows Manitobans to decide how to use their money. So all those savings, that's free for Manitobans to decide how they spend their money, where they invest that money, whether it be putting it into a savings account or maybe it's going right back into the economy with their purchases in their local area.

Manitoba should be a striving province, striving to become more competitive and not less competitive. A stronger basic personal amount would make Manitoba more attractive for workers, professionals, entrepreneurs; and it would draw investment, which, again, in turn, would help build our local economy here.

But instead, what this government is doing with this BITSA bill is increasing uncertainty. People are scared. People are worried. Imagine going to bed at night thinking about where you're going to find just a few dollars to—whether it's buying the milk that you need to feed your young kids or the bread to just even have toast in the morning. Those are real struggles that many people face, and it's only getting worse. I mean, that's—going back months now, people have been facing challenges like that, but times are getting even tougher now. And with this PST relief that this government's put on junk food—is not going to help that family significantly enough to make a change in some of their day-to-day and lifestyle ways that they live.

Last year, this NDP expanded taxes into increasing costs for Manitobans and businesses alike. At a time when families are already struggling, they continue to find new ways to increase taxes and take more from the—from taxpayers. They present minimal-saving measures as though Manitobans should be grateful, but they're—Manitobans are actually asking for something more meaningful, something more affordable. They want to see something measurable, something where they can really feel that they're getting something back in return, not just a bunch of broken promises and, you know, photo ops or the optics that look like they're actually going to be getting savings when, in reality, they aren't. They put it out like they're going to give this back to you, but meanwhile, you haven't got your tax bill; you're—you haven't seen where they're really going to come and gouge you in the end.

The Speaker in the Chair

But beyond the affordability concerns, there's also the matter of process and accountability. And the amendment reflects the serious concern that we're hearing from Manitobans—that this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance because the government has not allowed sufficient scrutiny or public input.

And that matters. Committee hearings matter; hearing from Manitobans matter. Stakeholders deserve the opportunity to identify concerns before legislation is finalized. And experts deserve the opportunity to point out the unintended consequences of such. You know, we have questions like: Were municipalities consulted in this legislation? Were small businesses or businesses consulted in this legislation? Hearing from contractors in industries where, you know, they've not been consulted on much of the legislation that this

NDP government has rammed through or attempted to.

This leads to the fact, then—we've seen this time and time again, Honourable Speaker, where this government does very selective consultation. They're very selective in who they will consult. They choose to meet with those who will reinforce their existing position and ignore those that may, you know, have a broader—have broader concerns or maybe even have some constructive criticism or would like to have input to legislation, maybe even to strengthen it to—so it works for all Manitobans and, again, not just a select few that this government chooses to work with.

And one major example that we see most recently, most topical right now, is the example of the PST exemption. You know, we've all heard and read from restaurants and local businesses across Manitoba, where they've raised the concerns that, under the government's proposal, prepared food sold in grocery stores could receive tax exemption, while the same prepared food sold through restaurants would continue to be taxed.

Now, if that doesn't create an uneven playing field, Honourable Speaker, I don't know what that does. That clearly says to me, and most of Manitobans, that you know what, we're going to be very picky and we're going to choose who and who doesn't—who this does and does not apply to. That is being very selective in legislation, and it does—again, it's showing biased and unfair practices.

* (17:40)

Again, this policy creates winners and losers, and we continue to see that with this government. And with the—specifically the PST, who loses in that, Honourable Speaker? Local restaurants lose. Those are the—that could be the small mom-and-pop restaurant losing out on this. Small-business owners are losing out on this. Workers, losing out on this. Communities.

You know, when we see restaurants impacted like this, it doesn't just impact the business; it's the whole community. Because often enough, these restaurants are an employer. They employ people in the area and if the restaurant's not doing well, that employment, that source of employment is going to be eliminated and it's going to leave families without a job, potentially. So this does have longer impacts and bigger challenges down the road.

And, again, what we see are concerns emerging after legislation is introduced, Honourable Speaker,

and that's, again, why consultation matters. And we have seen—and I know I speak about this often but the pattern's becoming too familiar under this NDP government, where they don't want to do proper consultation. We've all heard it and we've all been at a number of committees in the past while where, you know, we've seen where stakeholders maybe haven't been consulted.

And we have concerns related to many challenges when Manitobans don't go through that process. We've seen it—and I know I've mentioned this as well, with Green Team funding. That goes back a while, but we've seen even the security rebates. I know I've had organizations reach out asking why they weren't eligible to take part in that particular program for the camera security rebates.

And I know many businesses right now—not just businesses—we have Manitobans seeking assistance when it comes to crime. And we see it across the province where crime is increasing and this government comes out with a camera rebate program, but, you know, it's only a certain amount and it's only going to be limited for a certain amount of time and we're going to be picky and pick and choose who is eligible for that program and who isn't.

You know, let's talk about the Manitoba jobs agreement, Honourable Speaker, and what we've heard from stakeholders in relation to that where they, again, were not properly consulted. And this does not reflect good governance. What this does, again, is highlights the fact this NDP government likes to pick winners and losers. And good governance is when you listen before final decisions are made and you don't have to, sort of, backtrack and say, oh yes, maybe we should have listened to that or we should have extended the invite to speak to all stakeholders and not just pick and choose which ones we want to hear from.

You know, back to the MJA, the Manitoba jobs agreement. This has significant ramifications for Manitobans. Talking to some of my local contractors, the impact it has in not just rural communities, but my own personal conversations this last little while, where it does hit small rural communities.

And, again, that's maybe these contractors who have a significant number of employees, and when they're eliminated out of some of these opportunities, it impacts the business. It impacts the significant number of employees that they have, which is—it hits a rural community big time in ways that, you know, we often don't even want to think about because this, again, is going to be young families and you're going

to have parents without a job because, potentially, in some cases, these contractors and these businesses will have to lay off people.

And, again, that's not good for any of us here in the province of Manitoba when we're trying to build the economy, keep our jobs, be able to make all our payments and live a good life here in province and be able to enjoy all that we—that this great province has to offer.

You know, maybe we need to talk about the mounting debt, the deficit that is going to—that is coming from this NDP government. We are—we'll see where this is going to go. This government has gone out, made a lot of promises, and what this is going to do is actually balloon the debt. And who's going to have to wear that? Honourable Speaker, we're all going to carry that debt. And that's going to be carried on for generations. That's going to impact, you know, not only me right now and today in real time, but it's going to impact my children, and it's certainly going to be carried down on to our grandchildren, and we're all going to have to wear that. And that's not what we want to see here in this—in our province.

So going to talk about business again here, where businesses have raised concerns about competitiveness. Small business advocates have criticized the lack of meaningful support from this NDP government. Taxpayer organizations—again, go back and they've criticized the bracket creep that they've described as the stealth tax increase.

You know, municipal leaders have raised concerns about inadequate infrastructure investment. Organizations are bringing forward concerns as well.

You know, budgets are about priorities, and Manitobans are asking where the long-term economic vision actually is. Where is the investment here for the Province of Manitoba? Where's the strategy for growth? Where's the strategy for investment? And where's the strategy for agriculture? Where's the strategy for mining and the resource development? Where's the strategy for improving Manitoba's competitiveness?

There's nothing in here that's going to talk about or build Manitoba's economy, but, instead, businesses see increasing taxes, increasing regulation, which we know is a burden for many, many small businesses. We hear about that often, which also adds to increasing uncertainty. It's not—this NDP government has not made it easy for investment to come to the province of Manitoba.

Growth requires confidence, and growth requires investment, and growth requires stable and predictable policy. And no one is seeing stable and predictable policy with this NDP government, and we can see that families and businesses are losing confidence in the NDP government.

This government often speaks about supporting trades and skilled labour, yet we continue to see the instability surrounding institutions and those that are very critical to our workforce and development.

Again, Honourable Speaker, this BITSA bill that this government is trying to ram through is—it doesn't reflect a responsible budget. And what we are saying clearly is that this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that Bill 53 delivers actual, meaningful affordability measures that all Manitobans are seeking and what Manitobans really need.

And Manitobans agree. We all agree that we're in affordability crisis. We are worried for what the future might look like for generations to come. And this is an opportunity for this government, this NDP government, to sit down, to work with us on this side of the House, make some affordability changes and help all Manitobans and not just pick the winners and losers here in our province.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

*(17:50)

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I rise today to address Bill 53, budget implementation tax statutes amendment act, commonly referred to as BITSA.

I want to start with a very simple observation: Manitobans are searching for relief that is tangible, that's immediate and genuinely meaningful. And we see in this BITSA that none of that holds true—none of it.

What they're not searching for is another NDP government media release declaring success while families continue slipping further behind with every passing month, because that's precisely what this legislation amounts to, Honourable Speaker. This bill is being promoted by the government as an affordability package, and it's so far from that. Yet when Manitobans review the details, they discover quickly that the measures within this legislation are limited compared to the financial pressures families are confronting each and every single day.

This government continues speaking about affordability while at the same time overseeing higher taxes, higher assessments, higher utility bills, higher fuel prices.

I mean, when they talk about a 10 per cent decrease in fuel tax, that was one cent. Right now, with gas being, you know, a buck fifty or a buck seventy-five and starting to come down, that means absolutely nothing. But it looks great on paper when you say 10 per cent.

But Manitobans are catching on. They're seeing every day that the use of the words and the selling of some of these things isn't washing with them anymore and increasing household costs across almost every category of daily living.

Never, never, ever have we seen prices in the grocery store so high, and it's all happened in this last little while that the NDP has been there. They were going to march in and, well, we're going to talk to all the grocery stores and we're going to get this whole price fixing thing resolved.

Again, lots of talk. Legislation of this magnitude deserves careful review, legislation affecting taxes, homeowners, renters, municipalities, small businesses, restaurants. Manitoba industries should not simply be hurried through this Chamber without having limited public input and minimal accountability. And this is where the public is not having that opportunity right now.

Manitobans deserve an opportunity to be heard and, honestly, after several years of ominous BITSA legislation and rushed legislative tactics from this NDP government, Manitobans have every reason to expect greater transparency.

Honourable Speaker, affordability is the defining issue facing Manitoba families today. We see Manitoba families being stretched to the limit. That disposable income they have right now is so limited; it's becoming less and less. You know, it kind of breaks my heart to see families in the grocery store, in the toy stores, where their children want little things and mom has to put it back on the shelves because they cannot afford it because of this NDP government.

Families are trying to stretch paycheques that no longer stretch far enough. Seniors living on fixed incomes are watching the cost of living increase faster than their pensions. Young Manitobans are wondering why they can even afford to purchase a home or build a future here. And they—we have the opportunity, and it's also heartbreaking to see youth exiting this province. They don't want to live here anymore because of the affordability crisis that has been created by this NDP government.

Small businesses are facing increasing operating expenses while consumer spending weakens. And all

of this is happening while this Kinew government insists that small tax measures somehow represent a serious affordability strategy. Manitobans know the difference between symbolic gestures and meaningful relief. They understand the difference between a headline announcement and a real savings that actually helps cover the bills at the end of the month. And they know this bill falls short.

The government's signature affordability announcement is the removal of PST on selected prepared foods sold in grocery stores and convenience stores. That's why they built this entire affordability narrative around, but most groceries in Manitoba are already PST exempt. You know, this savings on PST on junk food, it's going to—the—it's going to translate into higher health costs and things like that, so it really means nothing.

Government is focusing on a narrow category of prepared foods and snack products while Manitobans are dealing with rising costs in every other area of their lives. Hydro bills are higher. Gas prices are higher. Insurance rates are higher. Property taxes are higher. Mortgage payments are higher. Rent is higher. Everything is higher.

And after all that, this government says Manitobans should celebrate saving a few cents on junk food at the checkout counter? Not.

Honourable Speaker, families can't build a future on pennies. That's the problem with this entire bill. Government is offering Manitobans pennies in relief while taking thousands of dollars away through every available avenue. A few cents saved on a prepared food item does not offset hundreds more in education property taxes. A small PST exemption does not offset rising hydro costs.

When I was young, small, many years ago, and the government used to talk about—

An Honourable Member: Many, many, many.

Mr. Wowchuk: Many, many years ago, it used to talk about the speNDP, and I used to wonder, gee, what's that all about? Well, got a first-hand look now. A tiny reduction at the grocery checkout doesn't offset bracket creep quietly taking more from every paycheque. And a delayed rebate years from now doesn't help a family 'struggly'—struggling to make ends meet. And we see that; they want immediate savings.

And some of our suggestions and working together could have brought that forth, you know? And I mean, I—just talking today, I always said, you know, that sometimes we got to work together for the betterment

of Manitoba. But this government displays time and time again that they don't want to work. They want everything to be their initiatives and this—they—or, their failing initiatives. That's why Manitobans increasingly feel like this government is completely disconnected from financial reality families are dealing with.

People aren't worried about whether they save a few pennies on a prepared salad. Absolutely not. They're worried about whether they can afford their mortgage renewal. They're worried about whether they can afford to fill the vehicle with fuel. They're worried about the hydro increases, worried about the rent increases, worried about property tax, and the list goes on and on.

And while all that is happening, the government continues presenting tiny tax changes as though they are huge affordability measures. Manitobans are catching on. You just have to see some of the comments made now and—when you go into your constituencies and listen to them. You know, the honeymoon is over for the Kinew government. People are starting to see through them.

* (18:00)

Manitobans know, they're not—one of the biggest concerns I continue hearing is government talks constantly about affordability while ignoring the cumulative effect of all other costs it continues imposing on households. And those are astronomical. Because affordability isn't determined by a single tax exemption; families experience affordability as the total cost of living. They experience it through monthly bills, through grocery receipts, through utility payments, through mortgage renewals, through insurance premiums and through the amount left in their bank account at the end of the month. And that is the big one. That disposable income is important to all Manitobans. If they can see it on every paycheque, it's great. If they can't, it's meaningless. And the junk food tax is one way—one thing that is very meaningless.

Perhaps most concerning of all, many Manitobans no longer feel confident that things will improve anytime soon. They see themselves under this NDP government slipping further and further into the hole. That loss of confidence matters because when families lose confidence in their ability to plan for the future, it changes decisions across the board.

Young couples cannot purchase their first homes. Graduates leave searching for better opportunities in other provinces and businesses can't expand or invest.

And that's another thing—is businesses in today's world, they're being repelled from this province under a lot of these policies of this NDP government. The red tape is so astronomical, people don't want to set up shop here. Why come to Manitoba when we can go to Saskatchewan and not have to endure the type of things that we have in Manitoba that is inhibiting us from opening up shop?

That's why affordability policy must be serious, comprehensive and rooted in long-term economic growth. Unfortunately, this legislation doesn't reflect the kind of serious thinking. Instead, it reflects government focused on political optics. And we see time and time again where the Premier (Mr. Kinew) abandons all his caucus and he goes on some trip so that he can engage in photo ops and then post and say how wonderful he is. No, it's happening here in this province. It is not wonderful. We are enduring some of the hardest times under this NDP government. Instead, it reflects government focused heavily on political optics and flashy announcements.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans deserve a lot better than the Kinew government. They deserve policies that improve economic conditions in measurable and lasting ways.

Last year, this NDP government removed indexation from tax brackets. And I remember when our PC government implemented the indexation, people were saying, it's about time. Well, sorry, in comes the NDP, out goes the indexation.

That means inflation automatically pushes Manitobans into paying more income tax over time and even when workers receive modest wage increases simply to keep pace with inflation, government—excuse me—government takes a larger share from them. That is bracket creep. And make no mistake—it—no mistakes, bracket creep is a tax increase. It increases the burden on workers, seniors, middle-income families every single year, and they fall deeper into a hole. This NDP government promised Manitobans a middle-class tax cut. Instead, they increased the tax burden by eliminating indexation.

And now, after increasing taxes through bracket creep, they're presenting pennies with their PST exemption as affordability relief on—with their junk tax. Manitobans are seeing through it more and more. They understand when government's taking way more than it's returning, they fall further behind.

Honourable Speaker, nowhere is that more obvious than in the area of education property tax.

The NDP continues collecting dramatically. And what did they do? They removed the threshold where school boards could put property tax in, and now we don't have our—now we can only blame the school boards for increases, we don't have to be the ones that get blamed. You know, always kind of scheming so that they're not the bad guy. They want to put it on somebody else.

The NDP continues collecting dramatically increasing amounts of revenue through education taxes, which—pretending small future rebates somehow offset those increases. You know, a lot of people will go and ask, if you remove this tax, how—where are you going to take it from? Well, you can generate a lot of revenue in a province by opening up your doors, and people are welcome to come to Manitoba and want to set up shop, and that generates a lot of revenue, and you don't have to tax, tax, tax. You can go ahead and find other ways of running programs on those bases.

Just a few years ago, education property tax revenues were projected at about 667—or \$667 million. Now those revenues are approaching \$1.1 billion annually. That's an enormous increase, and who's paying for it? Homeowners, seniors, families, small businesses.

Just had a call the other day about seniors and a subsidy that his 93-year-old mother was receiving. The NDP decided to get rid of that, and now she is struggling. And not everybody has families and children who can give her—you know, give a little bit of help to some of them or to their children who are struggling to live from paycheque to paycheque, people throughout Manitoba who are really struggling with living expenses.

Every year, Manitobans receive property tax increases showing higher assessments and increasing taxes. Every year, more families fall behind, and every year this government take—talks about affordability while taking hundreds of millions of dollars through property taxation. Then government turns around and says they'll eventually increase the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit by another \$100—not now, not this year, not even next year.

Honourable Speaker, families are struggling today. They can't pay their bills with promises scheduled years into the future. So let's remember the scale of what the government is asking Manitobans to celebrate: a \$100-a-year—or a \$100 increase years from now while education property tax have risen—risen by hundreds of millions of dollars. For many

homeowners, annual property tax increases alone will completely erase that future rebate increase.

So Manitobans hear this government's claim they are delivering affordability relief. May—many simply shake their heads because they know the math does not add up. The NDP keep trying to sell Manitobans pennies while collecting hundreds, it's not—if not thousands of dollars. That is why so many people are frustrated, because families feel squeezed from every direction. They see more money leaving their household every month while government insists things are improving. But they're not.

Honourable Speaker, another issue that deserves discussion in this debate is Manitoba's competitiveness relative to other provinces. And I'm glad the members across are listening. You know, it kind of reminds me in my 35 years of teaching in some of my classrooms. When you say the truth and the interesting things, everything becomes very quiet—you could hear a pin drop—because they say we are wrong, we should be listening to the members across, and we should be adhering to some of their plans to make Manitoba better place.

Honourable Speaker, another issue that deserves discussion is this debate—in this debate is Manitobans' competitive relative to other provinces, because affordability and competitiveness are both connected. If Manitoba becomes less competitive economically, families ultimately pay the price.

And it really hurts to see some big industries that were going to set up in Manitoba move on to Ontario, move on to Saskatchewan, move on to Alberta because they know that there is no future in Manitoba the way this NDP government is presently running things. Businesses invest every—or elsewhere. Workers leave for higher wages and lower taxes. Young professionals build careers in provinces where they see stronger opportunity.

* (18:10)

We've had many, many fine entrepreneurs move on to Alberta, and they are thriving right now. Why? Because they don't have to put up with all the red tape that this NDP government has put forth in front of them. Manitobans already face serious challenges when competing for investment, skilled labour and economic growth. We're competing not only with neighbouring provinces but jurisdictions right across North America. And in that environment, government policy matters enormously. Tax policy matters,

regulatory policy matters, energy policy matters, investment confidence matters. Yet instead of focusing on Manitoba—making Manitoba one of the most competitive jurisdictions in Canada, this government continues moving in the wrong direction.

Businesses warn about rising costs and the burden of government policy decisions, and small businesses are feeling squeezed from every direction. Many local businesses are dealing with higher wages, higher supply costs, higher borrowing costs and weaker consumer spending. Same time, they're expected to absorb additional government costs and administrative burdens. Then, government introduces small tax exemptions and expects businesses to celebrate. But business owners understand that long-term affordability requires long-term economic growth. It requires productivity. It requires investment. It requires confidence. They're not seeing any of that here right now under this NDP government.

That's why our PC team continues emphasizing broad tax relief and economic growth rather than narrow targeted—or interventions, because a stronger 'economint'—or economy benefits everyone, and a growing private sector creates jobs, higher investment generates opportunity, competitive tax policy attracts workers and businesses. And, ultimately, a stronger economy gives families more financial security.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Honourable Speaker, our PC team has proposed a much, much better approach. We believe affordability relief should be broad-based, immediate and meaningful. We believe Manitobans should be allowed to keep more of what they earn. And even the honourable Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) is nodding his head. I agree with you. He says he's definitely seen that. And, you know, he's a good guy too. I think he's one of the ones that really, across the floor, see things. He—it's not like follow-the-leader type of deal. *[interjection]* That's—he's—he does—he knows what's the best thing to happen, you know?

And we believe government should stop trying to micromanage affordability through selective tax policies that create confusion and unfairness. That's why we propose significantly increasing basic personal exemption. Our proposal would move Manitobans toward a \$30,000 basic personal exemption, that—putting \$3,000 extra dollars in the pockets of Manitoban families.

And the important thing is it would come with every paycheque. It wouldn't be a one—I mean, if you

think you're going to have a big savings and come near that, you're going to have to eat an awful lot of chocolate bars and bags of chips and junk food in order to achieve the same results. That would put real money back into Manitobans' pockets—not pennies, not selective exemptions; real relief. For many families, that could mean thousands of dollars annually remaining in the household budgets.

And, you know, it just may mean that odd time that your—you take your—they—or your—the young families take their son or daughter, they can give them that little special treat that they want. And they would just—they're going to be so happy getting that because mom, dad had a few extra dollars to spend, that \$7, \$8 on this trip to the toy store, for me, you know. And help dealing with higher—that means help paying rent, paying mortgages, covering grocery costs, dealing with hydro bills and transportation costs.

Broad-based tax relief also supports economic growth. When Manitobans keep more of their earnings, they spend more money in their communities. That economic activity supports jobs and strengthens Manitoba organically.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, there are numerous other provisions with this legislation that also deserve examination. And there are changes related to film tax credits, administrative requirements, provisions concerning bare trusts, beneficial ownership taxation and new powers involving accommodation taxes on short-term rentals. There are changes involving school division borrowing, security insurance. There are amendments related to carbon storage legislation, provisions that affect post-secondary institutions, policy that changes with real implications for industry, taxpayers, municipalities and Manitoba institutions. Yet this government repeatedly treats BITSA legislation as though it should simply pass with limited scrutiny because it's tied to the budget.

Legislation deserves proper debate. Stakeholders deserve proper consultation. Manitobans deserve transparency from their government. Over the last several years, they've attempted to move legislation through quickly with minimal public engagement. Committee hearings have been limited. Debate has been restricted. But it's not healthy for democracy.

And legislation—this legislation falls short because, despite all the NDP announcements about affordability, this bill doesn't meaningfully reduce overall financial burden facing Manitoba families. The cost of living remains too high. Taxes remain too high. Housing remains increasingly unaffordable.

Young people continue leaving the province, and businesses continue warning about Manitoba's declining competitiveness.

Affordability is not only about current costs; it's about whether Manitobans remain in the province where people can build successful futures. And right now, many Manitobans are questioning their future here. And what's the government's answer? Announcements designed around political messaging rather than affordability improvements.

It's why our PC team continues advocating for meaningful reductions in the overall tax burden facing families, because Manitobans need room to breathe. Wouldn't it be nice if all the members across said: You know what? That is a good idea, raising that threshold to \$30,000. Let's do it. Everybody would walk away here. They would be happy. We would be happy. And Manitobans would be the winners.

But that's not the way this government thinks. They don't want—they pick and choose. They keep on doing that. And I know the Minister of Finance is looking because he's—it's resonating. He's saying, you know what? You're right. They need political policies that strengthen Manitoba's economy rather than weaken it.

Honourable Speaker—Deputy Speaker, I also want to emphasize the importance of amendments before us today. Sending this legislation to committee is not obstruction, it's accountability. This process makes legislation stronger. Let all Manitobans speak. Let homeowners discuss rising education property taxes. Let families explain the real pressures they're facing. Let businesses discuss competitiveness concerns. That's how democratic accountability is supposed to work.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, our team has been clear: we're prepared to work together for the betterment of Manitoba. This bill relies far too heavily on symbolic measures. Manitobans deserve so much better. They deserve a government who recognizes the seriousness of the pressures families are under. They deserve a government willing to reduce overall tax burden rather than simply rearranging it. They deserve a government focused on long-term competitiveness and economic growth. And they—Manitobans—deserve a legislative process that values transparency, scrutiny and public participation.

The end of the day, affordability is measured very simply. It's measured when families sit down each month and try to make the numbers work. It's mea-

sured when seniors decide whether they can afford to remain in their homes. It's measured when young Manitobans decide whether their future exists here or somewhere else, in another province. And right now, too many Manitobans know that things are becoming harder, not easier.

Because before this legislation moves forward, Manitobans deserve the opportunity to speak, and they can speak for themselves. They deserve governments that work together for the betterment of their province, for the betterment of their families, for the betterment of their communities. They deserve transparency, they deserve accountability and, most importantly—most—this is the most important thing: they deserve affordability measures, and they can get it from that threshold. They deserve affordability measures that are actually equal to the challenges that they face every single day.

* (18:20)

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the amendment that my colleague, the member from Red River North, brought forward. And I want to start by explaining how important this amendment is.

And it's what we, our PC team, has been saying all along, is that this BITSA bill, the NDP's budget, does not provide real, meaningful affordability relief for Manitobans. And what we've seen is this NDP government, they won't even stand up and speak to their own budget bill. They're embarrassed by it. They know it's not enough for Manitobans. They know Manitobans need more right now. They know Manitobans are deeply struggling.

But they're not listening to them. They're not listening to Manitobans. They don't care. They're not willing to do the work and they're not willing to provide real affordability relief, desperate affordability relief that Manitobans need. And we saw this yesterday.

They don't even believe in their own budget bill. Yesterday, they didn't want to stay late to work because they don't believe in their budget bill. They don't believe that the measures that have been put forward is enough. They know that they can implement their various mediocre tax measures without passing BITSA, which is exactly why they didn't care to bring the budget bill second reading to a vote yesterday.

They're going to do what they're going to do, but the reality is what we've been saying all along: they don't care, they don't want to listen, they're not going to do the work and they know that their budget bill isn't enough. And, in fact, Deputy Speaker, they're embarrassed by it. They're embarrassed that the budget bill and BITSA that's been brought forward is not enough to help Manitobans right now.

And we saw it with figures that came out last week. Manitoba has the highest inflation rate in the entire country at 4.3 per cent. A significant increase over the month, last month. While every other province is trending a little bit downwards, Manitoba is going in the opposite direction. And things are getting worse.

The same can be said for food inflation. Manitoba has the highest food inflation in the country, 4.9 per cent. And when you look at the items at the grocery store that Manitobans are struggling to purchase—ground beef, lettuce, celery, pork, vegetables, fruit, healthy food that Manitobans want to purchase—that's what Manitobans are struggling to afford right now.

But what the NDP fails to acknowledge is that those items are already PST tax exempt. Manitobans already don't pay PST on those items at the grocery store. So what this NDP has brought in is—essentially, it's a junk food tax. It's a few cents, a few pennies off some pop and some chips.

You know, failing to recognize that many Manitobans are dealing with diabetes right now, and this is the opposite of what we should be encouraging Manitobans to purchase at the grocery store. But they fail to recognize that.

They fail to acknowledge that just like they're failing to acknowledge that health care has gotten worse under their watch, just like they fail to recognize that Manitobans are struggling under affordability crisis and a cost-of-living crisis, just like they're failing to acknowledge that Manitobans need more right now—4.3 per cent inflation in Canada, the highest in the country; 4.9 per cent food inflation, the highest in the country.

And just today, more numbers came out indicating that Manitobans are relying more and more on credit card debt while in every other province, families and individuals are relying less on credit card debt. But not in Manitoba. So Manitobans have to ask themselves why. Why are things so much worse for them than it is for other families and other people in other provinces?

So we're here to tell those Manitobans why it's so much worse for them. And it's worse for Manitobans because of decisions that this NDP government is making that is directly impacting Manitobans' cost of living. So let's go through and look at what those reasons are.

The most blatant example is the basic personal exemption. This NDP came in and they froze the basic personal exemption, they cancelled indexation. That's pushing Manitobans—more Manitobans into a higher tax bracket.

So what that means is any increase in wages that Manitobans might get or see from their employer will not actually be felt, because now they're pushed into a higher tax bracket, because that tax bracket is not indexed to inflation. Every other province in Canada: Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI, and Newfoundland. What's one thing they all have in common? They index to tax brackets.

This NDP government is doing the opposite. They cancelled indexation while other provinces have brought it in, recognizing that each of those provinces has inflationary pressures. Yet this NDP government is ignoring that, and they cancelled it at a time when Manitoba has the highest inflation and food inflation in the country. This just does not make sense, Deputy Speaker. Every other province has recognized inflationary pressures on its citizens, except—except—for Manitoba. Manitoba is the only province to not have indexation. That really says something about where this NDP's government's priorities lie, because it's not supporting Manitobans in affordability. If it was, they would do, at the very least, the standard of including indexation, but they didn't.

And as I said, Deputy Speaker, that is the standard. That is a simple policy affordability measure that every other province is doing. But not this NDP. They think they know better. They don't think Manitoba's dealing with inflation pressures right now, despite what all the statistics are saying: 4.3 per cent inflation, highest in the country; 4.9 per cent food inflation, highest in the country. And we know, and we're hearing from Manitobans all the time, that Manitobans are closer and closer to insolvency, and the statistics show that.

Meyers Norris Penny, MNP, comes out with reports talking about insolvency. And their last one—their most recent—over 50 per cent of Manitobans are reporting that they're within \$200 of insolvency—\$200.

Manitobans can barely get out of a grocery store with food for \$200 right now. You know, I have two kids; we're a family of four. Food's expensive. It's expensive to feed a family. And with over 50 per cent of Manitobans within \$200 of insolvency, those Manitobans need more than pennies because that's all this NDP government has offered them.

This is why, and this is the exact reason why, we have called on the NDP to increase the basic personal exemption to \$30,000. That would bring \$1,500 back for that single mom making \$40,000; \$3,000 back for that household family—the two-income household, that family—\$3,000 a year. I would think, and Manitobans know, that that's money that they desperately need. But this government refuses to listen. They're refusing to recognize the true cost-of-living pressures that are facing those Manitoba families.

So let's talk about where that \$1,500 could go, or that \$3,000 for the family—for a family. It could go to food. As I mentioned, highest food inflation in the country, 4.9 per cent. That could go to paying for healthy food for their families. But we also know that every family has a different household budget. Every family has different household challenges.

So there might be another family that need to pay their property tax bills with that money. That's another reason why Manitobans are so much worse off compared to other provinces. And the CPI numbers that came out last week indicated property taxes were one of the reasons why Manitobans are worse off.

And so let's just go through, Deputy Speaker, why that is. Why are inflation numbers so high because of property taxes here in Manitoba? So let's walk through what the NDP have done over the past two and a half, almost three years to make that happen.

*(18:30)

An Honourable Member: Nothing.

Mrs. Stone: Actually, it's not nothing. They did worse. They did things and made decisions that are putting Manitobans worse off as it relates to property taxes. They cancelled the 50 per cent education property tax rebate that delivered 50 per cent of education property taxes in a rebate form back to Manitoba households. So they cancelled that, they brought in their own measure.

But then what else did they do? They cancelled the 2 per cent cap on school divisions, and they didn't fund school divisions to inflation. So shocking, what

ended up happening, school divisions jacked up their mill rates, double-digit numbers on Manitobans—double-digit increases on Winnipeg families and Manitobans. And Manitoba households and Manitoba homeowners are now paying the price for that.

So those are three things that have directly led to an increase in property taxes. Manitoba's had the highest increase in property taxes in the entire country: 20 per cent since just last year. And yet, this NDP government doesn't think Manitobans need affordability relief. At the same time, they think that, oh, yes, all Manitobans can afford to pay their property taxes and they can just keep absorbing those costs because of decisions they made.

And sure, last year it was sloppy. It was a sloppy mistake, and we spoke about that in the House. It was sloppy because they made a very rash knee-jerk reaction. They didn't want to keep the PCs' 50 per cent rebate so they came up with their own.

But, as we've seen with every single policy that this NDP government puts forward and every single bill and legislation, they don't think through what they're announcing. And this has come-become apparent time and time again.

So, yes, it was sloppy last year. They didn't think it through. They've had a year to correct that mistake. But, no, they didn't. And, again, property owners are paying the price for a second year in a row because school divisions, again, jack up their mill rates, double-digit increases. The NDP government didn't, again, fund school divisions to inflation, as we've heard from superintendents across the province.

The school divisions are asking for a sustainable funding model. The school divisions know that what currently exists here in Manitoba is not sustainable for the long term. Homeowners are saying this isn't sustainable, to continue to place the financial burden on their property values and assessments.

I think about that low-income or fixed-income senior who's been in their home for three decades now paying thousands of dollars in additional property taxes and education property taxes. That's what this NDP government has done to Manitobans and Manitoba homeowners with the decisions that they've made, because they didn't think through something.

But, like I said, it was sloppy last year, and they've had a year to correct it and they still haven't. And it's going to happen again next year because they just don't care and they don't listen to Manitobans. And that becomes abundantly clear. And this in-time and

time again, this NDP government stands up and they're quick with the cameras and quick with the TikToks and make an announcement without thinking through the consequences.

And we saw that a couple years ago with the fuel tax, where they left out dyed fuel. They purposely left out farmers—purposely or mistakenly—because they made an announcement and they didn't think through the consequences or what the legislation actually would look like in practice.

And it wasn't until my colleague, the MLA for Portage la Prairie, and the Leader of the Opposition forced the NDP to sit late into the night until they finally recognized that, oh, yes, maybe we should include the farmers that actually grow our food, fuel our province. They ignored them. They didn't think it through.

And that's happening again with their BITSA bill. They left out restaurants. Actually, first, they left out mom-and-pop shops and convenience stores because they announced something for grocery stores, big chain grocery stores. And they left out the little guys across the street. And it wasn't until pressure from our PC team that they realized, oh, yes, this was a mistake. We should probably make that change.

And then they did. But then they left out restaurants, restaurants that contribute \$3.5 billion to our economy; over 42,000 jobs. That—those are not small numbers. Our restaurants are owned by immigrants, they're owned by Manitoba families—many of them are family-run businesses.

Small businesses are the backbone of our province, and restaurants are a key part of that. But this NDP government continues to leave them out, just like they left out convenience stores, just like they left out farmers a year and a half ago.

And, again, this goes back to: They do not think through the policies that they are announcing. And this is becoming a pattern with this NDP government. You know, I've already spoken to three different examples about where this NDP announces something before they do the work, before they do the consultation. And that's where consultation is so important.

And had this NDP actually consulted with the construction industry—here's another example: Announce something, make it sound all fluffy and good for the public until they realize that they've left out 88 per cent of construction workers from bidding on public projects. And now the industry has spoken up

and said, we don't want this. You're picking and choosing winners and losers.

On our side of the House, our PC team, we stand up for all workers. We're not going to pick and choose winners and losers, union or non-union. Should be fair competition. We believe in a fair market—free market. We believe in fairness. But the NDP doesn't, because they don't listen and they don't care. And the construction industry is speaking up loud and clear. And they've done the work for the NDP and they've let them know that this could cost up to 20 per cent in additional costs for a public project.

One of the association—construction industry associations came out and indicated that would be the additional cost for a school in Brandon. Taxpayers can't afford that. But the NDP just keeps layering. They keep layering and layering on costs to Manitoba taxpayers because they're not thinking through the legislation that they're bringing forward.

And this is seen with BITSA, as I mentioned. They've left out restaurants. They haven't included any real affordability measures for Manitobans. We're the only province in Canada to not have indexation on income taxes during the time when Manitoba has the highest inflation in the entire country.

You know, this is actually one of the reasons why, last year, I brought forward a bill, The Budget Bill Public Accountability Act, to ensure that budget bills actually go to committee. Because we already know that the NDP is not consulting with those that are being impacted by their BITSA bill or their legislation and their bills that they bring forward. That's been abundantly clear. It's why last year when they brought BITSA forward, they stapled major pieces of legislation onto the backs of BITSA so that they could avoid accountability to the public.

What the public accountability bill would do was it would sure that all BITSA budget bills would go to a public committee so that Manitobans would have a say. This is why we have committee. We have committee for every other bill that comes forward in the House. But the one bill that we don't is the one that impacts taxpayers the most, budget and tax implementation bill—the largest bill and most important—arguably the most important bill that a government brings forward. But they sidestep public accountability.

And the reason why committee is important is because the NDP—and all governments—they don't know everything. And if they're not going to consult,

then there's certainly going to be key gaps within the legislation that could otherwise be fixed. And it's been known that during committee stages, governments do fix gaps in legislation as a result of committee members coming forward. You know, and sometimes they don't and they ignore those Manitobans, and that is what it is; it's unfortunate.

But what we're seeing with this NDP government is they're not listening to Manitobans to begin with. And they don't want to listen to them at committee. If they did, and if they really cared about transparency and accountability, then they would bring BITSA to a public committee to hear from Manitobans.

And perhaps they would listen and they would broaden out some of their measures here to be more fair, to include those that they've forgotten—like restaurants, for example, like other small businesses—as opposed to having to backtrack and then make more announcements in the media like, oh, yes, we forgot about this industry, so now we're announcing to include them.

* (18:40)

It just shows a government, Deputy Speaker, that is immature in its governance. It shows that they don't know how to govern because they're not thinking through what they're doing. They're not thinking through the legislation and the bills that they're bringing forward, and that shows an immaturity of a government. It also shows the immaturity of a government who's not willing to listen, and that's been very, very clear.

And we know Manitobans are calling on this NDP to do more on affordability relief. We know Manitobans want to see the basic personal exemption increase. And to be fair, Deputy Speaker, we tried to compromise with the NDP on that. If the PCs are elected, we'll increase the basic personal exemption to \$30,000. That's our commitment to Manitobans and we'll make that happen. *[interjection]*

And, you know, the minister asks about how to pay for it, and this just shows the immaturity of governance because it's about choices. It's about choices. The government can—you know, they're heckling me because they know—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: —they know—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stone: Our side of the House knows that you pay for things by growing the economy. Manitoba has the lowest economic GDP growth in the entire country. We also know that bureaucratic spending has increased significantly under this NDP government. And while federal Prime Minister Mark Carney and every other province are trying to control bloated bureaucracy in order to provide more affordability for its citizens, this NDP government's doing the opposite.

It's about choices, Deputy Speaker. The difference between our side of the House and this NDP is that they're not willing to make choices, and right now their choice is to put Manitobans last and their friends first.

And that's really unfortunate because what Manitobans need is affordability relief. And that is so clear with the numbers that have come out over the past couple of weeks. Highest inflation in the country, highest food inflation in the country, more Manitobans relying on credit card debt, as was released today, where in every other province, their citizens and those families are relying less on credit card debt. Over 50 per cent of Manitobans within \$200 of insolvency.

Those are the real struggles facing Manitobans that this NDP government refuses to listen to, and this is exactly why we have brought this amendment forward. It's because this bill doesn't take into account real affordability relief. And I know and I hope the residents of St. James are watching this debate this evening and know that we are fighting to increase their basic personal amount to \$30,000 and that their MLA, the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), is offering them pennies.

And when they see that comparison—pennies from the NDP and the Minister of Finance—to up to \$3,000 per year from the PCs—they'll know what the answer is. They support this proposal. Manitobans support this proposal and we're hearing from them, and I know the members opposite are heckling because we're getting emails from their constituents. We hear Manitobans say that they like this proposal and this is the real affordability relief that they need.

But this NDP refuses to listen. And like I said, Deputy Speaker, we've tried to compromise. We are willing to work with the NDP. I sent a letter to the Minister of Finance asking him to co-operate and come to the table and collaborate. He ignored it. I asked the Minister of Finance to sit down so that we could discuss BITSA and co-operate and collaborate on it. He ignored it. Many of my other colleagues did

the same thing. They're ignoring it. Manitobans are asking for more affordability relief. They're ignoring it.

So what does all this mean, Deputy Speaker? This means—and, again, I will say it again and again—this is an NDP government that isn't listening to Manitobans; they don't care what Manitobans want or what Manitobans need and that is really unfortunate because, as I said—and I will continue to repeat it, and I will repeat it until the members hear me and listen—Manitobans desperately need real affordability relief right now. And we're hearing it every day from their constituents.

This is the reality that Manitoba families are facing every single day. Just this week, I was at a grocery store in Waverley. The price of healthy school snacks for my kids is soaring. I know the MLA for Waverley has a young family, and I can't imagine he's comfortable sending his small children to school without healthy food.

But, unfortunately, in Bill 53, that reality is not the case because Manitobans simply cannot afford to feed their families. Beef, vegetables, fruit, pork, healthy food, this is what Manitobans cannot afford, and all this NDP government's offering them is pennies off of junk food. When we look at Manitoba having the highest food inflation in the country, we're talking about healthy food. That's the impact. Their mediocre PST junk food cut isn't going to help Manitoba families in any significant way.

Manitobans know that our PC team is working for them. We know that Manitobans are struggling deeply and that they need real financial help. Again, 4.3 per cent: highest inflation in the country. And this NDP is offering nothing. More Manitobans with credit card debt, relying more on credit cards to pay for things like food and fuel: that's the challenge that Manitobans are facing.

So an extra \$3,000 sure would go a long way for those Manitoba families. It could help pay for food at the—for their families on the dinner table. It could help pay for the NDP's property tax scheme. It could help pay for fuel to get to work or get their kids to sports. That could help families put their kids in sports; sports are expensive now. It could help parents pay for kids to go to camp during the summer, also very expensive. Or it could help some of those families who just want a family night out, bowling, pizza night, movies.

All of those things cost money. All those things are expensive. Those are things that a lot of families

are giving up right now because they just cannot afford to do it because more and more Manitobans can barely afford the basic necessities alone.

And so let's just talk for a minute about the economy and the lack of economic growth under this NDP government, because this is something that they're also not prioritizing. There's nothing in BITSA that helps to grow the economy. And we know, on our side of the House, that to pay for things and when Manitobans succeed is when the economy's doing well.

I don't know how this NDP government expects to pay for anything at a 1.1 economic growth rate. And they didn't even prioritize it in their budget or their BITSA bill. I don't know how this—these ministers and this NDP government expects to pay for all the social services that they're announcing without growing the economy. Everything comes back to growing the economy. That is how we pay for things. And the fact that this NDP government does not understand that is a big problem, and it's a big problem for Manitoba.

And we've seen that with the statistics of where Manitoba's economic growth is right now. We've seen businesses leaving. We've seen investment fleeing. You look at the mining industry alone, Manitoba went from sixth under the PC government, in mining attractiveness and investment attractiveness, to 26th. That's the direction this NDP government's taking because they are not prioritized on the economy. But that is exactly how you pay for things in this province. You pay for things by growing the economy.

And so while every other province is out there attracting investment and attracting businesses into their province, Manitoba's driving them away with their high-tax, anti-business rhetoric. And Manitoba's going to lose out. And we saw Manitoba lose out for 16 years under the previous NDP government. And Manitoba's going down the exact same trajectory. We are losing out compared to neighbouring provinces and other jurisdictions.

So, Deputy Speaker, I don't know how the NDP is going to plan to pay for anything other than put us severely into debt, onto future generations, because until they start prioritizing growing the economy for our province, then Manitobans are going to be at a loss. This brings in jobs, brings in money, helps support our social services. Our youth unemployment went up to 14 per cent this past year. That is high, Deputy Speaker.

* (18:50)

And yet, again, we look at this BITSA bill and they excluded restaurants, restaurants that employ youth. As they've decided to pick and choose winners and losers through the jobs agreement, they're also picking and choosing winners and losers through their PST junk food tax. Because fairness—

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

An Honourable Member: Leave.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there leave for the member to continue?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I hear a no.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): It gives me—I'm honoured to stand here today. I'm honoured to be elected as an MLA in the province of Manitoba. And what I want to see is I want to see our kids, our grandkids want to stay in this province of Manitoba.

This is a great province if we let it be. But we have to help grow the economy, as my colleague from Midland has been speaking about here. We can't afford any more debt. We can't afford to be banking on our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren to help pay for the mistakes that this current NDP government is looking at doing.

The amendment that we introduced—the member from Red River North introduced—that we have not seen any satisfying evidence or assurance that this bill provides any real and meaningful affordability to Manitobans. I don't see any real affordability when we're going out and buying bags of popcorn or a bag of chips or a Coca-Cola; that's just not going to cut it.

What will cut it is real saving. Real savings that we have introduced should be part of this Manitoba moving forward. I rise today to speak on the BITSA bill, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, and to speak not just about what is written in this legislation but about what's missing in this legislation.

And one of the first things that I see that is missing in this legislation is no opportunity for people to be heard at committee. For the people of Manitoba—the people that we all serve in this great building today do not have a chance to speak on this.

So we, on this side, will stand up and speak for Manitobans. Because budgets are not simply accounting documents; budgets are moral documents.

They reveal a government's priorities, and I don't want my government to have a priority that includes a bag of chips and a Coke. They show Manitobans who matters, what matters and whether government truly understands the realities people are living through each and every single day.

We see people at the grocery store every day that pick up a package of meat and put it back because they can't afford it. We see people going early in the morning to bake shops to pick up day-old bread and buns.

The Speaker in the Chair

This is a wealthy, wonderful province, and why are we putting so many strains on people? And what Manitobans needed from this budget was relief they could actually feel—not headlines, not slogans, not symbolic announcements, not tiny savings that disappear before even a family notices them.

One of the issues I have with packaged food that this government has introduced as taking the tax off of, is a lot of those foods are very unhealthy. With our proposed amendment, we're giving people the opportunity to spend money the way that they see fit, and that way we will be able to stimulate the economy.

As the member from Midland said, restaurants are not part of this bill package. Yet restaurants employ a lot of younger people that are starting their first jobs. I'll never forget my first job working in the pizza place in Portage la Prairie, slicing cheese. I thought I was on top of the world. I had \$50 or \$60 in my pocket. That was a lot of money for an old guy like me. That was a long time ago.

What Manitobans needed was meaningful affordability relief, meaningful investment in mental health and addictions recovery, meaningful long-term planning and meaningful transparency from this government. Can you imagine what this government could've done with over \$350,000? That's the kind of money that's being spent on watching a cinder block building at 366 Henry. I'm not sure what could happen to a cinder block building, but since December 5 we have been spending your money to watch that cinder block building. Does that make sense to you, Manitobans? I don't think so.

Instead, what they received was another oversized omnibus bill that bundles together unrelated measures, limits proper scrutiny and asks Manitoba just to trust the government on their spending decisions without providing enough evidence that these measures will actually improve anybody's life.

Honourable Speaker, families in this province are not struggling by a few dollars a month. They're struggling by hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars. The food inflation is out of control. We can—we are not able to turn enough dollars with this current NDP government to stop the threat of the increased money that it is going to cost our kids and our grandkids. So we need to stand up every day on this side of the House. We're fighting not only for the people of Manitoba today, but we are fighting for the future of Manitoba.

People are choosing between groceries and rent, between fuel and medication. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine a person that is out there that may have anxiety issues and they're trying to decide whether they should buy fuel in order to get to work or whether they should be buying their anxiety medication? I can't imagine that. Between paying utility bills and buying clothes for their kids—how can that be? How can we, in this rich country of Canada, how can we let Manitobans worry about whether they should pay their utility bill or whether they should be buying clothes? Young families are wondering if they will ever be able to buy a home.

Under this current plan that the NDP is proposing with their BITSA bill, there's going to be a lot of kids living in their parents' basements. Is that fair, Manitoban—Manitoba? I don't think so. Seniors lived on fixed incomes are stretching every dollar further and further than ever before. Students are graduating into an economy where affordability feels increasingly out of reach.

* (19:00)

The other thing that is hampering these kids that are coming into the workforce is the one-to-one ratio that we deal with when it comes with any type of journeyman and that. They can't get a job; they can't be paid properly because of the ham—because they're being hamstrung by this government.

I hear one of the ministers across the way is questioning anything that I'm saying, and I'd like to say: please get up and speak on this. We'd like to hear the reasoning on why this bill—why you will not let this bill go to committee. Let Manitoba—hear from Manitobans; let them tell you this bill does not work for them.

Students are graduating into an economy, like I said, that feels out of reach more and more every day. Workers are putting in full-time hours and still finding themselves falling behind. We're also

seeing—we're seeing people that are building apartment blocks, that are building different types of buildings out there and they're saying, no more; I cannot invest in this province anymore, and they're leaving the province. They're leaving the province because there is no way they can continue to exist here.

Workers are putting in full-time hours. They continue to work two jobs, three jobs, and at any time when Manitobans are facing historical affordability pressures, this government continues celebrating measures that amount to mere pennies in savings while the real cost-of-living crisis keeps getting worse. And I keep thinking about that person that has to decide whether they buy groceries or whether they buy medication. What do they do? Again, we're putting such a burden on families.

Honourable Speaker, Manitobans do not need performative affordability; they need real affordability. A family paying skyrocketing grocery bills is not rescued by symbolic tax tweaks. The farmer in North Norfolk that is paying over \$1,200 a metric ton for nitrogen cannot afford to pay 43 per cent extra on his education tax because of these measures that this NDP government is forcing upon them.

People are falling behind faster than this government is willing to admit and nowhere is this failure more obvious than in the broader affordability crisis created under this government. Families are desperate; families are stretched; communities are exhausted; front-line workers are overwhelmed. Yet, despite all the speeches and announcements, government has not provided sufficient evidence that is—that its current spending priorities are actually meeting the scale of emergencies Manitobans are facing.

To this NDP government: Give Manitobans a chance. Let them go to committee to hear what they need to hear. We hear announcements. We hear press conferences. We hear talking points. Again, I got questioned by a constituent the other day that is an engineer that said this government is talking about opening up Churchill in three years? Has anybody seen the permafrost? Has anybody seen the way the railroad is in shape up there? And does anybody realize that most of the grain travels east and west, not north and south?

But where are the measurable outcomes? Where are the province-wide strategies with measurable targets? This government is known for making grandiose announcements and absolutely no plan to go with it. We are currently spending right now five times the amount of money on a drug consumption site than we

are on recovery. Why are we doing that? Why are we not trying to help people get better? Why are people having to line up? And if they are saying—because this drug consumption site is now opening, supposedly in a month—where are they going to go for recovery if they're asking for recovery? There are no beds. There is no place for detox. There is no beds for recovery.

In Portage la Prairie, my own city, there is one detox bed. If a person goes into a RAAM clinic and says, okay, I'm ready, I want some help, I want your help, I want to get better, you know what they get told? Maybe in three to six months we can help you out. That is no way for a government to perform.

Where are the benchmarks for success? Where is the evidence that these policies are truly making life substantially more affordable for Manitoba families? Where are they? Maybe when the NDP does get up to speak, they will show us where this is going to be more affordable for Manitoba families because there is no evidence.

This NDP government has shown us no evidence where people are going to save money. It has shown no evidence of where our economy is going to grow. It has—what it has shown is that Manitoba plates are leaving here on a daily basis because Manitobans deserve more than political branding around fiscal policy and affordable living. They deserve results.

And, again, when we talk about the amendment, we have not seen satisfying evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability. There is no sign of it. Because Manitobans deserve more than political branding.

Honourable Speaker, this government frequently speaks about evidence-based policy. Well, where is it? Show Manitobans, stand up, let them see it. Stand up and show them. If that is truly the case, then taxpayers deserve accountability. Taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being spent and where it's being spent. They deserve to know whether programs are producing measurable improvements. How will we ever know that? They deserve to know whether government spending is actually helping families keep up with rising costs.

We need to know that our—we're in Manitoba where we are one of the richest farm provinces in all of the world and we are being hamstrung. People are struggling to put a crop into the ground. And what is this government offering? A bag of chips and a Coca-Cola.

And government should not bring forward major policy changes and then accuse critics of obstructing

when legitimate questions are asked. Questions are not obstruction. What we are to do in this House is debate. Accountability is not an obstruction. Scrutiny is not an obstruction. That is what democracy is all about. And Manitobans deserve that democracy, especially when public debt continues to grow and grow and grow under this NDP government, and financial pressures continue to intensify.

Honourable Speaker, here's the evidence. This Province cannot continue spending without measurable outcomes. If spending rises but wait times remain high, Manitobans notice. If announcements increase but services remain inaccessible, Manitobans notice. And nowhere do they notice it more than in that brand-new hospital in Portage la Prairie that remains closed. When will this NDP government tell us what the cost of running a closed hospital is costing? What is the electricity costing? What is the heating and cooling costing? What is it costing for the staff that was hired to start on the 27th of October? There is no sign of any costs on that.

* (19:10)

If budgets grow but families continue following behind, Manitobans notice. And, naturally, they begin asking where the money is going, and they should. Manitobans have the right to know where their dollars are being spent.

Honourable Speaker, a government member may stand in this 'chamer'—Chamber and claim affordability has improved, but if a Manitoba family is still struggling to buy groceries, still struggling to afford child care, still struggling to pay their heating and cooling bills, then, understandably, they may question whether the government truly understands what their reality is.

And that disconnect matters politically, but more importantly, it matters socially and economically. Because when people begin feeling that government messaging no longer reflects their lived experience, trust begins to erode.

And we hear that. We see that. We've heard that from the Manitoba Trucking Association. We've heard that from the construction associations: 85 cents per man-hour will be added on to all government major projects. If that was the case, we would be able—if that was the norm back when the hospital in Portage was being built, we could have put in two or three MRIs into that hospital.

Instead, what do we do? We continue to let people wait. We continue to let people die. We continue to force

hospitals to spend more money to try and help people, because diagnosis is coming too late.

Honourable Speaker, we also need to ask whether this legislation represents the best use of public resources, because every dollar government spends is a dollar earned by a hard-working Manitoban—a hard-working Manitoban that is likely working more than one job.

Honourable Speaker, we also need to ask whether this legislation represents all of Manitobans. Because—and particularly during periods of economic uncertainty, government have a responsibility to ensure public spending produces meaningful results. That should not be controversial in any way. That should simply be responsibility of governance.

So when legislation is introduced, opposition members are entirely justified in asking important questions. And the only way they could do that is if they were allowed to speak at committee, for them to have a voice.

Why will this NDP government not let Manitobans have a voice? What measurable outcomes will this produce? How many Manitobans will benefit? How significantly will they benefit? For how long, and at what cost? And how will success be evaluated? If we're not looking at evaluations, then how do we know anything has worked properly? Those are not partisan questions. Those are fundamental governance questions.

Honourable Speaker, I think Manitobans are also increasingly concerned about whether government is addressing root causes rather than symptoms. And again, that's why I am speaking today on the amendment that we have not seen satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability for Manitobans.

An Honourable Member: The motion.

MLA Bereza: The motion. Because affordability pressures did not emerge overnight, and they will not disappear overnight.

That means government must think beyond short-term announcements and focus on long-term structural affordability. That includes taxation policy. That includes housing policy. That includes economic growth. That includes energy affordability. That includes creating an environment where wages can grow and families can build stability over time. And many Manitobans are asking whether this bill genuinely addresses those deeper structural concerns

or whether it is simply another short-term measure designed primarily for political messaging, like we heard about the Churchill announcement.

Honourable Speaker, predictability matters. Families want certainty. Businesses want certainty. Workers want certainty. Investors want certainty. Because if there is no certainty, they will go west to Saskatchewan or Alberta, or east into Ontario, and they will be welcomed with open arms, not closed doors. And legislation that lacks clear, measurable outcomes creates uncertainty about whether affordability relief will actually materialize in a meaningful way.

That is why permanent affordability measures matter so much. That is why broad tax relief matters so much. Because Manitobans actually plan around these policies. They can budget around them. They can make long-term decisions around them.

And that is precisely why we continue advocating measures like increasing the basic personal exemption for a family to have \$1,500 to \$3,000, that they can decide on their own—not being told by a government—how they need to spend that money, not being told, the only relief you're going to get here is on a bag of chips, a bag of popcorn, maybe a bag of salad—

An Honourable Member: Rotisserie chicken.

MLA Bereza: —and a chicken rotisserie.

If a measure is modest—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Bereza: —government should say it is modest. If a measure provides temporary assistance, government should acknowledge that—it honestly.

But overselling limited measures as transformational affordability policy ultimately damages the public's confidence. And, again, it chases them right out of Manitoba. Because people compare government claims against their lived reality, and right now, many Manitobans are still struggling. That is simply the truth.

Honourable Speaker, we on this side of the House are not opposing for the sake of opposing; we are asking legitimate questions because Manitobans deserve legitimate answers.

And if government cannot clearly demonstrate how this legislation will produce measurable affordability improvements, then Manitobans have every right to remain skeptical of this government because families are evaluating policy through the lens of their

own monthly budgets, and many families are still finding those budgets are stretched to the limit.

Ultimately, this debate comes down to a very simple principle: Government should not merely announce policies; government should prove that the policies work. And until we see stronger evidence, clear measurable outcomes and meaningful long-term affordability improvements for Manitoba families, we continue raising concern on behalf of people we were elected to represent.

* (19:20)

Yet Manitobans continue struggling to find affordable housing while demanding—while demand continues rising. This is—so when government says it's addressing addiction, mental health, homelessness, affordability and community safety, Manitobans expect an integrated strategy, not isolated announcements, not disconnected spending lines, not political messaging. Because Manitobans do not need pennies.

Manitobans need real help, and they deserve a government willing to provide. They need policies that put substantial dollars back in people's pockets. They need addiction treatment available when someone reaches out for help. They need recovery supports in rural Manitoba. Honourable Speaker, I could go on and on and on.

Thank you for—

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

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Please stop. Stop with the applause. It's all good. It's all good.

Well, I'm glad to get up and speak on this motion here in the Legislature tonight, and I'll just read it again to show what we're sitting here and discussing tonight.

This House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or 'assuridance' that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

So let's move over to a few quotes. And Honourable Speaker, these are out of Hansard, so anybody can look them up publicly. Here's a quote, and this is about affordability and what we haven't seen in this BITSA.

Here's a quote: They're removing rate-setting oversight from the Public Utilities Board and giving their Cabinet complete control. This would allow this

government to increase hydro rates without the Public Utilities Board oversight. This removes accountability and it removes transparency.

And I can hear members asking, well, who said that? Well, that was this current Minister of Finance (MLA Sala). He said that on May 18th of 2022. So what they're doing is making things unaffordable by setting a lot of rates and going around the Public Utilities Board with this bill. And this is not affordable for Manitobans. And that's exactly what this motion talks about.

But this minister is doing the exact opposite of what they have committed to do, and that is the definition of a hypocrite. And we've talked about this before, about the hypocrites on the other side of the House.

Here's another quote: This bill, and I quote, allows this government to set hydro rates at the Cabinet table. This bill represents the total and complete politicization of hydro rate setting in this province. It weakens the role of the Public Utilities Board. And this is not the path to affordability for Manitobans.

And, oh, sorry, yes, people are asking, members opposite. The Finance Minister knows who said it because it was him, and he's hanging his head in shame as we speak. Here's another one: Manitobans know the truth—and this is a quote. I'll start it again: Manitobans know the truth. They know that on that side of the House they stand for dismantling the PUB and jacking up rates. Rates should be frozen. What's the Finance Minister doing? This is his quote again. What's the Finance minister doing? Setting rates at the Cabinet table, jacking them up. That is the definition of a hypocrite.

So here's another quote: Without any hearings, this premier is ordering Manitoba Hydro to dramatically increase their rates. Well, there's another one, another definition of hypocrisy. And who said that? That is the current Premier (Mr. Kinew) of this province.

And then what does that Premier do? He goes and jacks the rate up at the Cabinet table. Go to the PUB? No, forget that. We'll just skirt around the PUB and what they all stand for, even though, on October 13, 2020, specifically said that that is something that he wouldn't do. But then he goes and does it.

So there you have it. That's this current government. Hypocrites. They're eliminating—here's another quote: They're eliminating that function and moving rate setting from the independently reviewed process at the PUB to the Cabinet table. Who said this?

March 16, 2021. Again, the Finance Minister. Again, hanging his head in shame.

May 16, 2022. Here is another quote—sorry, May 31, 2022: It takes all rate-setting power away from the Public Utilities Board and places that in—power into the hands of Cabinet. Again—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I'm not sure just exactly how all of the member's references to the Public Utilities Board and Manitoba Hydro are relevant to anything in this particular piece of legislation.

So if the member could bring his comments back to this or tie them in somehow, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Johnson: Absolutely. I'd be more pleased.

And I started out with this motion and repeating it because it is about evidence of assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

And Manitobans need these affordability measures, Honourable Speaker. And thank you for reminding me to remind members why we're here tonight and talking about the failures of this bill and why we shouldn't give it second reading because of those failures.

Here's another quote. This is April 19, 2021: They object to the premier trying to upset the authority of the Public Utilities Board and use his pen at the Cabinet table instead to set their rates. Who said that? That's the current Premier (Mr. Kinew).

And, again, this is about affordability, and that's what we're discussing with this motion here. It's about affordability and the pressures that Manitobans are feeling on all fronts. It's about the minimum 1.1 per cent economic growth that we see as a province, but inflation is going up by 4.3 per cent, and that, by definition, is falling behind when inflation is going higher, quicker, faster than your economic growth.

This poor horse that's trying to tow the cart here, I think, has keeled over. Honourable Speaker, 4.9 per cent food inflation alone, so the poor person that's looking for affordability now has to make decisions between the rent or food, heat or food.

March 4, 2021: They pushed the Public Utilities Board to the side so they can raise rates at the Cabinet table. Who said that? The Finance Minister—this current Finance Minister.

And then what are they doing in this bill? They're taking affordability away from Manitobans and putting it on the Cabinet table.

They ordered—here's another quote: They ordered higher hydro rates without even having a public hearing, without even going to the Public Utilities Board.

Members opposite, that's exactly what they're doing. And that is the definition of hypocrisy.

* (19:30)

So we also have—sorry about that, Hansard. We also have 14 per cent youth unemployment. Well, this bill that brings in the junk food tax removal does not help restaurants at all, Honourable Speaker. This will help, oh, the Walmarts, the Costcos, the rotisserie chickens, or chicken rotisserie as some refer to.

But the big stores—sure, they get a break. But the small mom-and-pop restaurants that do prepared meals as well, what do they get? Nothing. Now they have to try and compete against the Costcos and the Walmarts of the world.

I also want to mention, I didn't even get started here and a third of my time is almost up, Honourable Speaker. I want Manitobans to see, the ones that are watching here tonight, not a single NDP member has gotten up to defend this bill—not one. The minister spoke about it briefly at the beginning, short QP; not one member since then has gotten up and spoken about it.

Quite—apparently that they are embarrassed of their own legislation or they'd be up talking about how great this bill is and they would get up and maybe speak against this motion that we're talking about right here. But they know the motion is accurate. They'll still vote against it, but they know it is accurate.

So, let me say from the outset that Manitobans were told—they were told that this would deliver relief. They were promised relief. They were promised action. And what are they getting? Neither one of those. When they receive—what they received instead was another NDP budget built on higher taxes, higher debt, higher costs and, of course, lower expectations with this NDP government. It—expectations were higher, maybe when they first got elected; they're going lower and lower and lower every single day.

This legislation does not meet the moment that Manitoba families are facing right now, and that moment is affordability. Families across our province are under enormous pressure. Grocery bills are up.

I think I mentioned grocery bills are up 4.9 per cent for food inflation. Mortgage payments are up, rent is up and hydro is up under this government. Insurance is up, fuel is a way up. I think diesel's \$2 a litre now and those farmers that are trying to put in crops, I just feel for them. That all comes back to why food inflation is up. It costs money to grow food, and this government isn't offering any relief at all for anybody.

Obviously, I think we all know, education property taxes—they're not up; they're skyrocketing; they're beyond up. Any family that's trying to budget that into their household budget is getting a shocker when they opened their budget—or their tax bill. Wait 'til rural Manitobans get theirs in another, oh, month or two, and then they'll be more repercussions, and that's just disheartening and disingenuous from this government, what they've been doing to Manitobans on affordability.

And what are Manitobans doing? They're doing everything right—working hard, raising families, contributing to their communities, but they're still falling behind.

And after two and a half years of this NDP government, what is being offered as an answer in this legislation? Pennies—pennies on prepared food items, junk food tax, and if we want to get into healthy eating, not everybody can afford to eat healthy. This directs more people to focus on purchasing junk food if 7 cents makes a difference on a can of pop for them. And then it forces them to move towards junk food and away from healthier food.

And these pennies, while the government quietly takes hundreds and thousands of dollars out of your other pocket, they'll sprinkle a few pennies in your front pocket with their hand deep, deep in their back—in your back pocket.

So, how are they doing that? Well, that's through bracket creep, to start off with. When the PC government was in charge we raised the basic personal exemption and then indexed it to inflation every year, so you don't lose buying power over a period of time.

If your BPE stays stagnant, every 14 years your buying power drops in half from the dollars that you have in your pocket.

So, under this government, they're slowly, slowly pulling money out of your back pocket and putting couple pennies in your front pocket, and that's what the whole big hype is about. Here's the pennies in your front pocket, while they're ripping money out of your back pocket.

Manitobans know this through bracket creep. Education property taxes—there's another one—school taxes, hydro increases and fuel taxes, they raised. The largest fuel tax increase in the province of—in the history of this province came from that NDP government.

Honourable Speaker, this government is putting pennies in your front pocket and pulling thousands of dollars out of your back pocket. And members opposite are saying, oh, yes, I guess we did give the largest fuel tax increase in the history of the province. It went up; check the records. Go back in any budget you've ever seen: the largest increase came under that NDP government. That is simple fact—simple fact.

An Honourable Member: Good job, Derek; you're a bozo.

Mr. Johnson: Oh, I can be called a bozo; that's great. But I'd like to just say that name-calling across this—the floor of this Legislature, you guys should be embarrassed. It's just belittling.

So that's what Manitobans are experiencing every month, is having money pulled out of their back pocket, with pennies being dangled in front of them. When they sit down at the kitchen table to pay their bills, they know—they know—there isn't as much in front of them under this government as there was under a PC government.

This bill simply does not provide meaningful affordability relief, end of story. And that's why we brought this motion forward.

The MLA for Red River North moved this reasoned amendment: And that this motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word that and substituting the following—and members opposite should listen to this, and they could maybe get up and put a few words on the record, and then—and they will know that this amendment is steadfast—This House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, 2026, because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

And that's why we are here late at night discussing this.

So we are not here to simply oppose for the sake of posing; we are here to improve legislation. We're here to stand up for the Manitoba family that's having a hard time to make ends meet. And, quite frankly,

we're here to demand better from this government. This government, if it's serious about affordability, this is the test. They can bring an amendment: raise the basic personal exemption, at least, at bare minimum to what the formula that the PC government implemented. At least, they could raise it to that amount to give you relief, the working Manitoba.

But the Progressive Conservative caucus has put forward a practical, achievable and common sense proposal to significantly increase the basic personal exemption so Manitobans can keep more of the money that you earn. This isn't a credit at the end of the year. This is every single paycheque. The government would have to take less of it, and therefore more would be in your pocket.

Our proposal to move towards a \$30,000 basic personal exemption would put real money back in the pockets of Manitobans. And, quite frankly, for an individual, would be up to \$1,535 per year—per year—that stays in your pocket; it doesn't get taken out and then a rebate at the end of the year.

So for a two-income family, well over \$3,000. That makes a difference when you're raising a family. That makes a difference whether you can buy, oh, junk food with no tax on it or a nice healthy snack to send your kids to school with. That is real relief people would actually feel. That is money for groceries, that is money for rent, money for hydro bills, money for gas if you're fortunate enough to have it, money for children's clothing, money to help families to make ends meet at the end of the month.

* (19:40)

And, unlike this government's policies, our proposal actually strengthens the economy at the same time. More money in your pocket, you're going to go out and spend it and support those businesses. So they typically spend it in their local communities. So now you see a community thriving. And they support small businesses. Those small businesses will hire your kids.

But, under this government, no, that's not what's happening because we now have 14 per cent youth employment under this failing NDP government. This money will help support local jobs. That economy actively generates additional revenue for the Province through growth, not through punishing taxpayers.

So that's the difference between our vision and the NDP's vision. They want to take your money and spend your money how they see fit. We think it's more valuable in your pocket. We believe Manitobans

know how to spend their money better than any government does. The NDP believe government should take more and boast about giving a couple pennies back, but they are taking more of your hard-earned money.

Honourable Speaker, the government likes to talk about affordability—falsely, of course—but let's look at what Manitobans are actually experiencing under this NDP government. The NDP cancelled indexation of tax brackets and the basic personal exemption. That's a tax increase. That's called bracket creep. It means inflation pushes Manitobans into paying more taxes every single year.

And you wonder why you're feeling further and further behind every single year since this NDP government has come in. That's one of the many reasons why; your purchasing power is not increasing. Low-income Manitobans pay more. Middle-income Manitobans pay more. Seniors on fixed income pay more. And seniors—*independence is key*. And part of independence is having enough money to pay for your hydro bill, your rent, your taxes if you're fortunate enough to own a home, and your buying power is being eroded by this NDP government. Young families, they pay more. And if it's a two-income family, they pay well over \$3,000 more compared to our plan.

And now, after creating the problems themselves—they're the ones that created it—the government expect applause because they're removing PST on some junk food. That's not what affordability is about. Manitobans are smarter than that. They understand basic math.

They know that saving a few cents on a rotisserie chicken does not offset the hundreds of dollars higher in education property tax, does not offset the money they're taking out of your pocket due to bracket creep, keeping more of your money and then they think they know how to spend it better than you.

It doesn't offset hydro—higher hydro bills, doesn't offset your higher fuel prices if you're fortunate enough to own a vehicle and you go to fuel up; we can all see that fuel is way higher than it should be at the moment. It doesn't offset higher MPI costs either from this government and it doesn't offset the hidden tax hikes caused by bracket creep.

This legislation doesn't meet this specific moment in time for Manitoba families. We need to reject this budget and add the basic personal exemption increase into it.

Honourable Speaker, even—the City of Winnipeg is now sounding the alarm over these education property taxes. They put an insert into the property taxes to explain where that tax bill is actually coming from. And if there's so much savings, like this NDP government and the Finance Minister is suggesting, why would they have to put that information into the tax bill? Property tax bills were mailed out this month, and they clearly show what Manitobans were expecting. What were they expecting? Yes, higher taxes from this NDP government.

School divisions across Winnipeg increased their tax requirements between 5.1 per cent—and that's dodging a bullet—and some are 11.7 per cent in a single year. Pembina Trails is 11.6. Louis Riel is up 11.7. Winnipeg School Division is up 9 and a half. Seine River mill rates up 10.9 per cent. Interlake school taxes are up 10.6. Families are opening their property tax bills and seeing a massive increase due to this current NDP government.

And the City itself, now, as I mentioned, included an insert explaining that education taxes make up the bulk of many property tax increases. And they know residents are frustrated. They know that. And that's why they inserted—for the preventative measure of seeing how high this NDP has jacked up your education property taxes.

And why are Manitobans frustrated? Well, more money out of their pocket. But this government keeps pretending that a \$100 increase in their rebate arriving next year—they're telling you that's what you want. I think you know what you want, and that's money in your pocket now. And that comes with increasing the basic personal exemption. And that all ties in to the affordability that we're discussing here tonight.

So they're pretending to put an extra \$100 in your pocket—again, future; this is future money. Sometime next year, you might get it. And now they think it's going to make up for massive tax hikes that they've done. It doesn't. It doesn't make up for it.

This government's own numbers show education property tax revenue has exploded. Not increased, exploded. From approximately \$667 million in the 2023, to nearly \$1.1 billion—with a B-billion in 2026. Over \$400 million more every single year being collected from Manitobans. That's black and white in the budget. You can open the budget document.

And that's how this is tying into affordability here today. Over \$400 million more every single year is being collected from Manitobans. That's black and

white in the budget documents that the NDP government has released. Pick up a copy and read it.

So that money's not falling from the skies. It's coming from seniors; it's coming from homeowners; it's coming from working families that are already struggling with affordability to make ends meet.

The NDP are raising education property taxes and then trying to distract Manitobans with tiny rebates years down the road. Manitobans are smarter than that. Honourable Speaker, unlike the NDP, we respect the intelligence of the Manitoba voter. Manitobans know the difference between real relief and political gimmicks. And what they're seeing with this NDP is definitely political gimmicks. They know that \$3,000 back for a working family matters far more than mere pennies being sprinkled at their feet. And those pennies—they don't help much at the grocery store, but the \$3,000 on each and every paycheque staying in your pocket most definitely would.

So let's discuss the broader fiscal picture, because this legislation exists when the—within the context of another NDP budget built on debt and deficits. Probably in less than a minute and a half left—I'll save that for the next time I speak here later tonight, Honourable Speaker.

I think that what Manitobans need to recall from tonight is a mere 1.1 per cent economic growth under this failing NDP government. How is government going to raise revenue and how is your family going to have jobs under this NDP government? Oh wait, they aren't: 14 per cent youth unemployment, 4.9 per cent food inflation.

* (19:50)

So every time you go to the store and you seem like you're walking out with lighter and lighter bags, that's exactly what's happening: 4.9 per cent food inflation under this NDP government and overall, 4.3 per cent inflation.

And you're wondering why your paycheque is not getting bigger. But they won't increase the basic personal exemption. They're going to continue taking every single penny from you while they're pulling thousands of dollars out of your back pocket. You know what, and if you buy enough pop and Coke, you might even get a quarter in that front pocket, but we know you're losing thousands out of that back pocket.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Once again, it gives me a—[interjection] Honourable Speaker, it's interesting that the MLA for Keewatinook, once again, has lots to say but yet has nothing to say. He speaks from the cheap seats over on the government side and really doesn't have the courage to stand up and speak to the budget or BITSA bill or anywhere else. He would just rather name call from a seat, much like some other members on the NDP side has. It's interesting that, you know, it's shortly before 8 p.m., we're putting words on the record, which is the democratic right here in the province of Manitoba, and that's what we're elected to do, to debate whether it's legislation or documents, much like what the Finance Minister has brought forward.

So we are debating tonight the motion that has been brought forward by the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton). And so the member from Red River North said, and I quote, is moving a reasoned amendment and that the motion is being amended by deleting all the words after the word that and substituting the following: This House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

And once again, Honourable Speaker, we saw evidence of the lack of work ethic by the government bench yesterday, and we're seeing it again today and tonight. So it's interesting that none of them actually want to stand up and put any words on the record. Lots of, you know, basically nothing, lots of chirping from their seats, lots of name-calling, as usual. But this has come to be, you know, sort of status quo for you-know-who, the Kinew government.

So we started talking about not only BITSA and the budget, but also this motion that the—my colleague from Red River North brought forward in regards to actually talking about real savings for Manitobans. And when we start really drilling down into the typical NDP view on taxpayer dollars, it's a fact that they feel, on a day-to-day basis, that it's actually their money; that they lose touch with the fact that they're here representing taxpayers. And there's only one taxpayer, and whether that's at the school board level or municipal, provincial or federal, there is only one taxpayer and there's a finite number of dollars and cents that families have. And I think part of our reasoned amendment is to bring real savings to Manitobans.

And I know that, you know, no matter what the Premier (Mr. Kinew) says, we know that he was born with an extra large silver spoon in his mouth and has never really had to overly work a day in his life, and when we talk about tax savings and the—*[interjection]* Oh, the member from Keewatinook would like to talk again, and I don't know when he's going to get up. It's just unfortunate that sometime in the near future, Honourable Speaker, he might get up and talk.

It's interesting, Honourable Speaker. I mean, you brought forward some rules for this Chamber, and once again, the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) and others on that side of the bench, they don't like rules, because they've never really had to follow any in their previous careers, and they still continue today, still talking about—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The Speaker is standing. Order.

So I'd ask members to calm themselves and quit hollering back and forth.

Mr. Ewasko: As what had happened the other day with the—with another motion that was brought forward, I wanted to really make sure that I was putting many words on the record today as opposed to the few the other day that I had the opportunity to put on the record.

But that being said, Honourable Speaker, I put more words on the record the other day than the Finance Minister did for his BITSA bill. And I know that he has lots to say as well and eventually he'll get up, much like the member for Keewatinook or anyone else that wants to continue chirping from their seats. So—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable member for Keewatinook needs to come to order.

Mr. Ewasko: Again, it seems that some members on the NDP bench has difficult time with rules, but we are going to try to make it through these 20—almost 24 minutes talking about the reasoned amendment and making sure that we, on this side of the House, are putting words on the record in regards to some actual cost-saving measures that are going to help each and every family here in this great province of Manitoba: north, east, south and west.

And I know that we've talked on more than one occasion about raising the basic personal exemption. The basic personal exemption, I mean, basically, it's how much money can an individual earn and not have

to pay tax. So, under the former NDP government, under Premier Selinger, they never actually raised the basic personal exemption. We raised it. *[interjection]* So the Minister for Housing and Addictions also sounds like—would like to put some words on the record, and, again, we strongly encourage people to get up. And if you don't want to approve or talk in regards to this motion, which that's what we're debating, then sit there and wait or get up and put some words on the record in regards to their own BITSA bill.

But, anyway, back at the basic personal exemption. So we raised the basic personal exemption when we were in government from \$8,800 to \$15,000. And, in addition to that, we had indexed it to the rates of inflation. And so that meant that the basic personal exemption would continue to grow as the rates of inflation had driven up costs, wages, various different things. And that's what actually put more dollars back in the pockets of hard-working Manitobans, Honourable Speaker.

At that time, we were looking at probably about \$75 every pay an individual would get. And I know, to many members on the NDP side, that \$75 doesn't sound like a whole lot of money, but to hard-working Manitobans, we know that \$75 definitely could help and definitely move things forward.

* (20:00)

So now we're asking for the basic personal exemption to be raised to \$30,000. We're looking at a household or a double-income family raising—or saving about \$3,000 annually. Well, that's a big chunk of change. We know that many Manitobans might not put that whole amount of \$3,000 into the savings account. They're probably going to spend it.

I know that members on the NDP side, economics is fairly difficult for some of them—most of them—but a lot of these tax savings would be then put back into circulation by Manitobans. They're going to spend that money and that's going to help stimulate the economy and make sure that there's those funds, again, going to what? People, parents, adults, kids, taxpayers, those hard-working Manitobans, the money back into the system.

And they're able to then spend the money the way they see fit, as opposed to the old way of the typical NDP party and NDP government, is to then tell people what they should be doing with their money and taking their money and basically thinking that they

know better, they know how to spend the taxpayer dollars better than the taxpayer themselves, which is sad.

But this is typical. I mean, we've seen it now for many, many years. The Selinger government, back in the day, they would bring BITSA bills forward as well and slip in all sorts of little tidbits, little land mines for Manitobans in the BITSA bill. And all we've really asked multiple times is to take the BITSA bill to committee so that the public can have their say, their view over these things.

So what did we see in 2011, around that time, under the Greg Selinger era? And I know that many people on the NDP side were huge Greg Selinger fans and—including the Premier (Mr. Kinew), which apparently was the—who was the star candidate in 2016 and then didn't take a whole lot of time before the Premier stabbed Greg Selinger in the back. But when we talked about BITSA, we talk about this reasoned amendment about making life more affordable for Manitobans. We saw the Greg Selinger government do something that I'm seeing a lot of similarities with this Kinew government and what they're doing to Manitobans, and it's in these little increments that will continue to grow over time and cause Manitobans' life to be even less affordable here in Manitoba.

So what did Greg Selinger do? I mean, he went—every door in the 2000 election, went knocking on the doors and—for the sake of those people who are having to transcribe this and listen to the microphones and that, we wouldn't replicate the door knocking thing—but he went to every door in Manitoba and said, look, don't worry. This is not going to cost you a cent. It's not going to cost you a penny. They drove the bipole line up 300 additional unnecessary miles, drove the cost up \$5 billion, which then hurt the taxpayer.

And that's what we're talking about today. We're talking about affordability measures and the fact that what this government, the Kinew government's doing now with this BITSA bill is not—it's smoke and mirrors, Honourable Speaker. So what did Greg Selinger do? He went and he expanded PST on various different things that never had PST on in the past, so haircuts, birth and death certificates. They had you taxed coming and going. And Premier Selinger at the time thought this was hilarious, and he was making—adding PST to beer and wine and various different things, and home insurance. I know that there's many members in here talk about insurance on a day-to-day basis. Some get it, some don't. I mean, that's their choice, right?

And, I mean, Premier Selinger at the time expanded that PST, and what did he do? He told Manitobans that he was not going to raise taxes, but, sure enough, in 2013 raised the provincial sales tax by a point which then cost Manitobans dearly.

And so when we start talking about these basic things, like basic personal exemption, the NDP don't like this idea because they say, well that's going to—it's going to cost so many dollars. Well, no; in fact, when you do a tax savings, it actually stimulates the economy and actually gives people more money in their pockets to go out and spend it as they see fit, Honourable Speaker.

And I think, in the big picture, what this Premier is doing—I think he's setting it up where he's actually going to eventually listen about the basic personal exemption, and I think he's going to increase it over time. I mean, it's unfortunate that he decided to go and stop the index to inflation on the basic personal exemption. It's undemocratic, it's un-Manitoban, and it just, at the end of the day, Honourable Speaker, is costing Manitobans more.

We see—we've seen these 'omnibus' bills for years and years and years under the NDP, and they try to slip it in, and I know that this year is pretty much a similar year that we've seen over the last two and a half years under this Kinew government.

They basically miss deadlines, mid-March of each and every year prior to a budget, bringing in legislation. They miss deadlines and then ask people to ram these things through, you know, before we lift for summer. And that's why we continue—that's why this motion is to talk about getting rid of certain parts of the BITSA bill and making sure that this government is listening. We're here on behalf of Manitobans trying to talk some common sense into this government into raising the basic personal exemption.

Now here's something that happened the other day in Estimates and in regards to BITSA, in regards to the PST and—the PST freeze on groceries? Or the—or taking the PST off groceries? We're not quite sure because the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning said in Estimates the other day that they're freezing the PST on groceries.

And, again, Honourable Speaker, it's not the first time that we've seen the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt) a little offside with what the Premier has delivered in his own speeches. But eventually—eventually—the media,

Manitobans will catch on that this government is not a serious government. They're not really here for Manitobans. They're here to pat themselves on the back, give Manitobans a little sprinkles over here and—much like my colleague from Interlake-Gimli mentioned, and then take larger amounts of money out of a different pocket. And that's what we're seeing under this Kinew government.

So like I said, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) said that he's taking the PST off of all groceries. Well, in fact, I know that there's still a few members on the NDP side that actually go do their own shopping. And if they actually took a look at their grocery bills, they would see that already majority of their items are PST exempt, unless they're loading up.

And I'm waiting for a comment from one of the members on that side, but he doesn't want to talk right now, because I'm going to be talking about junk food and Pepsi and those types of things, and we know that they're in favour of taking the PST off of those items. And as I had mentioned on a question last week, I guess, in regards to how health advocates, Doctors Manitoba, are all concerned about that component of it. Everybody is in favour of a tax break, Honourable Speaker, absolutely. But in this day and age when we're seeing higher rates of obesity and diabetes, I don't know if this is necessarily the right policy that the Premier really had intended.

* (20:10)

And also, I believe the Premier said the other day—and somebody will correct me if I'm wrong—said the other day that he's also celebrating the fact that he's taking the PST off of Slurpees, and, you know, a good member in the Chamber here said yes; that's correct, and—which is odd because he's using the term Slurpees, which is a term that, of course, as kids, as, you know, adults and youth growing up in Manitoba, we would go to where for Slurpees? We would go to 7-Elevens for Slurpees; not slushies, not frosties, not whatever.

But what's happening lately—and I think one of the first ones that were closed in the city of Winnipeg was actually in the Premier's own constituency, and closing down 7-Elevens all over the city. You know, it's partially because of the affordability crisis we're having here in Manitoba, but it's also the crime. The crime has gone up. Drug use has gone up, you know, and this is no fault of the Winnipeg police or other police enforcement or enforcement agencies. This all falls solely on the Kinew government and his Justice Minister.

And so you're seeing all around the city of Winnipeg crime is going up, theft is going up, and why is that? Well, either it's people are out of control and they just don't know right for wrong, which we've seen evidence from the NDP bench, certain members not necessarily knowing what's right for wrong throughout their history and their years; but it's also because life is more—is unaffordable, Honourable Speaker.

And I think that's where this reasoned amendment makes sense. I mean, I see some colleagues, even on the NDP side, I know that off the record they agree that putting \$3,000 in a double income household back into their pockets so they could spend it how they want is going to make more sense than a lot of the things that this Kinew government is doing.

I mean, I haven't even got a chance to really talk about the affordability measures or the lack of, on education taxes going up in this province. I mean, we know that the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister—and of course she's had to have a conversation with the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Kinew)—has significantly—significantly decreased the amount of funding to school divisions.

They have cut that funding to the tune of, in some cases, we're looking at the funding that was given by the previous PC government in their last three years compared to these three years by the NDP government, we're looking at, in some cases, a reduction of 400 per cent.

So that means that the—so for simple math for those on the NDP side that has difficulty in math—and now, unfortunately, due to this NDP decisions, some of that training for our educators, for our teachers moving forward, are going to be lacking a little bit too, because they're really not forcing anyone to specialize in some of these teachable classes.

But we've seen taxes—this Education Minister, Finance Minister and the Premier is actually using Manitoba School Boards Association as a scapegoat because of the lack of funding coming from this Kinew government to school divisions. Well, they have no choice but then to raise taxes and, in a lot of cases, by double-digit numbers. And those numbers that we're seeing being passed down to additional taxpayers is an unfair funding model which, technically, is not even a funding model.

This Education Minister—we're still waiting for some answers from Estimates. We asked some questions and they're, I guess, going to get back to us

sometime between today and the future on some of those answers.

And I guess we will continue asking those questions because a community—one of the communities that I represent, which is Victoria Beach—and there's some members in here that are very, very knowledgeable on the community of Victoria Beach. You know, their tax base—the amount of taxes that Victoria Beach is sending to the Lord Selkirk School Division, is upwards—it's north of \$300,000 per student. Holy smokes, Honourable Speaker. I mean, that's a big chunk of change.

And it's all because of the ill-thought-of idea by this Kinew government to wipe out the education tax rebate. I mean, really, in the big picture, back in the late '50s, we were at an 80-20 rule where 80 per cent of education funding was coming from government and 20 per cent was coming off of local property assessments. And now—you know, under the previous PC government, I think we were up to about 88-12: 88 per cent coming from the provincial coffers and 12 per cent coming from local jurisdictions.

And now it's gone roughly 55-45, and depending on which school division, it—you know, you could flip-flop those numbers much like the Premier flip-flopping like a pickerel on a dock on many things that he's saying this day and age, Honourable Speaker.

We talked a little bit about the fact that the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister had mentioned about the grocery—the PST being frozen. That sounds to me temporary. I think that's something where we're not quite sure. Maybe they're going to take it back to the drawing board and realize that they need to do more cost savings to Manitobans.

I think they're going to hear loud and clear over the summer—you know, possibly when we're sitting in here—their feedback. And if they're not hearing it already, I'd be shocked because, of course, a lot of those members on the NDP side, many of which have the privilege of having a cottage out in the area that I represent—

An Honourable Member: Or land.

Mr. Ewasko: —or land, in some cases, in—depending on what they what types of choices they had made.

I mean, we take a look at—you know, I like the line earlier today. We heard about the tiny targeted tax measures by this Kinew government, and that's exactly what we're seeing. We're seeing very small amounts being given to Manitobans, almost like just

patting them on the heads and saying, please be good. We're going to give you these little tax sprinklings, but we're really not going to be doing anything major for you to really save you and your family a lot of money.

So we're taking a look at the amendment. That's what we're debating today and then, I guess we'll be moving into additional BITSA conversations. And I'm looking forward to hearing members on the government side stand up and just put any kind of words on the record in regards to why they think that their tax savings measures are—would give Manitobans more relief than doing a basic personal exemption increase.

I mean, to me, it's just simple math. And if we have to work it out on a on a whiteboard or draw it out for someone, we can do that. We have offered on more than one occasion to work with the various departments on coming up with a solution to make sure that we are working together on real tax savings to Manitobans.

* (20:20)

And I know that, you know, we take a look at—again, if we just talk about education and we talk about child-care spaces, we talk about making sure that we have enough staff, trained ECEs and child-care assistants for those spaces.

It's unfortunate that this Kinew government has put a pause on so many different things that would actually benefit Manitobans because more and more Manitobans need to continue to get out there and work, and that's what helps increase our economy here in Manitoba. And with that, that gives the provincial government more and more dollars and cents to help with the roads, education, infrastructure, those types of things that each and every Manitoba so deservedly deserves.

You know, reduction in crime would be a good thing as well, of course, and under this government we're not seeing safety being a priority. I know there's a lot of chatter about it, but we're not really seeing the evidence. We're also seeing here in the last little bit that, again, property taxes are going through the roof. Crime is up. Drug usage on school properties is up. It's unfortunate, Honourable Speaker.

I want to say thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion and I look forward to additional debate on this in the future.

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

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): I, too, wish to speak to this reasoned amendment, or, as one of our colleagues so aptly put it, he called it a reasonable amendment. I would suggest both of those work very well, and having the opportunity to spend time and listen to colleagues, I appreciate how varied our life experiences are, where we come from as—and then become elected officials in this Chamber. And we speak to this reasoned amendment, or reasonable amendment, from different perspectives and I really appreciate it, and it would be really good for our Chamber if members of the NDP would also get up and speak to it.

Now, we understand they would probably not speak entirely in favour, but they would also bring a perspective that would be healthy, and I would encourage all members to speak. This is an important debate. I feel that this debate on the reasoned amendment—and we've had debates over the last couple of weeks—have really given us an opportunity to get down to what the budget and what BITSA actually means for Manitobans, for our constituents, for people across this province.

And I want to thank my colleague from Agassiz, who mentioned that on the weekend she spoke to a lot of individuals, constituents and others, who indicated to her how they were struggling, how things were difficult for them. And she mentioned individuals from the trades who are struggling because of high taxes and high expenses. And we do have the highest food inflation in the country, not just the highest inflation, but the highest food inflation. And I want to thank the member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram) for having raised that. That was so important for this debate, that we should never lose sight of the fact that when we talk about inflation and food inflation, how much that hurts working men and women, families across this province. So I appreciated that.

The member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza), who tends to be always, if I could put it, he leads often with his heart, and he gave some very heartfelt messages from struggling Manitobans and a lot of those stories were tough, and I had the opportunity to sit and listen to him and listen to those stories. There are people really struggling and they're being hurt financially. And that spills over into their personal lives, into their private lives.

So when we talk about a budget, when we talk about a BITSA that, if I walk down the street and I asked neighbours what they thought about BITSA, they would probably ask me what in the world is a BITSA.

And yet it has such an incredible impact on the lives of people.

So the fact that the member for Portage la Prairie brought some of these to the Chamber, I think, is very important because it humanizes things that can often be dehumanizing. Numbers tend not to be emotional and they tend to be almost dehumanizing because they're numbers. So the member for Portage la Prairie bringing in that human element, I certainly appreciated it very much.

Also I would like to thank him for raising the fact that he represents a community that has the cleanest hospital in North America. It is by far the cleanest hospital anywhere in North America because there's nobody in it. The NDP put locks on the doors. There's nobody in the hospital. It was built; it's new; it's cutting edge; it's ready to go.

The Progressive Conservative government built it. All that the NDP had to do was cut the ribbon, open the doors and allow patients in.

And nothing. The NDP mothballed a brand new hospital. And nowhere can you find in BITSA, nowhere can you find that they're even going to fund it. There's not even a projected date now.

The member for Portage la Prairie represents his community well, and he brings those concerns to the Legislature, and he does it well and we thank him for raising this issue because, again, this affects Manitobans. Anybody who's driving on No. 1 Highway and maybe hits a deer or hits some wildlife, could end up being seriously injured and may need that new hospital with all the new technology in it, and they're not going to have access to it. And the member for Portage la Prairie is right to ask, why not?

On behalf of all Manitobans, why is it not in BITSA? Why is the government failing on this? They don't have to build it; it's built; it's ready to go; it's got everything in it—everything but people. So I thank the member for Portage la Prairie for his comments.

Member from Interlake-Gimli got up and he did a whole bunch of quotes on members of the opposition who are now members of the government, and I actually remember a lot of those comments and how gratuitous they were and how shameful they were and how moralistic they were.

Now we're talking about BITSA and we're talking about the budget and we're talking about hydro rates, which is—plays very important in these budget documents, and I am going to get to those numbers.

And now, all of a sudden, everything they spoke against they are doing. So much for the high road. And the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) pointed out the hypocrisy of it. What they said they would never do, they are doing absolutely and completely.

And I thank the member for Interlake-Gimli for his quotes. It was memory lane all over again. I remember the now Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) on his moral high horse, charging down the hill with all his what he wouldn't do and what was wrong, and he's doing exactly the same thing with his budget and with BITSA—exactly the same thing.

I'd like to thank the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), and I'm only picking a few of my colleagues, who, when he was actually allowed to speak, because members of the opposition don't have the courage to speak, but they certainly love, as he put it, to heckle from the cheap seats. Thought that was particularly telling.

And he's right. Members should be allowed to speak and should have the opportunity to speak. And I would suggest to members opposite, they should also speak. Get up and speak to what you believe the budget and BITSA are doing for Manitobans.

Disagree with us. That's what the Chamber is about. That's what democracy is about. You are disenfranchising your electorate. The men and women who voted for you are disenfranchised because you're sitting in your seat saying nothing.

* (20:30)

The member for Lac du Bonnet, particularly appreciated the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) like a pickerel on a dock, and I do have—I have used that term from time to time, and I may even have used it inaccurately, and appreciate very much him dealing with that.

I do want to deal with BITSA and the budget. And the last time I got up to speak I spoke about what economists say about budget deficits. And I want to go there again. And this is what economists throughout history have said, that budget deficits are just deferred taxes. So we have seen this government run some incredibly substantial deficits with no world war, no war to speak of and no pandemic. And yet they are running unbelievably substantive deficits. And all's what they're doing is they are making future generations make the hard choices; they're just deferring the taxes. And some day a generation will stand up and they're going to have to pay for it, and that'll be by taxes. And it's irresponsible of this

government to keep running deficits like they're running and then just push the taxes that are going to have to be raised to pay for it to future generations.

The other thing—and we talked about this a little bit—inflation is caused by out-of-control government spending and is de facto a tax. Inflation is no different than a government tax because if you start the year with \$100 and you have 5 per cent inflation, you have \$5 less at the end of the year, and that goes—rolls over year over year over year. Inflation is a—is basically a tax on the working men and women of this province, and Manitoba right now has the highest inflation in the country. We have the highest food inflation in the country.

So all of these deficits that the NDP is running, all these deficits that are not covered by tax dollars, that are deferred taxes for another time, later down the road, are actually now causing a different tax, and that's called inflation. And the out-of-control spending is driving up inflation, which is eroding working men and women, their income and their ability to move ahead, to maybe buy a home, buy food, clothing, all the things that we take for granted. That's what inflation is. It is basically a tax. And that comes from economists throughout history. You can google it.

I do want to talk to the actual numbers. As someone who did sit on Treasury Board—I had the honour of being vice-chair—so I love numbers, if you would bear with me on this. If you go to the summary revenue page, and on the summary revenue and expenses page, there is always the 2025-26 budget—that's what they budgeted—and then what is forecast; what is now the best guess of what the numbers will be for '25-26; and then is the number budgeted for '26-27. So you get a really good comparison.

I want to zero in on a couple of numbers, and I want to—first of all on individual income tax. If you look at what was initially budgeted for in 2025-26, and then you look at what the forecast is, the forecast is down by \$161 million. So let me try and put that in laymen's terms. Individual income tax that's going to be paid, the Department of Finance believes that the number's going to drop from what they thought it would be, to what it probably will be. It will drop by \$161 million. Go look at the budget for this year, and they—and this NDP government is projecting a \$274-million increase. They were down last year by \$161 million, and this year, from what the forecast is going to be, they're predicting another \$274-million increase. And this is when I spoke the last time to this.

I indicated that the budget as presented was overly ambitious on income, far too ambitious: \$274-million growth in individual income tax when we have the highest inflation, the highest food inflation. When people are struggling, to suggest that some of that might happen is—it's a very ambitious number. I would probably make the argument, it's not reasonable.

Go to corporate income tax right below. From '25-26 budget to forecast, again, the forecast being now what they think—is what they think the income will be from corporate income tax. They believe that they were off by \$2 million. So they—they're going to see a little bit of an increase. The budgeted for this year is not an increase of \$2 million, but rather an increase of \$84 million. So last year, budget to forecast—or we would say budget to actual—is a growth of \$2 million that they see that to go from actual of last year to budget this year, a growth of \$84 million in corporate income tax.

And my question is for both of these numbers—and this is what we would do at Treasury Board. We would say, based on what do you see this kind of growth? Like, where in the economy do you see this kind of an upswing of growth that would justify, in personal income taxes, \$274-million growth year over year and an \$84-million growth year over year for corporate income tax? That is epic. Like, what booming economy do NDP members see that would justify these kinds of numbers?

Like, I would love to see an NDP member get up—maybe the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala)—and give a justification. Because he would have—he must have some kind of a justification given to him by the Department of Finance. I mean, we're certainly not under the impression that these are just budget numbers. Well, we hope they're not. There has to be some kind of a justification for that kind of a growth in individual income tax and corporate income tax. Where is the justification?

And I would say to members opposite, get up and put the justification on the record. Manitobans—and most won't see these numbers and most won't be able to see—know how to read them. But they do know there's something wrong. And you can't fool the people. They maybe don't see these numbers, but they know there's something wrong. And that—by the way, that finds its way into the confidence—consumer confidence. You won't just see a \$270-million increase; you'll see a substantial decline.

You cannot have individuals lose confidence. And these numbers are very, I would say, grossly

ambitious, not—are they possible? Maybe. Are they probable? Probably not. And I'm trying to see what my time is here. I believe it's a little small on my screen here; I think I have 12 minutes.

So I do want to move on, and I want to talk about a few other numbers, and that is equalization. I find it interesting. And, again, I would love to hear the Minister of Finance or anybody on the NDP and benches to give us a justification why they believe these numbers are growing so exponentially. If you go look at equalization, federal transfers, if you go 2025-26 budget and forecast, the number doesn't change; it's the same number.

* (20:40)

The budgeted number for this year goes up \$355 million. There has to be some kind of a justification for the number to go up that high. Like, you can't just plug those kinds of numbers in, because then it makes the projections on this budget suspect. And we have seen—bond-rating agencies have looked at these numbers. And I would suggest to members of the Chamber, the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and his officials would have gone to a lot of the bond-rating agencies, to a lot of those who raise money for us as a province, and he would have given some kind of justification because they would have looked at this.

And they must not have liked the justification they were getting, because after the Minister of Finance and his officials came back to Winnipeg—and please, could somebody on the NDP bench at least get up and say, yes, the Minister of Finance and his department did go out east and speak to our bond-rating agencies, and, yes, he did speak to those who raise the capital for us to keep running these deficits and building the things that are in here. Please, somebody get up and tell us that he did go there, because—and if he did, they're not buying it. They're not buying the justification for these numbers. And that's why they said—and my colleague from Borderland quoted a whole bunch of sources where they are saying that they are struggling with the numbers. They're struggling with the over optimistic income numbers. They are very optimistic.

I—it looks like I have about nine minutes left. I'm trying to see here on my screen. I want to continue, and then that'll probably be the end of my time. And I want to talk about the Crown corporations.

If you look at Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, the projection is the income is going to be down a little bit,

and Finance Department—kind of, it's within the ballpark. Deposit Guarantee Corporation: the numbers are basically stagnant. Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation lost \$12 million. They feel this year it'll be a \$24-million turnaround, which is actually more like a \$36-million turnaround, because you go minus 12 to plus 24. But, again, not a big variable in the budget.

You then go to Manitoba Hydro. It was budgeted that Manitoba Hydro was going to add \$220 million to the summary budget; \$220 million on the positive. Remember that number. It is now projected that Manitoba Hydro will see a loss of \$502 million.

Let me do the math for you: That is a drop of \$722 million, because you had a surplus projected of 220, you then lose 502. That's a turnaround—a negative turnaround of \$722 million. That is substantial. And we all know why. Droughts—you know, there were just really big, big environment issues. And nobody's blaming politicians for those numbers, because that's just the way it goes. We don't have the money.

What troubles, I think, many of us is that this year there's a predict—a projected, budgeted \$140-million income from Manitoba Hydro. Let me do the math for members. That would be a \$642-million recovery. Now, it's not an overly big number, but that is a substantive recovery. And I think what members of the Legislature would like to see is based on what is that number—a \$642-million turnaround to get to the 140—based on what?

So, for instance, the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), or Gimli-Interlake—I hope I got that right. Make sure I get his title right: it is Interlake-Gimli. He would know about the lake levels in Lake Manitoba, which is basically one of the storage lakes.

And then there's also Lake Winnipeg. What are the levels? At what level are they right now? What about the rainfall? And I know some areas did have rainfall. There was some flooding, sort of, in central Manitoba. What impact does that have on the levels of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg? Because that's the water we need to run the turbines in our hydro dams as the water moves north to go to the Hudson's Bay.

Where is the justification for this? We would love to see that. If we would actually get serious information like that, then we could say—and along with all the other points that I've raised—you could actually say, okay, it looks like Lake Manitoba is—the levels are increasing.

The member for—make sure I get the name right again here—the member for Interlake Gimli had indicated to me that you could basically walk out almost for a kilometre out into the lake. That's how shallow the lake is. And to fill that lake would take rain of epic proportions. We would need to have rain out west, definitely to the south and to the east, to start to turn around the lake levels.

Now, we as opposition aren't necessarily entitled to get briefed on the lake levels, because that would then have an impact on what Manitoba Hydro can produce insofar as electricity goes, which would then give a justification for a \$642-million turnaround around—or recovery on the summary revenue budget.

There are a lot of questions. And I think people are beyond—just because a politician says it, then it must be true, and we just believe them. I think—for sure, my constituents, they hear what's coming out of this NDP government and they just scoff at it. They would like to see empirical data.

And why is it—the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), somebody from Executive Council could even be, you know, one of the MLAs from the backbench might have this data. Manitobans would feel a lot more comfortable about what's happening and what's transpiring in the province if we had some justification for these numbers.

Because if these numbers are, at best, 'fudget', as Jon Gerrard from River Heights—he used to refer to the NDP budgets as the 'fudgets'. And then he brought fudge one time, and the media ate all his fudge and never gave him a story. But it was a pretty interesting prop.

If these numbers are not real numbers and there's no data to support these numbers, then basically, the deficit as projected is going to be way off. And that's a problem. Because this Premier (Mr. Kinew) loves to pretzelize himself to the point where all's—what he does all day long is pat himself on the back. But he's patting himself on the back. He says we have the lowest debt-to-GDP in the country, which isn't true. What he's saying is that his 'fudget' numbers of what the deficit would be, approximately \$400 million, is lower to GDP than anybody else in the country.

And that's probably because they're actually using real numbers. They're actually putting forward what they really think their deficit's going to be, not a 'fudget' number. Because the numbers that I've pointed out here—and my next speech, I'll actually add all those numbers up—there is at least a \$500-million bunch of money that is iffy, that is based on, maybe,

rose-colored glasses. Because nowhere is there any documentation that would back these projections up.

* (20:50)

And if these projections are, like Jon Gerrard would say, if they're a 'fudget', and we end up with a five-, six-hundred-million-dollar budget—or deficit budget or worse, we will see a downgrade of our provincial finances. This is a warning. And I think these debates are important because we speak to each other as decision makers. We know the power is on the NDP bench. They won the election; we get that. But there are some of us, colleagues across the Chamber, who have experience in government, in life, from living around the lakes, to know that there are difficulties with these numbers. And I think it would be most unfortunate that if these numbers are not based on any kind of reality, that then this province ends up with a downgrade. And that would be most unfortunate.

And I think my time is just about going to run out, and I appreciate the opportunity to put these concerns on the record.

The Speaker: Order, please.

Before recognizing the next speaker, I will advise the House that I've received the letter. In accordance with rule 44(2), the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) has designated his unlimited speaking time on the reasoned amendment to the honourable member for Steinbach.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I hear some applause in the Chamber. I'm certain it's coming from both sides of the House.

I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for providing me his unlimited speaking time. It's probably lost on some members, those who are relatively new, that this actually exists as a thing. It's not something that's commonly used, and it's not something that's commonly designated to another member. But I have certainly seen it in my time.

And it's particularly important, I think, when a member or the Assembly as a whole in a caucus is dealing with a particularly important issue, as this is. The budget bill, the BITSA bill, is certainly one of the more important marks in the legislative calendar. And it is because it affects really everybody.

All Manitobans in some way, if they were to sit down and read a budget document, would see themselves reflected in it. So the ability to have a fulsome debate, I think, is important, and the Leader of the Opposition—I mentioned to him that there was a number of things that I did want to speak about.

I had the opportunity, actually, this afternoon to consult with Statistics Canada resources. And I was curious about what the actual cost increases were in the latest CPI data. And they sent me a list of about 200 individual items where the cost has increased anywhere from 3 per cent to 5 per cent over the last few months. And I plan to go into that more deeply in my comments, which is why I needed an additional time—200 items.

I might not go through all 200 items, but I do think it's important for members to understand the real impact that Manitobans are facing across a broad category of issues when it comes to inflation.

I mean, there's been—well, frankly, a ridiculous amount of time spent in the Chamber talking about rotisserie chickens. But there is a litany of items that Manitobans and Canadians probably don't even know each and every day that they find that there's an increased cost and they might not know. They might not be able to identify every item that has gone up in cost over the last few months. Some of them, of course, are obvious, right? I mean, you drive by the gas station, you go to buy meat in a grocery store, it's clear and it's obvious that there's been a significant cost.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

But I was surprised when Statistics Canada provided me with the list, honourable Deputy Speaker, just how expansive it really was. And there's probably things that people never even think about or consider.

But at the end of their pay period or at the end of a month, when they're at the kitchen table, as a former leader used to say, and they're adding up their budget, the impact is felt. They might not know everywhere that it's coming from, but the impact is felt.

You know, before I get into the sort of the main pith and substance of my comments, honourable Speaker—or Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to give a bit of a shout-out to Steve Lambert, a member of the media 'constabulatory' who is leaving us at the end of this week. I believe that Friday is his last day with The Canadian Press.

And I'll be brief in these comments, honourable Deputy Speaker, but it's worth noting in a time when there are less and less media covering politics, covering many things, many world events, and certainly doing so at a lower depth than has been the case in the past, that somebody like Steve Lambert has dedicated his entire life to reporting the news, his most recent time reporting the Manitoba Legislature.

And what I appreciated about Steve, in particular, and I think that the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) would join me in these comments, is that Steve really cared about process. There aren't a lot of reporters that—maybe not even a lot of legislators who care about process and how things happen in the Legislature. It's often confined just to House leaders and the Clerk's office and you, of course, honourable Deputy Speaker and the Speaker, but reporters increasingly don't pay that much attention to how things happen in the Legislature.

And I think that that's really too bad because there's a rhyme and a reason to it, and I'll get more into that when it comes to the reasoned amendment, but there's a rhyme and a reason in terms of why things happen in the Legislature and why they're happening this way this evening when we're sitting here in the Legislature.

And Steve was one of the reporters who dug into that, who truly wanted to know why things were happening. And then he had a way of explaining it to the public, why it actually mattered to them. And that's really always the hard part, right? I mean, it's one thing to understand why things are happening. It's another thing to be able to communicate it to somebody else in a way that they would actually care.

And Steve was always excellent at that, and so much so that he became sort of the go-to person in Manitoba for legislative process. And then other media would call him on—I'd often heard him on CJOB and they would be saying, well, you know, you're an expert in this, Steve, but why is this happening?

So I was wondering what kind of a gift I would get for Steve. We've worked together, obviously on opposite sides of the spectrum—me as a politician, him as a reporter—but always great respect—great respect. He treated me fairly. If there were bad quotes that I got, they were because I gave them, not because he made them up. And I have just great, great respect for him.

And I was thinking about, what kind of a gift do I get Steve? And I'm not sure if there was a better gift that I could give Steve than a late-night sitting in the Manitoba Legislature. Because what more would Steve Lambert appreciate than a good old-fashioned, late-night Legislative sitting. So, Steve, I wouldn't want to say this one's for you, but it sort of is.

Now back to the issue of the reasoned amendment. I want to speak to the matter of what a reasoned amendment is. I suspect that there's lots of members

in the Assembly who haven't actually heard of a reasoned amendment before this one and the one previous that was given. They're probably members who didn't realize that you could amend a motion at second reading on a budget or—frankly, you could do it, really, on any bill. It's not just on a budget bill, but it certainly can. It can be done, obviously, on a BITSA bill.

And so, why a reasoned amendment? You know, actually, up until about, I want to say—and the esteemed Clerk of the House, Rick Yarish, could correct me, I'm sure—I want to say that, up until about 13 years ago, reasoned amendments had kind of fallen into disuse in the Manitoba Legislature. They hadn't been used for a long time. Now I don't want to, like, overestimate it. It might not have been decades, but it certainly was many years.

And it was during the debate around when the NDP increased the PST and we sat through the summer, and some members—not many anymore—but there's some members in the Chamber who will recall that time—not necessarily a happy time for anybody but, you know, these things happen in the Legislature and there are reasons for them.

* (21:00)

But I remember talking to the Clerk's Office at that time, and we were talking about a reasoned amendment because we'd come across it at that time as an opposition about, well, you know, how would this work? How would it look?

And if I recall correctly—and, again, as I get older, my memory isn't as true as it once was—but I do recall the Clerk's Office saying that it hadn't been used for many years. So as we dug sort of more deeply into it, well, we came to understand that a reasoned amendment is, as the name would say, it is an amendment to a bill or a motion that gives a reason, that provides a reason for that particular amendment. Its reason for existing is in its name: it's a reasoned amendment.

And why I really appreciated the ability to use reasoned amendments then, and now again some 15 or 16 years later, is because it provides an explanation in terms of why the opposition is concerned about something. I mean, often that's expressed in speeches, it's expressed in news releases, it's expressed in a lot of different things. But to actually be able to put into an amendment, as this one does, the actual reasons of concern, is, I think, an 'elegant' way for a parliament and for legislators to be able to debate something. And I think that that means something for us.

This is most commonly used in the Canadian context, in the UK context, of course, being part of the Westminster model of government. And this reasoned amendment and the previous one, I think, were brought forward really in some ways to help the government. I might go as far as to say it's a friendly amendment, a friendly reasoned amendment, because it provides something for the government that they might not even understand that they need. And that's time. It's time to think about what the consequences of the BITSA budget, BITSA bill, are and what the BITSA bill is not.

So, in some ways, I feel that, as an opposition—and I don't know if all members will take this in the spirit that it's given—but I think it provides a gracious exit for the government. And I have no doubt—I mean, I don't expect ministers to stand—I would be happy for ministers to stand up and say anything, frankly. But I don't expect them to stand up and say that they were completely wrong and they've made mistakes. You know, it's an unfortunate reflection on today's politics that we don't have the ability anymore, seemingly, to acknowledge mistakes and to correct.

I would say as an aside, though, honourable Deputy Speaker, one politician who was very good at that was actually Gary Doer, former premier. I was in the Assembly when he was the premier. And there were times when he would stand up and say something along the lines of, you know, we're not perfect and we make mistakes. And then he would correct something, either in legislation or in direction.

That seems to not be the way of this NDP. They've been there for two and a half years, almost three, I suppose, this fall. So it's not as though it's a new government. It's not as though it's a government who, you know, is unnaturally filled with recent election hubris. So it wouldn't be wrong, I think, for them to reflect and at times go, you know what, maybe we didn't quite get this one right.

And I think, in many ways, that's what this reasoned amendment is. It is an opportunity. It's an opportunity for the Finance Minister and the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine), who I understand are in deep conversation right now. And I would hope that the Government House Leader and the Finance Minister are conversing about how a mistake was made and how that could be corrected, because my experience in the Legislature has been that when the public sees a government acknowledge that something was done incorrectly or didn't go far

enough, they actually get far more credit for it than they might think.

Unfortunately, we seem to live in a time right now that we don't want to acknowledge, or politicians don't want to acknowledge when those mistakes have been made. And that is truly something that we see reflected in the current government and particularly when it comes to the BITSA debate.

Because they've now had weeks—weeks—to understand that what they're proposing for tax relief, such as it is, is particularly small and particularly minuscule, and I think if they really, in their heart, were able to speak freely, and I know it's harder for ministers because they're bound by that sort of confidence and the collectiveness of Cabinet, but certainly those who aren't in Cabinet, if they could speak freely, I think that they would acknowledge that they missed the mark, that the budget was presented as something that it truly isn't, and that much more needs to be done.

So we're providing today an opportunity for the government to have more time. This reasoned amendment, as is now more commonly used in the Manitoba Legislature and in other jurisdictions in Canada and the UK, is more than just a reason for something to change; it's an opportunity. It's an opportunity that's dressed up in a reasoned amendment, I would say, honourable Deputy Speaker. And the opportunity that exists for government today is for them to take a step back and go, okay, we didn't get it all right. And this is entirely possible.

You know, a lot of people when they—who aren't following the Legislature that closely—and I'd refer to someone like Steve Lambert, who I acknowledged off the top of my speech, he would certainly know this because he's an expert in these sort of things, but the average person who would be watching the goings on of the Manitoba Legislature, or it would be the same for Parliament in Ottawa as well, they probably are going, well, didn't the budget pass, like, weeks ago? Like, didn't we hear something about the budget passing quite a long time ago?

And, of course, what actually happened was the budget speech passed. We had a vote on the budget speech that was provided by the honourable Minister of Finance (MLA Sala). Now, it seems like a very, very long time ago. And that was an opportunity, of course, for, you know, comments on the broad strokes of the budget. The budget speech provides an overarching commentary on what the budget is going to

provide. But you really have to wait for the BITSA bill to be introduced until you see the details.

So the budget speech—frankly, in today's, you know, parliamentary system, the budget speech has become more of a political document than it really is actually a financial document because it—you know, it's dressed up in all sorts of flowery language and actually doesn't provide a whole lot of details in terms of how numbers were actually arrived at.

And my colleague from Springfield-Ritchot spoke about his time on Treasury Board. I also had the opportunity for many years to serve on Treasury Board; and members of the NDP who are currently on Treasury Board, I hope, would know and would see sort of the detailed work that goes into building up a budget. A lot of Manitobans—and I'll get back to the point about the budget speech—but a lot of Manitobans wouldn't even understand, and why would they really, honourable Deputy Speaker, that the budget process begins usually, like, in the summer before the spring of the budget.

At that time, the Finance Department will issue letters, usually under the signature either of the Treasury Board secretary or the Finance Minister to departments and provide them a target, a budgetary target that they are expecting them to meet. And what that means essentially is that the Department of Finance has determined that this is what they expect revenues and expenditures largely are going to be. They set these sort of goals and then a surplus or a deficit, a number under the NDP—it's always deficit, of course—and they set these targets and then they ask the departments by way of memo to meet these targets.

* (21:10)

So in the work in the summer, generally, the work of the department begins and they begin to go through how they're going to meet targets, where they can find efficiencies, how it matches what their spending priorities were in the department. You know, are they things that they can not do and do instead? And often, in very large departments, like the Department of Families or Health or Education to some extent—to a lesser extent—the budgets impact outside organizations like regional health authorities or school boards or, in the Department of Families, the different agencies around the province. And those organizations, those sort of government-reporting entities, to some extent—not school divisions in particular, but regional health authorities and others—they then have to come

back with suggestions about how they're going to meet those particular targets.

So the budget process is a year-long process. And for the public, they really just hear the budget speech. And then there's some sort of a front page explanation on the Winnipeg Free Press or the Winnipeg Sun going over the highlights of the budget. But there's not a lot of detail in that particular document. Those details, honourable Deputy Speaker, are left for the BITSA bill.

And—now, it's also worth noting, as an aside, that sometimes there's more than one BITSA bill. We've seen under various stripes of government—it's not confined to one government or the other—where there's more than one BITSA bill that comes forward because something changes, you know, after the drafting of the first one and it requires a second one to come forward.

But within the BITSA bill is the details of how the government is going to achieve the various things that they laid out in their budget. And so that's what we're largely talking about here today. The reasoned amendment speaks about how there's a shortfall in providing affordability measures—real affordability measures, measurable affordability measures—for Manitobans.

And that is something that I think, as an opposition, we are doing the government a favour. Now, you know, a quarter after nine on a nice Manitoba summer evening that we've all waited excruciatingly long for because we've had a not-the-best of Manitoba springs. It may be that the government doesn't see this as a favour.

I mean, I would ask them to sort of open up their minds and open up their hearts to really what this is about. It is about providing more time—more time to do the right thing. And in a world where there's lots of feeling that everything in politics is a zero-sum game and that it's all about gotcha moments and everything else, I hope that the government sees this for what it is. It is the opposition reaching across the aisle, in a theoretical way, and saying, let's—let us help you.

Manitobans are saying that this doesn't meet what we need when it comes to a financial or affordability crisis. And, by the way, like, it's not just me labelling it as an affordability crisis. This is actually one of the most ironic things of the whole thing, honourable Deputy Speaker, is—you know, you had the government previewing the budget weeks, maybe months, before it was actually introduced in the spring. And they were saying, well, you know, this is—we're in an

affordability crisis and this budget's going to address it.

So you sort of get this anticipation from the public, for those who are paying attention. There was enough media scrutiny about it that people were paying attention. And people were feeling it and people were sort of waiting, like, what is this budget going to do to have a meaningful impact on what me and my family are facing? That's what the average Manitoban, I think, was thinking before the budget was introduced, because that's what the Premier (Mr. Kinew) led them to believe. He led them to believe that this was going to be something that was really going to move the needle when it came to affordability.

And, you know, I mean, as an aside, we've seen that with past governments. I can, you know, refer back to the previous Progressive Conservative government, which members of the government love to talk about but never in a factual way. And they could look at how many times there was meaningful tax relief provided to Manitobans during that time. One of which—and not just the basic personal exemption and increasing it—but one of them was also ensuring that tax brackets were indexed to inflation. This is one of these things that, you know, you almost have to be a chartered accountant to get excited about it. And I know some chartered accountants who get very excited about it.

But it's important because when you take tax brackets, the amount of money a person makes before they have to pay a certain threshold of taxation, and you de-index it, essentially what you're doing is you're freezing those brackets of income and moving people artificially into a higher tax bracket as their wages increase.

And it's a sneaky way to do it. It's a sneaky way to do it because most people don't pay attention to it. Most people don't know it's happening. If they look closely at their pay stub at the end of the year, they might notice more taxes have been taken off. But they feel it in other ways; they know it in other ways, intuitively or instinctively, because they have less money than they had before.

So, you know, when I look at this particular reasoned amendment, I see it as an opportunity for the government to reset. Now, this House is scheduled to rise on June 1, I believe it is. I don't have a calendar right in front of me, but I believe it's June 1, given our set election calendar, which, you know, was an important change in 2016 in the Manitoba Legislature. And there would be plenty of time—doesn't feel that way,

probably, to many right now—but there would actually be plenty of time between today and June 1 to implement meaningful tax relief, basic personal exemption, allowing people to keep more money before they're taxed. They can earn more money before they're taxed. Lots of time to do that.

I suspect that our very capable House leader on our side of the House, who I know would be incredibly willing to engage in this discussion, could get together a little team on our side, and if the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) on the other side was willing, they could put together a bit of a team.

And I suspect that, you know, in just—in a few days—few hours, maybe—meaningful tax relief could be determined—we've already given, you know, our suggestion—and it could be inserted into the BITSA bill. And on June 1, the House would rise, and folks would have that assurance that they would have a more affordable summer than they would have otherwise if the bill passes the way it is now.

So what we really are doing with this reasoned amendment is providing that opportunity for the government to be able to reflect, to restructure, to reconsider and to do something that Gary Doer used to do well, and to say, you know what? We don't always get it right. Sometimes we miss the mark. And my guess is—and boy, I—you know, I'm still a little 'resitant', even at 9:30 at night or whatever it is, honourable Deputy Speaker, to be giving advice to the NDP.

But I do this, you know, out of, I think, goodness for Manitobans—is if they actually listened and took this opportunity, Manitobans would be better off. I think that families would be better off. And, honestly, I think that the government would be better off. Now I hope my—I can't see, but I hope that members on my side of the House aren't, you know, stop giving advice, stop giving advice.

But, honestly, I think that that's the heart of what this reasoned amendment is. It is to provide that opportunity for the government to take another look at this and to say, are we really heading down the right path?

Now, I mean, haven't sort of gotten into the main comments that I wanted to put on the record yet today. I've got a few more introductory comments to make. And one of them is, you know, I think about the importance of government members speaking to the BITSA bill, speaking to the reasoned amendment, providing for the public and their constituents in

particular, and ministers to the general public if that's what—who they're representing, but certainly MLAs to their individual constituents. Providing them an explanation about why they think this paltry amount of tax relief, in a crisis that's defined by the NDP and the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) crisis, is enough.

* (21:20)

So there'll be time, at some point after my unlimited time, for members of the government to get up, to put words on the record. And I trust that they will. I think that there's noble people on all sides of the House, and I've said that. I don't consider anybody on any side of the House to be, like, a political enemy. We might be adversaries in some ways, but I honestly believe that people run for election for the right reasons and want to do things the right way.

So here's an opportunity for members of the government to rise later, after I'm done some of my comments, and to say to their constituents and to the public: Well, this is why we've done what we've done. We've maybe fallen short, and we're willing to take another look at it.

And I bet you that, you know, the MLAs who did that, their phone lines, their emails, their text messages, their social medias would probably be filled with accolades because people would be saying, yes; that's actually what we wanted. That's what we were hoping that the government would do. You kind of gave us this expectation months ago that there was going to be this really significant and really monumental budget.

In fact, I actually think, you know, honourable Deputy Speaker, I think if I remember correctly—and somebody can correct me if my memory is faulty—I think that the Premier said that this would be, like, the best budget in the history of budgets or something like that.

Like, you know, I mean, it's a ridiculous comment. And, you know, if there weren't—if that wasn't backed up by a series of other ridiculous comments you'd sort of just write it off and go, well, you know, sometimes everybody is subject to hyperbole. And that's just how it is sometimes in the Legislature or in Parliament.

But because the Premier does this so often and seemingly with such, you know, joy, you almost have to think he means it, and if he actually means it, that this is the best budget in the history of Manitoba, then he's either completely disconnected with Manitobans and what they're facing in their individual lives, or he

hasn't looked at another budget in Manitoba history. I mean, I can't think of another explanation. It simply has to be one of those two. But, obviously, this is a budget that falls far short of being even an acceptable budget, let alone one of the best budgets in the history of Manitoba.

And, you know, as an aside—and I do intend to get to the main comments of my speech soon—as an aside, though, I would say, honourable Deputy Speaker, you know, we talk, and I've heard it in the House—and I want to give a bit of a caution, right, because I've heard members of the opposition—or of the government—say, and, you know, in fairness, it's largely the Premier, but not exclusively the Premier, who has said these sort of things. He said something of the line—and I'll paraphrase, but I could certainly get the exact quotes if need be. He said something of the line, a line that's, well, only folks like us know what it's like to hurt, to financially hurt.

And, again, you know, sometimes in the flurry of question period or other debates, things are said that I actually don't think people mean, but because the Premier has repeatedly said comments like that, I would caution him in those comments. I've had the opportunity, in my time, to sit in a number of different ministerial roles, even in the Premier's chair for a brief period of time, and I've had the opportunity to meet Manitobans from the far northern reaches or the far southern parts of Manitoba and from the east to the west, and there are so many amazing individual stories of people who've overcome things in their lives that were hard.

And I know that those stories are reflected on the government benches, but I also know they're reflected on the opposition benches, because I know in talking to my colleagues who sit in the opposition now—and many who sat previously in the government, but who aren't still in the Legislature—that many of them have overcome incredible things, difficult things. It's not a government story; it's not an NDP story; it's not an opposition story; it's not a Progressive Conservative story; it's not an independent member story; it's not a Liberal story. It's a Manitoba story.

Manitobans across our province, so many of them have faced different sorts of hardships, some here in Manitoba, some in other countries that they lived in previously. And now they're facing a different hardship, many of them, having a hard time making ends meet.

And I've shared this in the Legislature before. I mean, one of the reasons that I got involved with

starting up a food bank in Steinbach—it's called Helping Hands food bank—for southeastern Manitoba; it's located in Steinbach, but it serves an area broader than the city of Steinbach—was because of my own personal experience.

My father died when I was very young. My mom was a single mother, raised my sister and I. We lived in government housing for many years. And I'm actually incredibly grateful that there was government housing available for us to live in because I don't know what other options they would've been. I was 11 years old, and I just simply don't know what—where we would've gone but for the fact that there was government housing available.

And years later, as I became more aware of what a struggle that really was for my mom, I said, okay, how do I sort of give back to this? And so, working with others, we worked for the food bank and people who wanted to start a food bank, and we began one in the city of Steinbach. I wrote its first bylaws—which probably need updating now—but that was my way of saying, you know, there are people sometimes who get into circumstances that aren't of their own doing, they fall into a wrong path, and they're just hard done by economically.

And that was our situation. My dad was an alcoholic. He died as a result of his alcoholism. My mom was left as a single mother, and she relied on the generosity of others and government support, and, of course, she worked really hard because that's who she was and who she is.

And those stories aren't exclusive, certainly to me, and they aren't exclusive to members of the opposition, and they aren't exclusive to members of the government, and they aren't exclusive to members of the Legislature; they are Manitoba stories. So I just want to say when the speak—when the Premier (Mr. Kinew) speaks about the budget or other things, but I notice in particular when he speaks about the budget, he will say things like, only people on our side know what it's like to hurt financially.

And, frankly, you know, I'm probably at the stage of my political career where I don't get all that insulted that easily anymore, and I'm not all that insulted by it, but it's certainly an insult to my mother. It's certainly an insult to my mom who had to find us government housing, who had to work a minimum wage job for 50 hours a week to make ends meet. It's an insult to her.

I had to caution the Premier, and I caution members of the government who think that that line of

attack is any way helpful to them. It is insulting to Manitobans generally, and it's insulting to members on all sides of the House who've had a struggle.

Now, I want to return back to the struggle that Manitobans are facing in this particular budget. So I talked about what a reasoned amendment is: an opportunity. It's an opportunity for the government to reflect, say, all right, how do we sort of reset? How do we begin again on something that we need to begin again on? I spoke about the BITSA bill and how it's different than the vote on the budget. The vote on the budget is the vote on what's essentially a political document. Talked about how we get to this point in the legislative process on BITSA.

And I want to just stop here about the process because my friend, the member for Elmwood (MLA Maloway), was speaking on the BITSA amendment a couple of weeks ago, and he inferred my name, not in a bad way, unlike the Premier sometimes.

My friend from Elmwood interjected my name as somebody who had been involved in creating the rules for 2016—in 2016, which are largely, you know, with minor exceptions, the kind of rules—the rules that govern us here today. And the member for Elmwood was suggesting at that time that if we wanted to change how BITSA was dealt with and whether to send it to committee, that we would've done it at that time.

Now, I have great respect for the member for Elmwood, by the way; I'll say this again. Now, this might be the second time I'm going to get in trouble with my colleagues in the House because I acknowledged the first time we're actually trying to do the NDP a favour by giving them time to reconsider on this bill, so that might be my problem, No. 1.

And now my second problem is I'm going to acknowledge that I have fondness for the member for Elmwood, partly because of, you know, the 'longevity' that he's been in the Assembly and then the various things that we've—our paths have intersected from the legislative perspective.

* (21:30)

But he talked about how, if we wanted the BITSA bill to go to a committee in the way that BITSA—or bills generally go to committee in the Manitoba Legislature, that it would have been done as part of the 2016 rule changes.

And I would submit to you, honourable Deputy Speaker, that the member for Elmwood, on this particular issue, quite doesn't know what he's talking about. He knows what he's talking about on a lot of other things. So on this particular issue, you know, he wasn't sort of there at the table when there were discussions about how the rules would proceed. And together with the NDP was Dave Chomiak and Steve Ashton, and I think Jon Gerrard was representing the independents or Liberals at the time—lots of discussions about what the rules would look like, largely as what exists today with some minor tweaks and changes.

But there was discussion about the budget and there was discussion about how the budget would proceed in the spring sitting, when the budget should be introduced by, whether it should be voted upon, whether or not the Estimates hours—which are all part of this process that we're undergoing right now—would be a part of that, whether or not the bill could potentially go to committee. That was discussed as well.

And it's not that there were objections to any of those particular trains of thought when it came to rules and changes in rules.

In fact, I would argue that almost anybody who has been a Finance minister in the Manitoba Legislature—and I would include Greg Selinger in that, I would include Cameron Friesen in that, I would include the current Minister of Finance (MLA Sala)—I bet you all of the Finance ministers, former Finance ministers and current Finance Minister, would say, you know what, we should pass the budget in the spring.

Because there's operational issues, right, about government and how do things get paid and employees and all those sort of things, and not having to operate on special warrants. And we probably are one of the few legislatures in Canada that doesn't routinely pass the budget in the spring.

So then that probably—you know, there probably are members in the House who are hanging on to every one of these words, who are wondering then, well, why is it that that wasn't dealt with in 2016? If you really wanted BITSA to go to a public committee or a hearing, why didn't it happen in 2016?

And the reality was, it was just a time issue. There were so many changes that were happening to the rules at the time that it simply wasn't going to happen. But there was a commitment to ensure that the rules would be reconsidered and that things like how the budget was dealt with would be considered again.

In fact, I think there was a loose commitment to do it after the 2016 election.

Well, I'll take whatever responsibility I need to take for that, but I think it's a collective responsibility in the House that, you know, sometimes when there's momentum, when it comes to changing rules, you ride that momentum. And then, suddenly, momentum stops, and I suspect that that's probably what happened in this particular case.

But I would certainly encourage the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine)—who I know is—cares about the rules deeply and who I respect them for their caring of the rules of the House—and I would say to the Opposition House Leader, it would be good to review, right, I mean, how the budget is dealt with in the spring. Now there has to be trade-offs, obviously, for opposition and for government, and that's the nature of these rule discussions.

But the fact that BITSA doesn't go to a public hearing in the way that other bills in our legislative system—unique, relatively unique in Canada, I think there might be one Maritime province that also has public hearings—is not because there was an unwillingness by either the then-opposition or the then-government to entertain that discussion. It's just that there were too many rule changes happening at the time.

I mean, our calendar, the fact that we have a set sitting calendar, the fact we ask questions during private members' business and before government bills, all those things didn't exist before 2016. There were—and I can't even think of all the different changes that happened. I'm sure the Clerk's Office would inform me of that. But, I mean, there were so many changes happening that just adding the budget changes onto that was simply not reasonable.

So when my friend from Elmwood says that, well, this is something, then, that the member for Steinbach, you know, could have dealt with if he really was concerned about it at that time, it wasn't for lack of concern. It's just the fact that there was a volume of rule changes happening at the time that, in and of itself, was so significant.

So, I mean, it might be that, you know, that the last reasoned amendment spoke about sending the BITSA bill to a government committee, and I wonder now if members of the government don't sort of regret not taking us up on that reasoned amendment because we might be much further in this process than we are

tonight, but for the fact that they didn't accept that ability to move this to committee.

And it would have been interesting to hear what the public had to say about it. And I'll get that when I get into the main—I'm still kind of in my introductory comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But when I get to the main comments of my speech, I'll talk about what the public might have said, if given an opportunity to speak to this in a public presentation.

But I do want to conclude this sort of brief introductory comments with a plea to members of the government to take the time not only to reconsider the BITSA bill, to find real affordability measures and to place them into the bill, but to also speak to the bill, to speak to your constituents who want to hear, want to hear why it is that you think this bill is satisfactory or maybe you don't.

Maybe there are members of the government who would like to say, hey, I think—to do a Gary Doer, I would say—it's almost like a verb—to pull a Gary Doer and to say, you know what? I don't think we quite got it right. And we're going to go back and we're going to do this. I can almost hear Gary Doer in my head saying this because he was good at it. But maybe that's the opportunity for members to stand up and say, yes, like, you know, we're going to go back and do this differently.

And that might be freeing for members of the non-Executive Council members in the government, often referred to as backbenchers—I'm not really fond of that term—but those who aren't in Executive Council, who aren't in Cabinet, they may want to speak, and they can. They're a little bit more free to speak than if you're in Executive Council on certain matters. Just say, yes, you know, I don't think we quite got this right.

I don't think that would be something that should be taken as some sort of attack on the government. It should probably be seen as welcomed. I'm not sure that this Premier (Mr. Kinew) is sort of geared towards that sort of advice, but it is something I think that he should look at and consider. So I would encourage members of government to search their hearts and to look at whether or not, after I'm done with my unlimited time, to be able to stand up and speak to this particular bill. I would welcome to hear their comments. Now, those are just some brief introductory comments that I wanted to put on the record, honourable Deputy Speaker.

But I did want to speak now in particular about some of the things that exist within BITSA and some of the things that would be considered to be against affordability measures, that would be driving costs up. And this is what the reasoned amendment is about. It's about finding real, measurable things that provide greater affordability.

So one of the comments that was made earlier, I think it was by the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) but probably echoed, as well, by the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler) related to the Manitoba jobs agreement or the Manitoba no jobs agreement or the forced unionization, a portion of BITSA or whatever you want to call it. I mean, this is a really, really important thing that's happening in Manitoba that I don't think is getting the attention it deserves. And it relates specifically to affordability and to affordability measures as this particular reasoned amendment speaks to. The Manitoba jobs agreement is sort of the—I don't want to call it the evil twin, but maybe it sort of is—of what was brought in when the NDP won government in 1999.

So this is sometimes referred to by the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and he'll say, well, you know, we've had this before, we've had project labour agreements before, it was used for the expansion of the floodway, he'll refer to it being used by Duff Roblin for the creation of the floodway.

But the Manitoba jobs agreement is actually very different than what the project labour agreements that those particular projects were built under. And even the project labour agreement for the expansion of the floodway, which was brought in by Gary Doer, was relatively controversial. Not the project of expanding the floodway itself; I mean, everybody understood after the flood of the century in 1997 that there was a need—clearly a need—to expand the floodway.

* (21:40)

And it's interesting how history sort of moves us on, right? Because we were at a time once where there was great consternation and questioning about whether a floodway was ever needed decades and decades ago. And it was, of course, because of the brilliance and the foresight of Duff Roblin that has saved untold millions of dollars in property damage because of the construction of the floodway. In fact, they actually had this debate in Fargo not that long ago. There—I'm not actually sure what the state is of their floodway in Fargo. It might still be under construction, but they're building a floodway themselves

and they, you know, pointed to Winnipeg and what Winnipeg had done so many years ago.

But after the flood of 1997, where you saw all that property damage, you know, along the Red River, and there was a lot of different measures that were taken. There was the federal-provincial ring dike program—I think there was a name for it and I can't remember the exact name because it was 1997—but a ring dike program where—you can still see them, right, when you drive around. And now they're all nicely manicured and such, right? But there was ring dikes built around homes to build them up beyond the 1997 flood levels. And there was funding for that really, really important program.

But also, one of the projects was to expand the floodway. And, in the Assembly, there wasn't really a great disagreement about expanding the floodway. I think most members—if I recall, all members agreed that the floodway needed to be expanded.

But there were questions about cost, timing, how it was going to be done. And what was brought in then to expand the floodway was called the project labour agreement, which many called the forced unionization plan because it essentially made workers who were working on the expansion of the floodway to pay union dues, even if they didn't belong to a union. Now, that sounds pretty familiar to members in the Chamber here today, because that's essentially what the NDP are doing now, but with much smaller projects.

So the PLA, with the expansion of the floodway, was controversial at the time because open shop construction organizations said, listen, like, you know, we can provide the service. There's not a concern—if there's a concern about the project not getting done, labour disruption, we can work through that. We have other ways to deal with wages. We have the wages—construction wages act. There's lots of different mechanisms to deal with things, but forcing non-unionized employees to pay union dues was going to drive up the cost.

Now, it's been a long time. I don't know exactly the figures about, you know, how much it drove up the cost. I do know that the expansion of the floodway was overbudget. And part of that is because you had to expand the bridges and everything else. But there were just simply costs that were higher than they might otherwise have been. And part of that was because of the forced unionization plan that was then brought in under the NDP under Gary Doer.

Again, no argument on the expansion of the floodway. Everybody agreed that that had to be done. Just as the creation of the floodway saved millions and millions of untold dollars and property damage, so too would the expansion of the floodway have done exactly the same. And it wasn't—that wasn't an issue of debate, I don't think, in the Manitoba Legislature.

But the PLA certainly was a matter of debate. And so the former Progressive Conservative government said, hey, you know, these PLAs are—not only are they not necessary because projects were getting built without forcing non-unionized workers to pay union dues, but also, they were providing a lot of consternation between open shop contractors and unionized companies, which really wasn't necessary—that sort of consternation between the two. So we did away with the PLAs. Well, you know, along comes a new NDP government, and what's old is new again, I suppose. And they bring in the Manitoba jobs agreement.

But it's the Manitoba jobs agreement on steroids because they took the amount that used to be in the billions, in terms of the projects that would be applied to for the former project labour agreements. And they said, you know what? We're actually going to apply it to projects that might be \$50 million.

Like, \$50 million is a lot of money to me. It's a lot of money, I imagine, to every member in the Chamber, and it's a lot of money to Manitobans. But in the scale of capital projects for Manitoba infrastructure and for the capital planning part of government, these aren't the biggest projects, by far, that they deal with. In fact, you know, a lot of schools are built in that 35-to-50-million-dollar-or-more, just over, range. So, suddenly, schools are captured in the Manitoba jobs agreement that requires its forced unionization plan, which drives up costs, which is at the heart of this particular amendment about affordability.

So now you've got—you know, it's like déjà vu; it's like 1999 all over again, maybe 2002 or whatever that Gary Doer brought in the PLA. But it's like we're living that all over again. And I'm driving in Winnipeg and I'm seeing the advertisements now about forced unionization and how this Premier's (Mr. Kinew) dividing Manitobans, which is ironic, because the current Premier has gotten some degree of political mileage out of using the term one Manitoba then spends an inordinate of time trying to divide Manitobans. And the Manitoba jobs agreement, the MJA, is one particular example, but not the only example, but it's

the clearest and the most recent example of how Manitobans are being divided and costs are going to be driven up.

The Speaker in the Chair

Now, I heard one estimate that said that one of the schools—I think it was one of them in Brandon—would—could potentially be 20 per cent higher in terms of cost because of the Manitoba jobs agreement, because you are essentially forcing unionization; you're going to force non-unionized workers or companies to pay what is, in essence, union dues, a fee to oversee some of these agreements and to have oversight over non-unionized workers. It actually goes significantly further than the PLA did in Gary Doer's time.

So it not only divides Manitobans in a way that is entirely unnecessary—I mean, it truly is a solution in search of a problem. There was no problem when it came to these kinds of construction projects in Manitoba. I would argue to you, Honourable Speaker, that the only real delay that I've seen in something like a school project, in recent years, is because the NDP cancelled them. I mean, thankfully, in Steinbach, the elementary school was so far out of the ground, I suspect the NDP did a circle around it and figured, can we cancel this thing? Well, you know, it's sort of halfway out of the ground so we can't really just knock it all down.

Although, I do remember a time when they stopped construction on the hospital in Selkirk, and it was just pillars coming out of the ground, and they said, okay, we're just going to stop building this hospital in Selkirk. The people in Selkirk, they used to call it Stonehenge because they would just drive by—maybe my friend from Selkirk could confirm this. They would just drive by and they would just see these pillars coming out of the ground where the hospital was supposed to be, and it just stopped. They just stopped building it. You know, my friend from Portage might go, hey, this kind of sounds like the Portage hospital. That one actually got completed, but now it just sits empty as a—as some sort of edifice to government inefficiency, I don't know.

But, anyway, getting back to the issue of the Manitoba jobs agreement, how it increases costs and how it relates to this particular amendment, is if you're going to force non-unionized workers and companies to pay these additional fees, and if it is, you know, 20 per cent is that they're projecting now in Brandon—that's—that was what was publicly reported—well, how

many schools are you not going to be able to build, right, as a result of that?

And I've heard the Premier say, well, this guarantees that schools get built. Well, you know, tell that to the folks in Grunthal who had their school expansion kiboshed for a long, long time by the NDP. Made students learn in unsuitable locations for a very long time and then sort of came along, I don't know, a year or two after and said, yes, and actually we're going to build the thing that we stopped and tried to take—to try to take credit for it.

The greatest risk of schools not getting built is the NDP; it's not the lack of a labour agreement. There's been more schools cancelled or delayed by the NDP in the last two years than I think there probably was in the previous 10 years.

So the issue of having an MJA, a job agreement, that's going to add costs—I would think it would be a bad thing to do it at any time, but this particular amendment, I mean, speaks to the affordability crisis that we're in now. I would think it'd be a bad thing to do it at any time, but can you imagine, like, doing it now when people are struggling to make ends meet for groceries and when they're struggling to fill in gas in their tank because, you know, gas has doubled in price despite the fact the NDP say they made it cheaper—it's doubled in price, actually.

* (21:50)

And then now you're going to put in this Manitoba jobs agreement, add on 20 per cent, and I think most Manitobans would say, okay, but why? Like, what's the reason for it? What are we getting out of that? Were we getting—are we getting more schools? Well, you could argue you're getting less schools because if the cost is going to go up, that means there's less money for the government to build additional schools. And there's always a number of schools that are needed to be built; there's always a list of capital planning in Education—has when it comes to priorities for schools. So, you know, you can argue that it's a bad idea at any time to artificially and for—without any reason, to add on costs for schools.

But I would say, particularly in this time when Manitobans are sitting at their kitchen table and they're looking at their budget and they're saying, you know, we might not be able to go on that holiday this year, and we were going to fly, but—then we were going drive, but now we can't even afford to drive. And, like, we're choosing between kids having a sports programs, or what are we going to have to give up?

And then they're looking at the news, and they're hearing the Premier (Mr. Kinew) talking about forcing people who aren't in unions to pay union dues and adding costs to construction. It doesn't make a lot of sense. And I think that Manitobans understand that.

And that is what the reasoned amendment, you know, really speaks to. It's about how do we really find a way to, in a time when it's more important than ever to have affordability, to do it. And I'd say again, Honourable Speaker, to the Premier, who speaks about one Manitoba and divides Manitobans at any opportunity he can, this would be one way to say, you know what? We went a little far. We went too far, and we're going to back away from this. We're not going to interfere in the construction industry. There isn't a problem that exists today where there's nothing really to solve here. We're going to go back to the way it was. And he'd get some credit for it.

And now, this is twice, you know, twice in one hour that I've given a suggestion to the Premier that would get him some credit, which I'm not charging for this, but maybe I should start. So, like, I think that, ultimately, this is an opportunity for the Premier to step back and to reconsider a lot of things that are existing within BITSA, but the MJA is just one. So I'm not quite getting into the main comments that I wanted to put on the record regarding Statistics Canada things, but I'm getting close.

But, on the issue of affordability—and this relates to what my friend from Springfield-Ritchot was speaking about. And he was speaking about debt. And I think he—I mean, I'm sure I'll ask him when I see him soon, but I'm sure that he said something along the lines of, debt is really just deferred taxes. It's a bill that somebody else is going to have to pay at some point. It's something that we are reaping the benefits of, presumably, because the money's being spent on something that one would hope would be good—although it's hard to identify what those things are sometimes with this government. But, ultimately, somebody has to pay that.

Now, you know, there was a fascinating statement that came out from the Premier—I want to say it was about two or three weeks ago. And it came out from the NDP communications team, and, I don't know, there's good staffers on all sides of the House, but I don't know who tried to come up with this spin. But somebody convinced the NDP to put out a press release that said that we had the lowest deficit-to-GDP in the country. Of course, they left out one word in that news release, and that was, projected.

Because what the actual news release should've said is, this particular budget projects the lowest projected deficit-to-GDP in Canada. And what that would have caused people to do is say, well, okay, what do they mean by projected deficit? Well, I mean, the projected deficit, this is a budget, right? So, you know, there's all sorts of assumptions that go into the budget. Some of them are tax-related assumptions: how much is going to be raised by personal income tax.

And, clearly, this is a government, I think, that is exaggerating what they—the increase of personal sales tax and other things are going to be in the next year. They seem to radically reduce emergency expenditures. Maybe they think we're going to all of a sudden have, you know, a great amount of rain that's going to boost the revenue of Hydro because our books are done on a summary basis. So if Hydro loses money, that falls onto the books of the Province. But there was a lot of hocus pocus that was done in putting together these numbers. And the reality is that you can kind of do that because you can just say, well, you know what, let's actually use this assumption when it comes to—let's use the rosier assumption when it comes to sales tax revenues. Let's use the least dire assumption when it comes to the emergency expenditures. And suddenly your numbers start to look better.

And so the government puts out a projected deficit of 400 or 500 million dollars, which, you know, in normal times wouldn't be that great. But compared to what the NDP have been doing, it doesn't seem to be that bad, except when you look at those numbers. And then you look at history. And I don't think the members of the Assembly largely understand this because many of them are new members. But if they would look back in history, I think what they would find is there hasn't been an NDP government that has met its deficit projections for—I want to say, eight years. So this particular government has missed every one of its deficit projections—to the worst, by the way. They never got better. And Greg Selinger, I believe, missed his deficit projections when he was premier—for the entire time that he was premier—which would mean that we're on a losing streak, not a winning streak, a losing streak under NDP governments of eight consecutive budgets, NDP budgets, where their deficit was underprojected. And not just underprojected by, like, a margin of error or around it—I'm talking hundreds of millions of dollars off of its projection.

So when, you know, the spin doctors in the NDP operation—or maybe this came right from the mind of the Finance Minister, I don't know; I tend to

think of him better than that. But when somebody said, you know what, we should put out a news release that said we have the lowest deficit number compared to GDP, anybody who pays attention to Manitoba politics knows there is no chance the NDP, based on past history, are going to meet their deficit numbers. They never do, you know.

And it's not even ever close to the—meeting those numbers. And I would argue that, you know, when they say those sort of things to Manitobans, I suspect people were patting themselves on the back in the back room and like, oh, isn't this clever and all this sort of stuff. People won't look into it. They don't know what deficits are compared to debt and they don't know what projections are compared to actuals. And they probably thought this was all very cute and funny. It's not cute and funny when, ultimately, you've got to raise taxes to pay for it.

And there are some members of the House, and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) would be one of them, who remembers what it's like when an NDP government had to raise the PST. In fact, he'll know, sitting in the House on this beautiful summer evening, that there were many, many beautiful summer evenings back in 2013, I think it was, where we sat in the House and we debated the NDP raising the PST.

And, ironically, many of the lines that the NDP today say were the same lines that they say then: oh, things are getting better, the deficit's going down, don't worry, it's all going to be okay. Now, of course, what we didn't know at that time was, like, most of the conflict that was happening wasn't just in Manitoba. It was in the actual NDP caucus at the time, and it all blew up. And maybe that's actually happening now. Who knows, right?

You know, I mean, there's lots of things that have happened with the Premier (Mr. Kinew) in recent days that I'm pretty sure some members aren't comfortable with and don't feel good about. And I'm sure they're hearing it at the door. But the issue of affordability and the issue of the reasoned amendment ultimately is about giving assurances to Manitobans and giving them a real understanding of where this province is heading financially and whether or not affordability will be improved, whether it's just going to be a show, as it is in this BITSA budget and taking PST off of Cheetos and Slurpees. Or is it actually going to be something measurable and real?

And when they put out that release, the lowest projected deficit—but they left out the word projected—to GDP, anybody who was paying attention knew this

wasn't a serious government. They weren't really dealing with this in a serious way, which is what Manitobans want. Because at this time in our history, you know, I—there's been lots of times in Canadian history and in world history where there has been a necessity to have a serious government—but I actually think at this time in particular, there are Manitobans who expect the government to be forthright, to be serious and to be upfront with the situation, financial and otherwise. And they're not getting it from this government.

* (22:00)

You know, we're dealing at a time now where we have votes on separation in a country which, like many members in the House, I'm old enough to remember the second referendum in Quebec, which almost separated the country by less than half a percentage point.

I was a staff person in the government in 1995, working for Gary Filmon's government. And my role on the night of the Quebec referendum was to draft, for MLAs, two news releases: one news release would go out if Quebec decided to separate, the other news release would go out if they decided to stay. And I remember sitting on the Grand Staircase of the Legislature, but most of the staff were off in offices watching the results on TV because we didn't have, you know, cellphones and instant access to the results at that time, so everybody was watching on the TV broadcast. And I remember sitting on the steps of the Grand Staircase of the Legislature, and in my two hands I had two different news releases: one release that I would send out if Quebec had decided to separate, one that I would send out if they decided not to. And it was late into the night before we found out that it was a margin—it was a fraction of a fraction that Quebec voted to stay. And now we're going through a referendum with Alberta. It's a serious time. It's an incredibly serious time.

And this amendment speaks to the seriousness of the issues that we are facing. The amendment speaks to the need for affordability, the need to support Manitobans, the need to show a real plan. And in a time where we have these concerns—and by the way, you know, I'm very grateful and thankful for Pierre Poilievre, who's going to be campaigning on the pro-Canada side; for former premier Jason Kenney, who's going to be supporting and campaigning for the pro-Canada side; for former MP Monte Solberg, who's going to be campaigning; and many, many others who

I don't have time to name today. I'm very grateful that they're going to be taking up that particular position.

But it speaks to the seriousness of the issues that we deal with, and on affordability, as the reasoned amendment speaks to. The issue of affordability requires a serious government. The issue of affordability requires a serious government that's going to put forward a serious plan for real savings. That's ultimately what Manitobans are looking for and what this particular amendment speaks to. And at a time in Canada where we see the seriousness of the things that we are facing, some of which are internal, some of which are external, some of which Canadians have some control over, some of which Canadians have no control over, there's an incredible need for a serious government. And what do we get instead? A Premier (Mr. Kinew) who barks and, you know, acts in a certain way that I think embarrasses all members of the Chamber, including members of his own caucus, and who puts out news releases that talk about deficits to GDP which are projected and simply aren't real.

So, with this particular reasoned amendment, I think it's an opportunity—I hope it's an opportunity—for the government to step back, for the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) and for others to come together and say, all right, where have we gone wrong? How can we bring this back to what we committed to before the budget was actually introduced?

Because, before the budget was introduced in March, the feeling was, as the Premier said, this was going to be, like, an extraordinary budget when it came to affordability measures. And what did we get? No tax on Slurpees and Cheetos, or something like that. So, you know, ultimately, Manitobans felt disappointed. Manitobans felt let down. I could go as—so far as to say Manitobans felt betrayed. And I suspect that if members opposite got up, they would actually agree to that and be able to speak to some of that as well.

So when we look at issues of affordability, which is what this particular amendment speaks to, I don't think we have to look any further than school taxes. And we saw an extraordinary—and I don't actually remember it happening before. I mean, maybe it happened in a less dramatic way, but I don't recall the City of Winnipeg putting an insert into the tax rolls for the property taxes that specifically said, we've got nothing to do with the school taxes. Like, you know, we're doing our best over here, and if you got issues with the school taxes, you got to talk to the trustees

and the school division. But that's how bad it was. That speaks to how bad it was.

There are divisions—and I've listened to my colleagues speak about how some divisions went up 20 per cent, 30 per cent, 40 per cent in terms of those increases. And the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) stands up and says, well, you know, we're going to give you \$100 back. I mean, so, on the one hand, you might be paying three or four hundred dollars more and, on the other hand, you might end up getting \$100 back. Well, it doesn't take a mathematician to realize that you're not actually further ahead. And families understand that they're not actually further ahead in that particular environment.

So what's been the NDP response when it comes to the skyrocketing school taxes in Manitoba? And, by the way, it's worth noting that this is, you know, it's not like this is happening across Canada. You look at this chart—I saw the chart which showed the school tax increases in other provinces. And then it showed Manitobans and, like, Manitobans look like some sort of elevator to the sky all of a sudden. Everybody else was just sort of tickling along there, and then, boom, Manitobans went up. It was ridiculous. I almost—I had to look twice at it to make sure that it was actually real, but it was. I fact-checked it. I'm sure that a—member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) and the Minister of Business, I'm sure they've fact-checked it too. They probably said, this can't be real, and then they looked at it and went, oh, my goodness, it is.

And they were getting the phone calls, I'm sure, in their constituency offices. And people were saying, can't you—what's going on here? Like, can you do anything about this? And then they probably said, oh, you know, it's the \$100. We're giving you \$100. And I can imagine how that conversation went.

So, you know, when you look at the pressures that people feel, and they feel those pressures when it comes to school taxes, and they're wondering, how is it going to end? And what's been the response of the government? Well, we heard the Premier say that—at one point he started to talk about, well, autonomy, autonomy, autonomy. It's up to the school divisions. He tried to deflect from the fact that the Manitoba School Boards Association said that they weren't getting properly funded.

So he—like, he aggressively went after the Manitoba—as he's wont to do—aggressively went after the Manitoba School Boards Association and said, oh, yes, we're giving you everything you need, basically. And they came back and said something quite different.

And then he kind of—it got to the point where the Premier (Mr. Kinew) sometimes gets to, and he just became dismissive and said, you know what? Not my problem. Go talk to the school boards, right? He just kind of threw his hands up and said, yes, I don't want to deal with this, because he was hearing how bad it was.

Now, you know, there are two different paths that a premier can take at that time when presented with the reality of people responding to excessive taxation, significantly high taxation over a two- or three-year period. You can respond to the School Boards Association in a certain way. And I don't think the way to do it in any of those situations is to be dismissive and to say, well, the School Boards Association doesn't know what they're talking about. Manitobans don't understand we're giving them 100 bucks back, even though they're going to be paying \$400 more on their school taxes. It was incredibly dismissive for a premier to take that sort of tack.

And there's also no sense of how this is going to end, you know? Like, I mean, we're going to go into another budget cycle. I mentioned how the budget cycle sort of begins around this time in the summer for the next year's budget and departments will get their targets. But, I mean, it's true for the school divisions too. They'll wait for their funding announcement that happens early in the new year, so January, February, I think it is, the schools will find out what the funding announcement is.

But there's no sense that this is ending, you know? That the 20, 30, 40 per cent increases to school taxes is coming to a close. Because the school divisions are still saying they're significantly underfunded—by this government, by the way—and they're saying that clearly and they're saying it specifically. And we're just sort of, like, waiting to see what the next hit's going to be, about how much it's going to be next year.

And that's just the one. You know, I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, Honourable Speaker, that Statistics Canada was gracious enough to provide me with 200 items that have gone up in price. And I'll get to those yet when I get to the main part of my speech; I'm still in my introductory comments.

But it's important to note that when you talk about, you know, school taxes and school divisions, that this seems to be something that has no end in sight, that people just have to sort of hang on and see what it's going to be next year and how hard they're going to be hit next year. And it leaves them with a lot of concern. I think it leaves people with a lot of

anxiety, and I think there's good reasons for them to feel that way.

* (22:10)

And, you know, at the same time, I relate it back to the comment I had about the Manitoba jobs agreement, right? You're going to start charging—potentially, according to the newspaper, if you believe what was in the Brandon Sun—a 20 per cent increase on building of schools at the same time that you're asking homeowners to pay 30 per cent more on their school taxes.

And, you know, there's a lot of homeowners who are saying, well, hold on now, wait a minute, don't these two relate? Like, how come we're paying, unnecessarily, 20 per cent more for building a school? And on the other hand, you're going to school divisions and to property owners and saying, we got to—you pay another 30 per cent. Maybe we can work something out here.

But the Premier doesn't want to hear any of that. He's not listening to what Manitobans are saying, which is why this reasoned amendment is a gift to the government. It's not Christmas in May or June, but it feels that way. Because it's essentially a gift that the opposition has put into a legislative wrapping and presented it to the government and said, you know what? This is an opportunity for you. We're here to help you help Manitobans.

I have no doubt that the minister of industry; the MLA for McPhillips, the MLA for—*[interjection]*—yes, I'm glad he's happy to hear that; the MLA for Waverley; my friend from Fort Richmond, who I enjoy serving on PAC with; I have no doubt that they're getting those calls in the Manitoba—or in their constituency offices where people are saying, like, come on, let's get real here. What are you going to do to help? You're talking about taking the tax off of Cheezies and Slurpees. And, you know, we all love a good Slurpee now and again, but it's not really going to help you, in terms of the affordability crisis that you're facing.

I have no doubt that those discussions are happening in the constituency offices of my friends in those particular ridings. And what a great relief it would be for them if the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) and others would say, okay, we're going to take this reasoned amendment as a friendly amendment. We're going to take it in the spirit that it was given, and we're going to come together, and we're going to come up with something.

Make an offer. Make—put on the table what we believe is the right thing to do. Maybe you've got something else, and let's come together and do something that will benefit the vast majority of Manitobans, not just those who want a Slurpee now and again. I'd count myself among those, and, you know, we're going to help them, and I just don't think that this government is willing to do it, but we're giving them the time. We're giving them the time. And sometimes time is the most valuable gift that you can offer to somebody. So to the MLAs who are enjoying a wonderful evening in the Manitoba Legislature at 10:15 at night, consider this a gift to you that has been provided to you so you can think about how things can be approved.

Now, I want to speak a little bit more about why a basic personal exemption, why it should be increased. And this goes to the issue of the amendment and affordability. And there are certainly lots of ways that affordability can be provided to people. The issue is what does—what gives them flexibility to be able to use the money in the way that best helps them and their family, and what's sustainable.

So, you know, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) talks a lot about—he likes to talk a lot about the very temporary gas tax holiday that was provided to Manitobans. Now, for those Manitobans who are driving by the gas station and seeing gas at a buck eighty-nine or a buck seventy-nine, boy, that feels like a distant day.

And whatever relief they felt at that time has long gone into the sands of Saudi Arabia but they obviously need something that's more sustainable, that isn't just sort of gimmick. We're going to do this for a real short period of time. And then, yes, gas prices might double in cost, but well, you're on your own because that's essentially—you know, it's interesting.

Actually, I'm reminded of something that the Premier said, actually just like a month ago, that the Premier was summers on radio or something. And he has a tendency to do this. He sort of just drifts into side discussions. And he said, well, you know what? Maybe we aren't going to take the gas tax off of fuel again. Just sort of threw it out there. But he said, you know what? We're going to wait a month, and we're going to see what the cost of gas is.

Well, I can tell you, the cost of gas today isn't any later—isn't any lower than when he said those comments. In fact, I would say it's probably about 20 cents a litre more than when he said those comments. And where did that commitment go, right? I mean, it's because it's how the Premier speaks. It's a—sort of in

the moment, let's see if I can get a headline, maybe people will forget, maybe the strait will open and the gas prices will go back down and I won't have to actually fulfill any of these sort of commitments. It's just this—sort of this loosey-goosey kind of commitments, when people actually need real serious government at a real serious time.

So the interesting thing about the basic personal exemption, which we propose, in terms of increasing, is that it provides flexibility. And when I get past my introductory comments, I want to give some specific examples. But, the basic personal exemption provides flexibility for families to be able to use the savings that they would get from not being taxed on, let's say, the first \$30,000 of their income in a way that best meets their family's needs. And this is, sort of, the crux of affordability and it's sometimes where governments, you know, get into challenges. The Premier has decided that, well, the vast majority of families must eat an inordinate amount of Cheetos and Slurpees, so this—that would somehow provide them with some sort of significant relief. I think the statistics would show something different.

He's also made the decision that restaurants must, you know, people don't go to restaurants and so that wouldn't provide them any sort of financial relief, so we're going to exempt restaurants from the tax savings. And so he's picking winners and losers based on what he believes individual families actually do in their lives, and I don't think that that's something a premier should presume.

I would say that the variety and uniqueness of families in Manitoba is as many as families that there are in Manitoba. Every family prioritizes things in a different way. Every family decides how it is that they're going to structure their family finances in a different way. So affordability, as this reasoned amendment speaks to, is actually then defined differently for every family. It's not a homogeneous, one-size-fits-all solution.

And that's the brilliance of raising the basic personal exemption threshold. It's because it says to families, all right, we know you're suffering—we know financially families are suffering. That's the common denominator across all this—all the families in Manitoba, I think, essentially, or mostly.

We know that that's the common denominator but we don't know the individual solutions to try to improve this because each family is different. They're not the same. So the basic personal exemption, by raising it, it says to families, okay, we're going to leave

more money in your pocket and you make the decision, you make the determination about how it is you want to spend that money.

So, if you're a family that has young children who are in sports programs, as many families do, and that's what you value and you're struggling to be able to pay the fees for those sports programs, well, raising the basic personal exemption says to those families: we hear you; we understand that this is a challenge and we're going to leave more money in your pocket and you can decide what to do with that. And in your family's case, the sports programs are a priority, so that money can then be used for sports programs. You might have another family who says, you know what? What we actually value, what's most important to us, is the ability to go on a family vacation.

My predecessor, Jim Penner, a dear friend of mine, who owned Penner Foods—and I've often spoken about in the House and I have just great fondness for—you know, I think he was sometimes frustrated in life because those who knew him, in his later years, after Penner Foods became quite successful, they knew him as a very wealthy individual, a very generous individual, by the way, as well, Honourable Speaker. But of—they knew him as a very wealthy individual. And the reality was that there was many times during Jim's life where the business wasn't doing that well or they were struggling. He would often say that, in the early 1980s, when interest rates were 20 or 30 per cent, that the only reason that the banks didn't foreclose on the store and the mall was because they wouldn't have known what to do with the rural mall. It would have just been a loser, so they figured, let's just let him run it and hopefully they can sort of get out of this. And, of course, they did.

* (22:20)

But Jim would often say that, in those times when they were struggling financially, what was important to him was that the family and that him and his wife, Bev, were able to get away on a vacation, sometimes with the family, sometimes just him and Bev. Those are the things that they valued because they worked so hard in the business that that rare opportunity to be able to get away from it was, was there—what they valued.

So I can imagine that there are families out there today, Honourable Speaker, who may be not in the exact situation; they're not trying to—well, maybe some of them are trying to run a business, but not all of them would be. And they're sitting there and they're going, you know, what we value most is we just want

to sort of take a week and go to a yurt and to go camping and get away. Or we just want to be able to travel to one of the provincial parks. Or there's something in Manitoba or maybe somewhere else in Canada that we just want to see. But we can't do it. We can't afford it. Gas prices are too high, camping might be too expensive, hotel costs may be too high and we're just not able to do it.

And so how is it then that we individually help those folks. Well, I mean, would the government try to come up with a program that was a vacation tax deduction program? Well, probably not, like that doesn't seem like maybe the best way to run finances or, you know, when they come up with a particular program to allow families to rent vacation properties. Well, maybe that wouldn't be the best way.

But, if you raise the basic personal exemption, you give those families, just like you did the families who were concerned about the sports programs, you put more money in their pockets and you say to them, you decide. It won't be the government that's going to decide what's going to be important to your family; what's going to give you relief and give you the affordability measures that you want. You leave it in the hands of individual Manitobans.

And, ultimately, that's what we, as an opposition, have proposed to the government. To say, you know—I said it before—but the constituents were phoning into the offices of Waverley and to Fort Richmond and to McPhillips. I can imagine that those calls are varied, they're not the same. People have different priorities, what they're struggling with, they're all struggling probably financially, but they're struggling in different ways. What matters to them isn't exactly the same.

And maybe it's frustrating for those MLAs from Waverley and Fort Richmond and for McPhillips to answer those questions, and probably because I actually, you know, I like each of those individuals. We differ politically, but I think they're—we get along fine, they're good folks. I suspect that they go home, right? And they go, man, I wish we could help these people. I wish that there was something we could do that actually helped all of these people. I don't want to just pick one family or the other that's struggling.

Well, here's that gift I was talking about. Here's that legislative gift wrapped up as a reasoned amendment that's been presented to the government that they just need to open and accept. Because by raising the basic personal exemption, the family who just wants to go on that holiday, you know, the family who just

wants to be able to keep their kids in the sports programs that matter to them, they're all helped. They all benefit by increasing the basic personal exemption.

And it's the government, of course, that, at this point, doesn't seem to want to listen to those suggestions. They don't even want to speak to their own budget bill for whatever reason. They don't want to defend it. They seem to want to, you know, it's a little bit of a let's just put our head in the sand and maybe this whole problem will go away and people will forget.

I think it's going to—I don't think it's going to be that easy. I think people, when we finally get out of the Legislature at some point, they're going to be confronting people at the fairs and those community events in the great areas of Manitoba that we have. And I think the constituents are going to be saying, you know what, we don't understand everything that was happening. We don't listen to every piece of the Legislature because why would they, right? They're busy with their families or doing the things that are important in their households, but they probably heard some stuff, right?

They heard that there was this debate about affordability and, you know, they were told that they weren't going to have to pay 2 cents on a Slurpee anymore—if there's any 7-Elevens open anymore, by the way, and I guess that's up for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) to try to come up with an understanding of why 7-Elevens are closing faster than you can shake a stick at. Every time you open up a newspaper, there's another 7-Eleven closing. So that might actually save the government a lot of money because that PST savings on Slurpees might not be that big of a deal anymore if there's no 7-Elevens open anymore because of all the crime that's happening in Winnipeg. But that's a digression, though. I'll get back to my main point, Honourable Speaker.

For those MLAs who wonder, what is it that we could do? We've missed the mark here. We clearly have oversold the budget. We said it was going to be the best budget ever, you know, and now it seems to be one of the most disappointing budgets that Manitoba has seen. What could we do?

Well, basic personal exemption is certainly your answer. And, as I said a little bit earlier, Honourable Speaker, lots of time, you know, lots of time. We're sitting here on a Tuesday afternoon. We're not even barely halfway through the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and you could actually get together—the different MLAs, whoever they pick, who they want to

get together with—and you could come up with a solution. And my guess, if it was an agreeable solution that gave affordability to the majority of Manitobans, that we could hammer out a pretty reasonable thing in a relatively short period of time.

And I think that most Manitobans would say, you know, that's actually what we expect. That's what we expect. We were disappointed with the dog barking or whatever the Premier (Mr. Kinew) was doing last week. And, boy, that certainly didn't land very well. And—but, like, we actually expect political parties to work together for the benefit of all Manitobans. And I'm sure—I really believe in the ingenuity, the ability for legislators to come together when it matters most and come up with a solution that benefits the majority of Manitobans. And it's critical at this particular time, probably more than at any time that I can recall.

You know, I mean, what are we all facing, as a nation? I had the opportunity—and it goes to affordability, and the NDP have spoken about this, so it's relevant to the amendment, Honourable Speaker—I had the opportunity for 10 years to serve as the co-chair of the Canada-Midwest-US relations committee, which is part of the Council of State Governments. I had—I served with three different American co-chairs from Ohio, from Kansas, from Michigan over my time. And I want to tell you, I appreciated the opportunity to interact with my American colleagues to talk about the seamless and united way in which we build automobiles. An automobile would cross the border eight or nine times out in Windsor. And, by the way, they got to open that Gordie Howe bridge.

And how great that was, right? How we built this sort of market that made sense for everyone. And I really enjoyed getting to know the perspective of my American colleagues on that particular committee. And it's one of the reasons I was so incredibly disappointed by what we've seen with the new administration when it comes to tariffs that violate the spirit and the letter, I believe, of the CUSMA agreement, or the USMCA, as they call it on their side. Extraordinarily disappointing. And, clearly, that has an impact on affordability.

And, you know, despite the minister of jobs and industry, or whatever his title is, constantly saying all sorts of things that are not true. All of us, I think, as legislators are disappointed by that.

An Honourable Member: Can't say untrue.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, now I think I've got his attention now. But, you know, whether they're—I think they're misleading, I would suggest.

And he knows that all of us want a relationship with our largest trading partner, with our neighbours to the south, that is respectable, that sees the importance of both sides doing well, that sees Americans succeeding, that sees Canadians succeeding, that reverts back to a free trade environment that has benefited both of our countries, both of our nations, not just us and not just the Americans. It has benefited both of our countries and all of us want to see that return.

* (22:30)

Now, when is that—

The Speaker: Order, please.

So I find that I must call the honourable member to order, that he has made some comments that I would really request that he withdraws because he's alluded to—in fact, more than alluded to, he's said that—constantly saying all sorts of things that are not true.

So I would ask the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Goertzen: Honourable Speaker, I withdraw that comment and I give a heartfelt apology to my friend, the minister of jobs and industry, who I do respect as an individual.

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the honourable member for Steinbach, that if he's going to refer to members, he uses their proper ministerial title.

Mr. Goertzen: I will again apologize to the member. I think he knows of whom I'm speaking. And I do apologize.

My point was specifically that every member in the Assembly, I believe, knows that the tariffs that have come forward from the US administration are not in keeping with the Free Trade Agreement, not in keeping with the spirit of the relationship that we've long held between Canada and America.

I actually don't believe it's reflective of most Americans. I think it's the distinction between what's happening with the administration and what most Americans feel. Because in my interaction with Americans, some of whom I served with on the US-Canada relations committee, I continue to hear the great respect that exists between our two nations. I do truly believe that both countries, the people of those countries, want to get back to a relationship that is, as it was, similar before the disruptions.

And my point to all of this, Honourable Speaker, was that it's a serious time of affordability. So we have the affordability issues that are happening because of the US tariffs. We have some supply chain issues that still exist from other times. We now have the disruption as a result of the Strait of Hormuz not being consistently open. We have a number of different pressures that exist in the world today that are impacting affordability.

Now, the Manitoba government can't deal and is not responsible for all of these things. I'm not suggesting that the Manitoba government is responsible for what is happening in Iran. But the Manitoba government does have a responsibility to do what it can do within its own purview and to not put forward measures that have very little meaningful, as the reasoned amendment says, meaningful impact on the lives of Manitobans who are struggling on a financial basis. They have a responsibility to bring forward meaningful tax relief. They said they were going to do it and they didn't do it. They have a responsibility to act like a serious government at this serious time.

So, you know, let's turn to the issue, for example, of Churchill, which is referenced significantly in the budget, which might relate to issues of affordability in Manitoba, depending on how it gets developed. Now, I would say—similar to my comments before that seemed to get me into some parliamentary trouble, so I'll be more careful this time, Honourable Speaker—I would say that in the same way that every member of that—of this Assembly of the House wants to see a normalization of the trade relationship that we have with our American friends and neighbours—in the same way, every member of that House wants to see Churchill not only succeed, but fulfill all of the great promise that it has.

I had the opportunity, in the fall of 2021, to travel to Churchill with ambassadors and consul generals from around the world. I took the train, by the way. I drove to the wonderful community of Thompson and took the train from Thompson up to Churchill, an incredible experience. And I know a lot of the folks fly to Churchill and it's understandable why, it's a bit of a journey when you drive and then take the train. But if you ever have the time and the inclination, taking the train from Thompson to Churchill is a wonderful Manitoba experience. It essentially operates like a bus, you know, it just sort of stops at places and picks up hunters who are on the side of the tracks and people, of course, are bringing groceries from Thompson to the various stops along the route on the way to Churchill. And it was just a wonderful

experience, and people were incredibly gracious and we had a wonderful—my family and I had a wonderful time interacting with Manitobans on that train.

But when we got to Churchill, as it relates to the budget, we had a lot of interesting discussions. Mayor Spence was the mayor at the time, and we talked about, sort of, the future of Churchill and what would Churchill look like, you know, in 15 or 20 years from now. And it's hard to sometimes look to the future of a community without looking to the past.

So, without question, there were many discussions about the things that had been lost in Churchill. Obviously, the military presence, the missile base; you know, the challenges that came with the loss of those endeavors in industry, the difficulty with the port and the fact that the port wasn't being utilized to the full extent. The train, obviously—the railway was, as I mentioned, I took the train there, so the railway was operating at that time, to some extent. I can't remember if it was before the repairs had happened to—I mean, there's been lots of repairs over time on the railway. But I don't recall if—I think it was certainly after the larger disruption, when you couldn't take the train to Churchill. But lots of discussions about the future of Churchill.

But, again, then reflecting on the past of Churchill and where it had come from. And I remember a particular individual say to me, you know, when did Churchill become so unimportant? I mean, and he reflected on when there were so many people and the port was bustling and you had the different enterprises, military and otherwise, who were there. And he says, it feels like we've become unimportant. So every member of the Legislature, Honourable Speaker, I believe, wants Churchill to succeed. But it has to succeed in a real way.

So the Premier (Mr. Kinew), in the budget and BITSA and in other places, has talked about Churchill and what his dreams are for Churchill. And, you know, I don't criticize the Premier for talking about dreams of Churchill. I think it's actually part of the role of a leader of a government, of any government, to have dreams for their province and for the communities that exist within the province. Those are good things. But it has to be backed up with something real, or it goes back to what I was saying about the budget to begin with.

Just like when the Premier said this was going to be the greatest budget in the history of budgets in Manitoba, got Manitobans all worked up and excited. And then the budget comes down and they're going,

like, did we miss something? Or, you know, is this Slurpee thing, is that what was supposed to get everybody wound up? And there was a great big disappointment.

So now he sort of shifted his attention to Churchill, and talking about LNG to Churchill, must be lots of interesting conversations in the NDP party about that one. But, you know, talking about pipelines to Churchill, talking about the expansion of the port; whether, obviously, you'd need the railway to be upgraded. You might even have an all-weather road. I mean, I've heard discussions about that. Talking about ice icebreakers that would have to be in Hudson Bay, not just military icebreakers—those are pretty expensive icebreakers; I'm sure there are things other than military icebreakers that could be used if you're going to try to keep the port open for a longer period of time—but all of this seems to come with not much substance.

It's a lot of optimism, and I'm not critical for being optimistic of anybody. But, at the end of the day, after several months, one would expect that the Premier would be able to, I don't know, hold up something that seemed concrete in terms of direction that it was going with Churchill, because remember that the federal government has now stood up this Major Projects Office—I think it's based out of Calgary, and is—has identified, like, a whole host of major projects that they're looking to move forward with.

* (22:40)

And Churchill always kind of gets notionally mentioned. It's sort of there but it's not in the committed list. It's kind of like, well, we're going to study this, we're going to—but it's not, okay, we're going to do this, right? And the Premier puts forward these things and ties it to, you know, the future prosperity of Manitoba and the affordability for Manitobans, as this reasoned amendment speaks to, and says, this is something that is ultimately—it's going to happen.

And he talks about maybe building a pipeline in two years—two to two and a half years. I mean, I think they built the pipeline in Alaska, I think it took, like, seven to 10 years. We'll see what happens with the proposed one from Alberta to British Columbia. But it doesn't seem like the Premier can actually have a real informed discussion about timelines, realities of fiscal commitments, when those commitments are going to come, when certain things are actually going to start looking like more than just optimism and dreams.

And my hope is for the people of Churchill—and having gotten, you know, to know many of them over the years, they deserve that. It's a wonderful community.

The Speaker: Order, please.

If I could get the honourable member to perhaps draw his comments back to the bill we're here discussing. As much as I'd like to hear about his adventures in Churchill, that's not what we're here to talk about.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, of course, Honourable Speaker. I'll gladly share my adventures to Churchill with you in another, more appropriate time.

But the issue, ultimately, was about affordability. And the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has said that, you know, if we develop Churchill, it will add to the prosperity of Manitoba and, ultimately, that will make things potentially more affordable for Manitobans, because there's more wealth that will be generated, there'll be more economic tax base, and we might be able to—he hasn't said it in these words—but potentially reduce taxes and those sort of things.

So, when a premier talks about the prospect of prosperity and the ability to drive that into something that would result in greater affordability, it speaks directly to the amendment. Because if you look at the wording of the amendment, I would say to the members of the House, the specific wording of the amendment that's been proposed and we're debating before today says that we need to see evidence or assurance that this bill—the BITSA bill—provides real and meaningful affordability.

And, my apologies, Honourable Speaker, because maybe I should have drawn attention to the House, to those words earlier in relation to Churchill, because I don't know that what we're seeing is real. Where is the real commitment from the federal government? Where is the real debate and discussion about when things are going to happen that might ultimately lead to a more prosperous Churchill and a more affordable Manitoba? We're not seeing it in BITSA. You know, it's not sort of coming clear in the BITSA bill. We're not really seeing it in any other way. And so we're left to sort of wonder how real any of this is. But, anyway, I will move on from my adventures in Churchill and will take you up on your offer, Honourable Speaker, to regale you with those stories at another time.

But for today, back on the issue on the—of the reasoned amendment, I want to refer to the wording, specifically, of the reasoned amendment. And it reads

that this House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, the budget implementation tax statutes amendment act, which we are referring in the House, essentially, as BITSA, because the House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real or meaningful affordable measures that Manitobans desperately need.

So let's parse this out a little bit, Honourable Speaker, because it is important sometimes to look at the individual words that exist—and this, by the way—I'm now sort of entering the main part of my comments. I'm done my introductory comments on the speech—this speaks to the reality of the amendment and what it actually means.

So the words within the amendment: satisfactory evidence. So let's stop there. What is evidence? What could pass in the Legislative Assembly as evidence that the government is bringing forward affordability measures? Well, I would submit to you, Honourable Speaker, that one thing that would be evidence, as the amendment refers to, in the Assembly would be the public.

You know, we have the ability in other bills for the public to come to the Legislature and speak to bills. We know why, and I've already discussed why BITSA isn't one of those things, but it certainly could be, and there certainly was movement towards those sort of things. But that would certainly provide evidence as the amendment asks for. The amendment asks for evidence, not in a judicial way, not in a court-instructed way, but in a way that legislators, MLAs, staff, the public could look and go, okay, I can grab hold of that. That feels like something that looks like evidence.

So when the public comes to committee to speak to bills, in essence, they're giving evidence. I mean, they're not giving testimony under oath, although they are giving evidence under protection of parliamentary privilege, which is interesting. And I didn't realize this 'til a few years ago when we had a bill that discussed non-disclosure agreements, that people could come there and, as evidence, speak of their non-disclosure agreements and do so under the protection of parliamentary privilege. In my, at that point, 20 years as a legislator, I had no idea that that protection was provided to those who were giving evidence at committee. But the amendment calls for that evidence.

So I'd submit to you, Honourable Speaker, that one of the ways that the government could find this evidence is by hearing from the public. Now, there's lots of different ways that the public can be heard

from. I admitted or acknowledged one, right, where one could come to committees, in person in the Legislature, virtually, at a bill presentation. And people could give that evidence and say, this is what me and my family are dealing with. These are the struggles that we're having. This is why the BITSA bill does or why the BITSA bill doesn't actually address any of those issues. And, I think that that evidence, as the reasoned amendment calls for, would be helpful for the government.

Now, it doesn't have to be in a committee of the Legislature that is the same as when you call a bill to committee. There are other special committees of the Legislature that we've had. You know, I refer actually to the travelling committee on newspaper subsidies, which was something of a farce, I'd say, considering there was committee hearings where nobody came and then there was committee hearings where evidence was taken and then nobody was actually followed up on it. It didn't—and the people of the committee actually didn't get a chance to give their own comments and the government issued a unilateral report. But nonetheless, I mean, that sort of a committee does exist, right, where evidence can be provided by the public.

So when the reasoned amendment calls for, in its wording, the provision of evidence, that is one way in which the government could secure that evidence by a committee of the Legislature, similar to the other bills that go before the Legislature, or something like an all-party or a travelling committee. Now, I've not spoken to my House leader on this issue, and that usually gets me into no ends of trouble when I do that, but, I mean, you know, it might be that the government or the opposition might say, all right, like, if we're going to hoist this bill or lack of evidence, let's then take this on the road, let's have a bit of a committee, right, an all-party committee.

We'll go into different communities. We'll ask about affordability. We'll see what people are really struggling with. We'll find out, like, if, you know, removing the tax off the point—or the 2 per cent of groceries that it already doesn't or that it already applies to or just applies to is helpful. That would be evidence. You could actually have meaningful discussions with Manitobans, and as the amendment calls for, that would be one way to secure evidence. But it's not the only way.

So I've given two examples and two suggestions for the government. One is that they could seek the evidence that the amendment calls for by a legislative

committee via the same way we have committees with other bills, or they could do so on something like a special committee. You know, put this bill aside, have a special committee that goes into different areas and learns from Manitobans. A very, very reasonable way to gather that sort of evidence.

* (22:50)

I would also submit, Honourable Speaker, that when we're looking at the reasonable amendment and its call for real evidence, evidence could be provided by MLAs, who themselves have been hearing from constituents.

The member—the aforementioned members for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) and Fort Richmond (MLA Chen) and McPhillips (MLA Devgan), who I know are listening to every word intently—MLA for St. Vital—I mean, they would probably be able to, if they spoke to this particular bill, they could rise and they could say, okay, you know, this is what I'm hearing from constituents.

Now, you know, they'd want to give a true accounting of that, as I know they would, because they're honourable members, because their constituents would be listening, right? And their constituents would be going, all right, like, what is—what are our MLAs saying about what is actually happening on the BITSA bill? But that would be one way that evidence could be garnered.

Another way evidence can be found, as the reasoned amendment calls for, is through consultations. Now, the government went through some exercise on prebudget consultation, probably using an American firm because I think they use EngageMB, but that's a whole different debate. And they would have asked for evidence or suggestions, comments from the public on what they hope to see in a budget bill. And, you know, I've seen with this government, sometimes those prebudget consultation meetings are—they're pretty vacuous and pretty vague in terms of the questions and they kind of lead to certain conclusions.

But my guess is if a real engagement was undertaken and you offered people real suggestions and you tried to garner the evidence of: How do you go about getting actual tax relief, affordability measures, as the reasoned amendment calls for? My guess is, if you ask Manitobans in a survey and said, all right, do you want to have, you know, a couple of pennies saved on a Slurpee? Would you like to keep \$3,000 in your pocket so that you could determine what's best for you and your family—as two suggestions—well, that would

be real evidence, right? That would be actual evidence that the government could then rely on and that's exactly what the resolution is calling for. It's saying that they're looking for satisfactory evidence.

That to me, well, it might be satisfactory. I'd like to see how the questions are actually phrased maybe before the government puts it out. And maybe they'd want to actually use a Manitoba or a Canadian firm as opposed to an American firm. But they seem to be, you know, eager to send our tax dollars down to the US these days, even if we're in a dispute. But that would be one way for sure that they could seek evidence, I think.

There are other ways, of course, that one could seek evidence. One can do surveys. It's not unusual for the government to do public opinion surveys about how people would view tax relief in a real way and how they would feel about, you know, a certain kind of tax relief versus another kind of tax relief. That would be important evidence for someone to be able to rely upon, as the reasoned amendment calls for, and as the reasoned amendment suggests that we should have.

But, I mean, the amendment is brought forward because that evidence just doesn't exist. I mean, you can talk to the members of the government side—those who will speak to you—and you can say—I mean, speak to me, not speak to you, Honourable Speaker—and you could say, hey, like, you know, where did you come up with this? Were you consulted on removing the PST from Slurpees and that this would be the big thing that would provide affordability to Manitobans? Is that something that you had a consultation with? Did you provide that evidence to the government? Because MLAs themselves can provide evidence to the government. And so, I mean, those questions are real.

But, I mean, I don't know. I mean, I've not had government members come to me and tell me if they were consulted on this or if this was all a surprise to them. And they showed up on the House. They were told to put on a flower or a boutonniere or something. And they sat down and they were surprised, as the rest of Manitobans, that the supposed greatest budget in Manitoba history kind of fell flat. And, you know, I'm not sure. I'm not sure if they had any sort of knowledge or foreknowledge of this, either. But that is something that I think Manitobans themselves could see as real evidence for affordability.

I want to look at some of the other words in the reasoned amendment. So the reasoned amendment

says the budget implementation stack—tax statute amendment act, 2026 should be declined because this House has not received satisfactory evidence, which I just spoke to, Honourable Speaker, or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordable tax measures.

So let me—I want to talk about the word assurance. And it's an interesting word when it comes to the amendment because the assurance is almost akin to trust. When you provide somebody an assurance, you're essentially saying to them, we want you to trust us. Can you trust us that this is something that is valuable or important? And I think that that assurance, that trust, has been broken with Manitobans.

And you hear it in a lot of different ways and you see it in a lot of different ways. Some of it you see on social media commentary. Sometimes you see it in letters to the editor, those who still write letters to the editor. Some come by the way of communications to MLA offices and those sort of things. There's a lot of different ways that people can express whether they have trust, whether they have the assurance of something happening or not happening.

But we are looking for, in this reasoned amendment, an assurance that there's going to be real and meaningful tax relief. We've not been provided that assurance by the opposition, and it's not been for a lack of trying, Honourable Speaker. There have been questions that have been put in question period, excellent questions by members of the opposition not responded to in an appropriate way by the government. Questions in committee which I hesitate to say were responded to by dog barking noises. Questions that have come in other ways to the government seeking that assurance that what is going to come is going to provide real and meaningful relief.

And that's why the amendment is worded in this particular way. It wasn't worded haphazardly. The amendment was specifically written in a thoughtful way that would try to encourage the government to come back to a reasonable position. So when the amendment speaks to the need for the government to provide an assurance, it's actually less of an assurance to us as opposition. I mean, we—you know, we there represent our constituents. We have a role as an opposition to hold the government accountable. All of those things are important; I don't think anybody wants to dismiss that. But the assurance is really to Manitobans that they're going to feel that tax relief.

Now, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has tried in his own way—usually, like, not that successfully—to assure

Manitobans that this is going to have some sort of real impact, the BITSA bill and the—some of the tax reductions on Slurpees for Manitobans. That's what he's tried to do. He's come out and said that 2 cents I'm going to save you on that Slurpee is really going to help you and your family. And I think that he felt that that would be enough to convince Manitobans, that most Manitobans would go, okay, well, you know, it's better than nothing.

The challenge is that this is not a time where better than nothing works. Because, as the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself has said, as the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) has said, as many other commentators have said, this is a time of economic affordability crisis. Now, that word I've used, but I'm not the only one to use it. The government is using the word affordability crisis. They're the ones saying, and it's true, that Manitobans are facing an affordability crisis.

So you go back to the resolution that we put forward and we're seeking an assurance that there'll be something that deals with that crisis. Well, what is that, Honourable Speaker? All we've been told is that Cheezies are going to be a cent or two cheaper, and that if there's any 7-Eleven still open, you can get a Slurpee for a penny or two less. That's the assurances we've been given.

And that's why, you know, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) who brought forward this reasoned amendment specifically used the word assurance, because he wanted the government to come forward to Manitobans. Yes, to us as opposition, too, but more so to Manitobans. And basically say, we understand you, we hear you and we got your back. We know you're going through challenges.

* (23:00)

We know you and your family are hurting more than you have for a long time financially. The costs seem to be keep going up. That you open that school tax bill and it's a 20 per cent increase from what it was the year before. That you head to the grocery store and you can't believe it when you pick up the groceries. You're looking at that price and you go, there must be a misprint. You know, you head to the counter and you say, I think somebody got something wrong here. But it's not. That's the actual price.

We're looking for an assurance that the government understands that. But what's been the response? You know, we get a brick wall from the Premier, who holds up his hand and said, this is it.

This is all I'm going to do. I'm going to reduce the price of Cheetos and you can get a Slurpee for a couple cents cheaper, but that's all I got for you. I'm not doing anything else.

And that's the disappointment, Honourable Speaker. And it's a disappointment by an opposition, but it's not about the opposition. I mean, we have a role there, and so we give voice to people, to people who talk to us—not just our constituents, by the way, but we give voice to that.

But the assurance that this reasoned amendment speaks to and that, ultimately, we are seeking on behalf of Manitoba—Manitobans is the assurance that real relief is going to come, that there's going to be something meaningful, that they can trust the government to do this.

And so, again, I go back to comments I've said earlier. The reasoned amendment is really a gift to the government, it's really helpful to the government, because it provides them a way to get out of a bind of their own creation, where they tried to convince people that this was going to be something significant and something real in terms of affordability in BITSA, and in the budget, more generally, and it didn't happen. It failed. And they're hearing it, and we're hearing it.

So the reasoned amendment comes with the wording from the member from Red River North, who I know spent a significant amount of time writing this amendment. I mean, I know he actually laboured over every word, which is why I actually want to focus individually on certain words because I know how much time and attention he paid to the words that are in this amendment. And he specifically wanted to use the word assurance, a promise, trust that Manitobans could get real tax relief in BITSA. And it's just not there, Honourable Speaker.

And more concerning about the fact it's just not there, because sometimes government makes mistakes, sometimes they miss the mark, sometimes they don't read the public correctly, sometimes they just are trying to be too cute by half—as the former member for Minnedosa, the honourable Mr. Gilleshammer, used to remark—too cute by half. And they just get it wrong. And so we come forward and say, give us an assurance that it's actually going to change, that there's actually going to be something different. And that's what the reasoned amendment in that phraseology is intended to do. But we've not heard that from the government.

Now, here we are, and it's 11 o'clock on a glorious Tuesday summer evening. I imagine there was hockey being played somewhere; I don't know the outcome. But it's an opportunity, right? And it's an opportunity for the government to now give that assurance that the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) was seeking when he put that wording in the amendment, the assurance that they're going to really do something that's going to be significant. That they're really going to do something that's going to be important when it comes to affordability. That it's not just going to be the sort of pennies here, pennies there, while you're paying a hundred or hundreds of dollars more for your school taxes, while everything else is going up around you, why you can't go into the grocery store without sort of seeking retail therapy. You know, there's going to be actually something that's meaningful. That's the assurance. That's the assurance that we're looking for.

And it's not too late. It's not too late. There's time. You know, I've seen, in this Legislature, things move. I've seen things move slowly, but I've seen things move real fast when they—when there's a reason for it. And I can't think of many other times when there's been more of a reason than tonight, as the reasoned amendment says, for fast action—for fast action.

And maybe I'll be surprised, Honourable Speaker. Maybe somewhere in the bowels of the Legislature there's a group of NDP ministers who are gathered around a table somewhere and they're saying, yes, you know what? I've listened to the opposition, and we've heard from our constituents, and, yes, I think we got it wrong; I think we missed the mark. And this assurance that the members of the opposition put into the reasoned amendments speaks to us. It speaks to us as a government that we need to provide people that real feeling, that real understanding that there's going to be something that's going to be meaningful for people in a means of tax relief and a means of affordability.

And I've seen it happen in the Legislature. I mean, it wouldn't be something that would be embarrassing for the government, or shouldn't be. Wouldn't be something that would require them to apologize. Wouldn't be something that would require them to put out some sort of mea culpa. I don't think we would, sort of, use it that way. I mean, we just want to see what's best for Manitobans. If somewhere in the depths of the Legislature this evening there are those ministers and others who are sitting around and who are saying, you know, we got to do something.

I looked at that amendment. I looked what the member for Red River North put forward, and he's right. We got to give people that assurance. It wouldn't be a bad thing. It wouldn't hurt the government. I'd argue it would help the government in the long run, Honourable Speaker, as I continue to give free advice to the NDP caucus late into the night. I will start to charge at some point.

But let me go back to the amendment and some of the specific wording that exists within the amendment. So I've dealt with two particular words that I wanted to focus on. One was evidence and one was assurance. So I'll just start on that wording so we get the full context, Honourable Speaker. The House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, because this House has not received satisfactory evidence. And you'll recall that I provided a number of ways that evidence could be garnered from the public and from others, or assurance—trust—that the bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

So let me talk about the word real. Has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures. Now, Honourable Speaker, as you were scrutinizing this particular reasoned amendment, you and others might have done what I kind of did the first time I read it. You know, you sort of look at it and you go, real and meaningful affordability measures. And you think, well, those are kind of the same things, right? Like real and meaningful, but they're actually not. They're actually something different. And so I want to spend just a little bit of time before I get to some of the main comments that I wanted to make on my speech on those two words, real and meaningful.

So let's deal with the word real, first, that appears in the reasoned amendment. What is real? So it's different than meaningful because what is meaningful is individual to families. What would be meaningful to my family might feel different for another family, even in time. Like I mentioned when my—when we lived—my family and I lived in government housing, what was meaningful to us then would have felt different than what's meaningful to us, you know, some 50 years later, right? It's a different sort of standard based on where you are in your life.

But going back to the word real, the word real is important because it speaks to—and I suspect that this is why the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) put this in the reasoned amendment. I'd have to talk to

him personally about it, but I know him as a person who is diligent in the wordings that he uses. So I suspect that he used the word real because he wanted it to be not something that was vacuous, something that was put out there performatively, something that didn't have, sort of, any backing behind it. I'm careful of the wording that I'm using. I'm not ascribing it to any member, Honourable Speaker. He wanted, you know, it to be real; that people could look at this and go, this isn't just spin. This isn't just political jargon that a government is putting out to try to get a good headline, to try to get 10 or 15 minutes on the news, but that is actually something that's going to happen.

* (23:10)

And I'm reticent to talk about Churchill again, Honourable Speaker, after my—the admonition you gave me last time. But I'll be much more careful this time and not speak about any adventures I had in Churchill, but to specifically say the word real relates to Churchill and BITSA because what we're hearing about the development of Churchill doesn't feel real yet because we're not actually seeing the evidence of it.

So you—now you see how all these words are lining up together. I think sometimes when people just read an amendment, it just feels like, well, people threw a bunch of words together, right. But it goes from evidence—there's no evidence that's being provided to the government, there's no assurance from the government that this is actually going to happen, and it doesn't feel real.

And that is ultimately what I think people lose trust in in governments. Because they don't—they listen to something and they go, you know what, I don't think that's real. I'm not even sure if the folks that are saying it actually believe what they're saying. It sounds like talking points. It sounds like something to get, you know, a headline. It sounds like something that was made up by some spin doctors in a back room, but it doesn't feel real.

And so, ultimately, the reasoned amendment is about wanting something that not only people can rely on in terms of an assurance that it's based on evidence—however that evidence is garnered and I gave some examples—but that people know that it feels like it's something that's real.

So I use Churchill as one example, right? I mean, it kind of—it—we're not quite sure if it's real. We, you know, we hear about major project offices, but we seem to be left off the list all the time. It doesn't

actually come with any money. There's no timelines. We're talking LNG, maybe. We don't—probably not—maybe wheat, I don't know. Icebreakers—military icebreakers? Nobody knows. Premier (Mr. Kinew) talks about things that aren't military icebreakers would be way cheaper, but none of it that feels real because we haven't seen any of it.

Like, we don't have timelines. We're not seeing any icebreakers. There's no development that we know of of the railroad. There's no all-season road that he sometimes has talked about. We don't know who the proponents would be of an LNG operation. The Premier has said that there are companies that are interested—of course, he didn't name them, and I understand why. I mean, there's proprietary issues and you don't want to go out and start naming a bunch of companies. But it still lacks that sense of realness, which is what the reasoned amendment is speaking to. It still lacks a sense that this actually feels like something that is going to happen.

Let's use another example, right. So the Premier talks about, well, you know, we're going to balance the budget next year. That has a relation to affordability because the ability for government to balance a budget would provide them more opportunity to provide affordability relief to Manitobans. But does it feel real? I mean, who really believes that this is going to happen?

When you look at the PST projections for revenue, when you look at where they've moved emergency expenditures down, projections for Hydro. You know, unless we're expecting there to be a monsoon this summer—and we had a bit of rain in the spring, for sure, but, I mean, looking at the weather forecast for the next week or two, not sure that we're going to get the rain that's going to result in massive profits for Hydro that will go into the summary budget of the government, so that doesn't feel real, right. It doesn't feel like it's something that's real, which is what the reasoned amendment specifically speaks to. It feels like something that is made up, that won't come to pass.

Let's talk about the issue, then, of school taxes, right? I mean, where is the reality and what's real there. On the one hand, you have the Manitoba School Boards Association representing the various divisions, and the various divisions individually saying we're not getting enough money from the government. *[interjection]* For some reason, I'm hearing thunderous applause in my ear, and I'm suspecting that that's not for me. But I'll continue on.

That—you know, you hear school divisions who are continually saying that it's not enough money for—to keep our taxation down. You hear the Premier (Mr. Kinew) telling the school divisions, oh, you've got more than you need—he goes out there and says that on radio. You've got the City of Winnipeg distancing itself and saying, hey, we got nothing to do with this—like, you know, this is all the Province's problem. Then you've got the Premier who stands up and says, no, it's not the Province's problem, it's all the school divisions' problem.

And people are left wondering, well, what is real, right? Like, what is the reality of something that they can actually rely upon? And that speaks to the heart of the reasoned amendment.

Now, I've now dealt with three specific words, and I want to deal with a couple of others. Dealt with the issue of evidence: the reasoned amendment talked about the need for satisfactory evidence that has not been received. Talked about different ways that that evidence could be garnered: legislative committees, listening to Manitobans through different forms of committees. Or assurance: so the trust factor that this government lacks, trust factor that there's actually going to be something that's tangible in terms of tax relief.

And then I talked about the word real. How real is this? How real are the prospects in Churchill? We all hope that they're real. We've not seen the reality of it. We have not seen the evidence of it. We hope that there's real, but hope's not a plan, right? So the reasoned amendment speaks to the need for real measures.

And then the second word is, and meaningful affordability measures. Now, I said in my—in one of my comments a few minutes ago that, if somebody was giving a tertiary read of the reasoned amendment, they might say, well, real and meaningful, those are the same thing, right? Those are the same words. But they're not actually the same words. Bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures. Well, the meaningful is an individual thing, right? I mean, the real is more of a concept of whether or not people have belief in something that is being said. Is this a real sort of thing that the government is talking about? The meaningful is very individual to families.

And, you know, I spoke about this a little bit earlier, but I want to sort of reiterate it because it speaks to the word meaningful that exists and that rests within the reasoned amendment. Meaningful tax relief for affordability measures isn't the same for

every family. And I've heard the Premier in the House say things like, we're the only party that understands what it's like to have to suffer financially. And, as I've said, that isn't really just an insult to individual members, it's an insult to families. It's an insult to my family, who lived in government housing for a number of years when I was young after my father died—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the member to, if he's going to continue his speech, to quit being so repetitious. He's gone over the same material several times now, so please keep your comments going, but keep them not repetitious.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I'm almost finished my introductory comments, so I will move on past any sort of repetition.

So moving specifically to the issue of meaningful, then. What's meaningful to one family isn't the same as what's meaningful to another. So I think that that's why that the word was specifically included in the reasoned amendment, is that we want to ensure that, through BITSA and through the budget, the government is actually bringing to those families meaningful tax relief.

I would submit to you that a 2 per cent savings on a Slurpee or Cheetos isn't the meaningful tax relief that Manitobans are looking for. The basic personal exemption option, which we hope the government will take, provides the meaningfulness because it allows individual families to make the determination about what's meaningful for them. Where can they take those tax savings and apply it in their individual budgets, in their individual realities, in their homes?

So when you look at the reasoned amendment as a whole, Honourable Speaker, and I provided the breakdown of some of the individual words, and I'll just summarize that because there's one more word that needs to be discussed. Because this—the budget 'impletation' act should not receive second reading because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance—talk about those two words as being something different and distinct—that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans—and here's the word I want to discuss—desperately need.

* (23:20)

Now, again, I think that the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), because he spent so much time

crafting this reasonable–reasoned amendment, really, you know, laboured over each individual word. And I think the reason that he used the word desperately is because it's a reflection of the reality in Manitoba. And it's not used lightly.

I don't think that any of us as legislators, as MLAs, elected officials, Cabinet ministers—I'm sure this will be true of the Premier (Mr. Kinew) too—want Manitobans to be in a desperate situation. So it's not a word that was used casually. It's not a word that was used flippantly. It's not a word that was used without thought or an understanding of it.

Honourable Speaker, the word was used with intention. The word was used specifically, and the word was used to try to impart to the Legislature through the amendment about the desperation that Manitobans feel. And again, it's not a word that should be used casually. I don't think it was put into the reasoned amendment in a casual way. It was put in there to express to the government the true feelings that Manitobans have.

So let's look at that word that exists—or, that forms part of the reasoned amendment—speaking to the reasoned amendment, Honourable Speaker—and why was it placed in there in the way that it was. Because I think that Manitobans are feeling that desperation in different ways: talked about the—you know, skyrocketing school tax, property tax bills, that are happening; talked about the things that they're seeing in the grocery stores on things that they're already not paying PST on, which is almost everything; talked about the decisions that they made. But I think desperation also comes from a sense that they don't know when this is going to end.

So there's two different issues: they don't know when it's going to end, and they don't know who is actually going to be involved in helping them. I'll talk about the second, because it relates to desperation, in a second. But the issue of not knowing when a crisis—and the Premier has used the word crisis when it comes to affordability—is going to end speaks to desperation. It speaks to the issue of feeling a sense of desperation.

And that desperation can manifest itself in a lot of ways. I mean, we shouldn't lose track of the fact that there could be mental health repercussions to what many folks are experiencing these days in Manitoba and, frankly, more broadly across Canada, right? As they lose, sort of, economic security, it's natural for people to wonder what the long-term repercussions are going to be for their family, what the long-term

repercussions are going to be for the kids or grandkids and how long that's going to exist.

So the word desperate—desperately—was included intentionally by the member for Red River North because he wanted to express that sense of helplessness that people feel at a time of rising costs without having an understanding of when that's going to change, when it's going to stop.

How is it that we're going to get back to a place where, you know, there is a predictable sense of what pricing is going to be. Because, remember, when we talk about inflation—I'm going to get that and get into that into my comments shortly, Honourable Speaker, as it directly relates to affordability—but when we talk about inflation, we're talking about a year over year increase. So, you know, sometimes the Premier says, well, this went up 2 and a half per cent. But it went two and a—up 2 and a half per cent on the back of something that went up 4 per cent the year before, on the back of something that went up 4 per cent the year before, and so, cumulatively, you're talking about a significant increase in cost.

And then the question becomes—and this is the question I think that many Manitobans are asking, I certainly hear from Manitobans—is, well, when is it going to go back? Like, are we going to see a time when prices revert back to what they were two or three years ago before inflation really started to take hold under the NDP government. And the answer seems to be no. And that is what's causing a part of that desperation—that the word is reflected in the reasoned amendment. Desperation is a reflection of the fact that people don't have a sense of when this is actually going to end.

So, I mean, you're left as a family member to sort of make decisions, right? Maybe you're planning on retiring—near and dear to my heart these days—but there are others, right, who would have been at that time where they're thinking, you know, maybe I'm going to step away from my job, or maybe I'm going to go a half time, or maybe I'm going to switch jobs, right, which brings its own sort of risk evaluation as well.

But now they're surrounded by inflation. They're surrounded by an affordability crisis. They're looking at a BITSA bill that doesn't really move the needle on any of those things. And they feel desperate because what is it that they're going to do now. Now, are they going to postpone the decision to retire. Are they going to postpone the decision to go half time. Are they going to postpone the decision potentially to shift

to another job. Those are real life consequences. Those are real life decisions. And, ultimately, those are things that cause people to feel desperate, which is why the word is placed within the reasoned amendment.

Let's go one step further, Honourable Speaker. I've said that there are different reasons that that can lead people to a place of feeling desperate, of feeling desperation. Another one is that they feel that those who have influence or—I don't use the word power, but, you know—have influence over ways to improve their life through affordability or whatever, aren't doing all that they can to support them.

Now, I mean, I've said this before. I don't think that it's within the power of the Manitoba government to resolve every issue around affordability. Not all of them are the making of the Manitoba government, but some of them clearly are. But there is in a—there is a sense that people want the government to engage in a way to alleviate the desperate feeling that they're feeling when it comes to inflation. They don't know when it's going to end. They don't know when this cycle is going to change or if it's going to change. They might not understand all the factors that are driving it, but they do understand that the government, a provincial government, has some ability, some power—if it has the will—to actually move the needle in a significant and meaningful—going back to the word before—a meaningful way. And they look for the government to be able to do that.

And the desperation grows because they looked at the BITSA bill. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) came out and said it's going to be the best budget in the history of Manitoba. It fell incredibly flat from that. People felt let down by the fact that they were told it was going to be something that it wasn't. And, ultimately, they feel desperate because they don't feel that the government has their back on these really, really critical key issues. And I think that that's a big part of the reason why desperation grows. And that's a big part of the reason why people ultimately are turning away from this particular BITSA budget.

So let's look—so I mean, I wanted to spend some time before getting into some of the main comments around inflation that I had. I wanted to spend some time setting the framework of why we crafted the reasoned amendment the way that it was done. Largely crafted by the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton). I'm not going to try to put words in his mouth in terms of every rationale or reason that he had, but I wanted to break it down. Because I think

sometimes people read these things, it feels like, sort of, a legislative tool to achieve another outcome or another means, but it's not that.

It's there for a very, very specific reason and it is there to drive home a specific point. So the words are very intentional. They're not there arbitrarily. They're not there as word fillers. In fact, I'm sure that there are words that were included in the reasoned amendment that ultimately were taken out. But they're there very, very specifically and for the reasons that I've had the ability to outline.

So I wanted, you know, to talk a bit about what are the things that could happen within—in a bill and what are the things that people might have expected in the BITSA bill, that might have caused this BITSA bill to not be—or sorry, this reasoned amendment not to be necessary.

* (23:30)

So I was doing a little bit of research—it's on a public document, Honourable Speaker. It was issued by CIBC. And they were issuing some advice to Canadians generally, to Manitobans specifically, on how to deal with an affordability crisis—words, of course, used by the Premier. He defined it as an affordability crisis. Here we exist in this affordability crisis. And CIBC had a few different pieces of advice.

Now, mind you, Honourable Speaker, this particular piece of advice written by C-B-C was intended for individuals. So it's advice that is given to individuals who are dealing with the affordability crisis, which I think we can assume is almost all Manitobans and, to a lesser extent, Canadians. One of the—so they gave sort of four or five practical tips. One of the tips was to tackle debt as fast as possible. So the advice of—for an individual on dealing with an affordability crisis from CIBC and the tips that they were giving was that you wanted to sort of get a handle as quickly as you could on the debt that you have. Now, for an individual who's dealing with an affordability crisis, that can mean consolidating your debt, right? I mean, some people have multiple credit cards, if you're dealing with lines of credit. So, you know, often the advice is, hey, let's consolidate this debt, tackle it as a whole, maybe get a better rate, and we're going to try to drive down some of that debt.

Now, for a government, the advice maybe isn't all that much different, and it's reflected in what we're not seeing in the BITSA bill. So my friend from Springfield-Ritchot said—feels like a while ago—in his comments before mine, that one of the ways that a

government can deal with an affordability crisis is to ensure that it has a handle on its own debt. And, you know, I'm not going to repeat the concerns that I had about how the government got to its deficit projection or how the—it got to its current debt level. But it is instructive that we don't have within BITSA—that we don't have, I think, something that's a real plan to deal with the debt that Manitoba has acquired.

And that's not just on the core government. I mean, that's part of it, right? That you have a core government debt that's in the tens of billions of dollars, but then on the other side you've got the Manitoba Hydro debt in the tens of billions of dollars, and one could argue that those two debts are, you know, almost equal, that they could almost equate from each other, and that there's a concern on both sides of that. I'm sure that when the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) is meeting with the bond-rating—bond-rating agencies in New York and in Toronto, that they spend as much time talking about Hydro as they do talking about the core government and its debt, and then for good reason, right? Because, ultimately, it's one taxpayer who is responsible for paying that debt, whether it is on Manitoba Hydro or whether it is on the core operations of government.

Now, we've gone back and forth way too often, I suppose, in this Legislature on how we treat Hydro and the Crown corporations. Are they part of the summary system? Are they reported individually and they don't part—they don't form part of the summary budget? And, you know, I'm not going to go through the history of how we got there or why that is, but it certainly exists as a real issue.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And I think part of the issue that we have today is that the government doesn't have a long-term plan on how it's going to deal with both the debt that exists at Manitoba Hydro, honourable deputy Speaker, and the debt that exists within the core of government. Now, the Minister of Finance can talk about, you know, the release about lowest projected deficit—which isn't real—the lowest projected deficit, which is a false number, to GDP. It doesn't deal with the debt at all. The debt sort of exists as something entirely separate, and the debt continues to increase because the NDP government, this one and Greg Selinger before, have never actually met their financial targets. In fact, there are eight consecutive NDP governments that have missed their projections—five under the last NDP Greg Selinger government and three under this current

iteration—who've continued to miss their debt projections.

But—so the issue that CIBC was wrestling with for individuals is, you know, you got to get your debt down. So in BITSA—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please. Order, please.

May I request the member to please bring his remarks relevant to the reasoned amendment, please?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, of course, honourable deputy Speaker.

So the reason amendment speaks to an affordability crisis and how do you deal with an affordability crisis. What I was talking about was a report that came from CIBC that was specific about how individuals deal with an affordability crisis, and I was using that as an extension about how a government could deal with an affordability crisis so it ultimately would help their—the residents of Manitoba. So one of the things that CIBC said was you could deal with an affordability crisis by tackling debt as fast as possible. That's incredibly important for a government.

And my comments—and I'm sorry if I wasn't clear enough, honourable deputy Speaker—my comments were specific to the fact that within BITSA, which this reasoned amendment amends, is not direct to debt reduction within the BITSA bill. So that was where the relevance is, and I'll try to be clearer in the future.

The other thing that CIBC was talking about when they talked about affordability when it came to issues around how people, sort of, get through an affordability crisis, they actually termed it as, you know, learn to love coupons, I think is how the article—the public article spoke about it.

From a government perspective, though, and within BITSA, what we don't see is how the government is properly shopping, how it's properly procuring. We know that they love sending money down to the United States for all sorts of contracts, but they're not talking specifically about how it is that they're going to get the costs under control through proper procurement and smart shopping.

We used to use that term a lot in the Manitoba Legislature, honourable deputy Speaker. We would talk about government needs to shop smart, that it needs to get the best value for its dollar, right. That, just like Manitobans are smart shoppers—and this was a term that a former premier used to use a lot—just like

Manitobans are smart shoppers, government has to be smart shoppers as well.

Because when you're dealing with an affordability crisis, as the reasoned amendment speaks to, one of the ways that government can help that is by ensuring that their own procurement, that their own spending, is as efficient and lean as possible. And we look in BITSA and we see none of that. There's no, sort of, discussions about where that is or where it could potentially be improved.

So here we are now, honourable deputy Speaker, and we are getting close to Wednesday, and we're trying to provide the government that opportunity to once again find a way to come to the table, meet with the opposition, meet with the Opposition Leader and say, okay, we hear you; we've heard Manitobans. We've missed a mark. Let's have a discussion about how we can actually make this particular BITSA bill work. That's all this is. That's—you know, I'm about to get into the main text of my comments, but that's all that this is, you know. I mean, it's nothing more than that, as I sort of wrap up my introductory comments.

It's nothing more than about trying to assure that the government recognizes that it's an opposition that's willing—and I would even say more than just willing; like, it's eager. It's—I don't know if I've ever seen an opposition so eager to try to work with a government to try to do something good for Manitobans, right, and bring some affordability measures to the province of Manitoba.

And I give credit to our team, to the Leader of the Opposition, to the great members of the PC caucus, who really set aside partisanship and said, you know, let's do what's good for Manitobans, right? Led by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), led by the Finance critic, outstanding MLA for Midland, led by many others in our caucus, just trying to say let's work together on this.

But I started some of my comments and I wanted to—I guess it was a bit of a winding road to get there, honourable Speaker, but I started some of my comments because I said that I'd had some connection earlier today with Statistics Canada. And they—and this is, you know, this is specific to the reasoned amendment, which is all about affordability and the cost crisis that Manitobans are dealing with.

* (23:40)

And I asked Statistics Canada to provide me with some examples of the cost increases that have happened, you know, over the last reporting period, over

the last year, a little bit less than a year, to sort of common products in Manitoba. They provided me 200. I don't know that I'll go through 200, but I do want to go through a reasonable sample so that there's a real understanding of what Manitobans are dealing with. And the examples that I'm going to provide, honourable deputy Speaker, which are specific to this amendment, are because we fail to deal with meaningful relief within BITSA. And you have to understand what Manitobans are dealing with on a day-to-day basis to truly feel that the government is or isn't meeting their needs.

There's been way too much discussion and way too much talk about rotisserie chickens and that kind of stuff without a real meaningful deep dive into what the actual cost increases are that Manitobans are facing that they may not even know about. And I'll conclude my comments on this particular section of my presentation on the things that Manitobans are readily aware of, right, like the things that are obvious in terms of prices going up. But then I want to delve a little deeper into the many things that Manitobans would be shocked to know that are going up, because they don't sort of track those sort of things, right? I mean, there's lots of things.

We—you drive by the gas station, you see the gas price up on the board. In a very real and obvious way, what the gas price is, and you know that it's gone up significantly and incredibly. But you may not know, you know, that flour—that the price of flour has gone up by 5 per cent, according to Statistics Canada.

So let me just talk about that for a little bit, and then these are data that was provided to me by them: 5 per cent increase for the cost of flour. Not probably as tracked as much as meat and protein and those sort of things, but, I mean, what sort of things aren't Manitobans aren't—using flour for on a daily basis? I mean, I don't have to name anybody, but I know that the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine) is a prolific baker, and I'm sure that they know what the cost of flour is, right, and how many things that you're actually making it. It's a real sort of general staple item in any sort of household. It's a natural thing on a grocery list. Now, no, these are not things that are—currently have PST applied to them, I don't believe. The majority of them won't be. They're not junk food; they're staple items.

So it's reasonable to look at BITSA and say, I think it's failed on this particular standard, right? If you look at the issue of flour, it's gone up 5 per cent, according to Stats Canada in the report that they

provided me. Where is it that BITSA is dealing with that particular issue?

Now, I could argue that if you raise the basic personal exemption, as one example, honourable deputy Speaker, that that would help to mitigate some of those costs for those, like the Government House Leader, who uses a copious amount of flour and many others, right? I mean, you know, it's a pretty common thing.

But I might—I would wager to bet, honourable deputy Speaker, that if you talk to the average Manitoban, that they wouldn't actually know that the cost of flour has increased by that much over a relatively short period of time. They certainly know that their overall grocery bill has gone up a lot, but they may not know specifically that on that item, that they're paying so much more than they were before. And you return to the issue of the BITSA bill and you're quickly realizing that there's nothing in it. I'm kind of looking through it now, right? Like, there's nothing in it that addresses specifically that kind of issue.

Well, let's go on. Let's look at other items that Statistics Canada provided to me, honourable deputy Speaker. A new item: cooking oil. According to StatsCan and the information that they provided to me a little bit earlier today, cooking oil has also gone up 5 per cent in the last year. So now you combine that with cooking oil, flour, each has gone up 5 per cent, and you're left to—no wonder, right, that families are finding that when they're making things at home.

And, you know, it's an interesting point that I want to make because there are many families, I think, who would say, okay, in a time of an affordability crisis, honourable deputy Speaker, one of the ways that we could save money is to sort of make things on our own, right. To—not just to deal with processed food, which is what the Finance Minister and others want to take the PST off of, but we could probably make things our own. So you look at cooking oil, you look at flour, and yet these costs have increased significantly over the last year.

And so you can understand why, going back to the point I made earlier about the term desperation, which appears in our reasoned amendment, you can see why families might feel desperate because they think they're making the right choices, right? Let's try to do some of this on our own. Let's try to, like, you know, make some stuff in our own budget, in our own home. And yet they're getting hit on those costs as well. Really, really significant.

I asked Statistics Canada, Stats Canada, specifically about the issue of milk and the cost of milk because it relates specifically to the affordability crisis. And what they provided me—and I don't know if it's broken down by region, I didn't have enough time to sort of get every particular region of Manitoba broadly. But they said to me that there's been a 5 per cent increase in the cost of milk in a relatively short reporting time.

Now, you might have members of the government say, well, you know, that's—we froze the price of milk. I mean, and by the way, honourable Speaker, I haven't mentioned this yet, I was meaning to get to it. But you had the Premier (Mr. Kinew), when he was trying to talk about affordability and dealing with the affordability crisis, go to some grocery store—probably some unbeknown grocery store to them that they were being used as this prop—and pretend to be taking, you know, milk off of the counter and saying, hey, we're freezing price on milk.

And, you know, for half a day on radio and TV, that's what was reported. The provincial government is freezing the price of milk. And a lot of people, and I provided the stats here, they were given to me earlier today, a 5 per cent increase on milk, kind of over the last reporting period. You go, that's pretty significant.

The government was freezing the price of milk. Well, that would mean something, right. Except, you know, it took a—it took a few hours and you started to get, like, things started to drip and drab out. And all of a sudden you heard: well, hang on now, it wasn't actually all milk. It was sort of just some milk. And then some media started to inquire and they go, what do you mean some milk, like, you weren't including chocolate milk, I guess. Well, no, it was really just milk of a certain sort of size, like one litre of milk. One litre of milk. That's all that ultimately that was being referred to.

So you went from this morning announcement, you know, through a tweet or video that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) put out, where it looked like the government was freezing the—all the milk, the price of milk, right across the board, all varieties, all sizes, right? And according to Stats Canada, milk has gone up 5 per cent. So that wouldn't, honourable deputy Speaker, that would feel pretty significant, right? And then you get further into the announcement—hour or two later and the truth dribbles out. Well, of course, by that time, the Premier had sort of achieved what he wanted to achieve, right? Which was good headlines for half a day.

But that's not ultimately what Manitobans need. And it goes back to the reasoned amendment, honourable deputy Speaker. The reasoned amendment specifically says there needs to be real, meaningful, and there needs to be an assurance that this affordability is coming. And that's a prime example of where the affordability that's provided in BITSA and beyond fails on every level. It fails on every measurement.

Let's break that down a little bit. So you say to people, we're going to freeze the price of a one litre of milk, which very few families buy, right? Like, I mean, if you've got a family with a couple of kids or, you know, you're buying volume, right? You're not buying one litre.

* (23:50)

But let's break it down. So the Premier comes out with this announcement. You think, okay, they're freezing the price of milk right across the board, all kinds, all sizes. Then you find out it's one litre. Okay, so what does it pass the test on our reasoned amendment? Was that real? It wasn't real. It's not what was—it was proclaimed to be. Did it give people an assurance, as our reasoned amendment asked for? It certainly didn't do that. And was it meaningful? And that's ultimately the crux of it, honourable deputy Speaker: it wasn't meaningful tax relief. And that's the foundation of what this discussion is about. In a crisis time, where is that meaningful tax relief?

All right, let's go on. Again, I'm not going to read everything StatsCan gave me, but another one that they sent me was rice. They said that rice has increased—you can see a pattern here, honourable Speaker—5 per cent. Now, rice is a staple item in the diet of many Manitobans. Certainly, folks who come from other countries, that's very true, but I think it's true for, really, all Manitobans. And the price of rice has gone up significantly. Now, some of that is inflation. Some of that are supply chain issues. You know, I noticed when I went to my local grocery store and was looking for a particular brand of rice, they said, well, there's a shortage of it.

There's some supply issues. There's—I don't think it was disease, but there were some sort of supply chain issues. And so the price has gone up—not only has the price gone up, but it wasn't even available. But there was a 5 per cent increase year over year. So what are Manitobans to do with that? Manitobans can return to the BITSA bill and say, okay, I've—I'm dealing with this. Now I'm going to list them off.

It's 5 per cent increase in rice, 5 per cent increase in flour, 5 per cent increase in cooking oil, 5 per cent increase in milk. And where is the meaningful relief, where's the real relief and where is an assurance, as the reasoned amendment says, that relief is going to come for those items?

Well, it's not, right? Because taking the PST off of the Slurpees isn't dealing with any of those issues. Those issues still remain. Changing the basic personal exemption would, because it would leave thousands of dollars in the pockets of Manitobans and it would provide some relief.

Now, nobody's saying, honourable deputy Speaker, that this is a panacea, right? That this is the solution for everything. But it goes a lot further in dealing with a crisis than it would otherwise. StatsCan—I'm going to just do a few more on the food items and then I'm going to move to more household items, honourable deputy Speaker. And at the end, I'm going to sort of total this up so you can, sort of, get the weight of the affordability crisis that exists and how BITSA simply doesn't deal with it.

On the issue—I'll group a couple of them together because I feel like they kind of are similar—bread, bagels and buns. Now, each of those have increased by 5 per cent over the last reporting period. So think about that now as we head into barbecue season, we're heading into summer. People want to be able to go on to their deck and enjoy a barbecue. They want to go out with friends. There's often lots of community barbecues. Those folks who represent rural Manitoba—well, not just rural Manitoba, Winnipeg too. There's lots of festivals that happen in communities where there's barbecues and there's costs. Buns, you know, pretty staple item that you're going to be using at a barbecue. Bread, bagels—maybe not so much at a barbecue, but for breakfast, right?

And what are the impact of those costs? What are those community organizations? We haven't talked about yet—this yet in the comments, honourable Speaker, so some fresh, new information for the members who are listening. What about those community organizations? Like, how are they going to be able to absorb the cost? So a lot of the focus has been on individuals, and that's important, right? The BITSA fails to provide meaningful and real tax relief to individuals. But let's talk about organizations. These non—not-for-profit organizations who are putting on events, who are looking to try to support the community—not just, you know, in an affordability way, but just in bringing people together—well, they're also

bearing these costs, right? They're also the ones who have to pay for the front end of these costs. And I worry, honourable deputy Speaker, that there's going to be less of them, that less and less people are going to be able to put on these events because of these costs that I'm outlining that I'll continue to outline for you.

In talking or in getting the information from StatsCan, they said to me that the—and this is an instructive one; I want to spend a little bit of time on this one—that the—in the last reporting period, the increase of fresh fruit was 4.4 per cent, and this is like a few months, right? And this adds on to the increase of last year and the increase the year before, right? So these are compounding increases when we're talking about inflation. But a 4.4 per cent increase of fresh fruits and a 4.4 per cent increase on berries.

Now, why I want to spend a little bit of time talking about affordability on this particular issue, honourable deputy Speaker, is that the government has made a conscious choice in their BITSA bill. They made a conscious choice in BITSA that they're going to not—that they're not going to relieve pressure on healthy foods like berries or like fresh fruits, but, instead, they're going to relieve a very minute amount of taxation on what some have come to call junk food.

The Speaker in the Chair

And, by the way, Honourable Speaker, it was none other, I think, than Marianne Cerilli who, today—former NDP member, MLA Marianne Cerilli—who said that it made no sense to be taking the PST off of junk food and not trying to provide some release for healthy foods.

So StatsCan has specifically reported that healthy foods, in—when it comes to fruits and vegetables, when it comes to berries, have increased individually on each of those, on berries and fresh fruits, 4.4 per cent. So it's becoming less and less affordable for Manitobans to be able to make healthy choices at a time when the government, through BITSA, is trying to make it more affordable to make the unhealthy choices.

Now, I think, actually, the point that Marianne Cerilli was making—and this will mark the most times I've ever quoted Marianne Cerilli in the House—but the point that she was making—and it's a reasonable point—is that there's a diabetes epidemic in Manitoba, and at that time, the BITSA relief that's trying to—

The Speaker: Order, please.

If I could interrupt the honourable member for a moment, we have a very special birthday that I'd like to announce.

The honourable assistant deputy Speaker—the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar)—it's his birthday. And, unfortunately, it's ending in, like, three minutes. So I want to take the opportunity to wish him a very happy birthday.

The honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you, Honourable Speaker—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care—

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, I think—

The Speaker: —on a point of order.

MLA Asagwara: Yes, on a point of order.

The Speaker: On a point of order, the honourable—

MLA Asagwara: Very important point of order.

Just following up on your acknowledgment of our colleague, the MLA for Burrows, I do think it's an opportunity for us in the Chamber to bring our voices together and just wish him a happy birthday the right way.

Happy Birthday was sung.

The Speaker: While I appreciate the sentiment, singing is not allowed. And it's also not a point of order.

The honourable member for Burrows.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): On the same point of order.

The Speaker: On the same point of order.

Mr. Brar: Honourable Speaker, I wanted to say thank you to all my colleagues for taking time to, you know, wish me happy birthday. And I realized that, on a positive note, it was for the first time in my life that I was celebrating my birthday, sitting in the Chair.

So I'm happy about it. Thank you.

The Speaker: And, again, the—on the same point of order?

The honourable member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram), on the same point of order.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Deputy Official Opposition House Leader): So I just—on that same point of order, from the PC caucus here, I just want to wish the member from Burrows a very happy birthday, and we're still under the wire here. So, happy birthday.

The Speaker: The honourable—again, I just have to reiterate, it was not a point of order.

* * *

* (00:00)

Mr. Goertzen: I was wondering what rule transgression I might have done since I was listing off such great detail, but I'm actually very thankful that you made that very good interruption.

And I want to add my congratulations and happy birthday and wish many more to the honourable member for Burrows, who I consider to be an honourable person, not just as a member, but a person, and I've appreciated the conversations that we've been able to have. So I'll add my congratulations to him. I didn't partake in singing because I knew it was a transgression to the rules, and I'm one of the few Mennonites who can't sing.

So back to the issue at hand, which has to do with BITSA and the—now, I was actually looking during that time whether I could find the price increases for birthday cakes from Stats Canada, but they actually didn't send me that one. So I can't even parlay into that.

But I want to go back to the issue of, before the interjection—the important interjection, I was talking about how Stats Canada had provided to me data that fresh fruit and berries had each individually increased by 4.4 per cent over the last, sort of, reporting period, so it will be over a few months.

And it's important to just reiterate that that is on top of previous increases, right? So it's a compounding inflation rate. If they would have increased—I don't have the stats in front of me—but if they increased, like, 3 per cent last year on top of 3 per cent the year before, you can see, sort of, the effect of that.

And the government, the NDP, have made a very specific decision to alleviate the taxation from what some would call unhealthy food—certainly, Marianne Cerilli, in her post today, called it unhealthy food—and to not provide that same relief to healthy foods like berries and like fruits and vegetables. And that's a conscious choice that was made in the BITSA bill, and, ultimately, it's one of the reasons why the reasoned amendment was brought forward,

because there's not meaningful relief on issues like healthy foods.

Some of the other—and I'm going to move off grocery items relatively soon, Honourable Speaker—but some of the other items that StatsCan provided for me—and I think that they—you know, these are the ones that are the most significant, I suppose—they said that meat in the last reporting period overall has increased by 5.8 per cent, and that pasta had increased by 5 per cent, butter had increased by 5 per cent and cheese had increased by 5 per cent. Now, these are all individual, right? And the reason that's important is, when you go back to the reasoned amendment, we talked about meaningful relief to deal with desperation.

And I think that what happens sometimes, and I think it's unfortunate because it doesn't serve the debate well, is that we get a little hung up on the things that are obvious and the things that we can easily track. So—and not that that's not important, Honourable Speaker. I mean, you know, the price of gas, everybody sees it, it's a buck eighty-two or whatever it was today; we all see it and we all see it when we fill up at pumps, so you can't miss it and nobody's saying that that's not important. This is very important.

Price of groceries, we know that some, in particular, are increasing dramatically because they spike, right, in terms of costs, but there's all these other day-to-day grocery items, you know, the ones that I just listed off: butter, 5 per cent; flour, 5 per cent; cheese, 5 per cent; milk was 5 per cent; cooking oil, 5 per cent. These all form part of a normal basket of items that an average Manitoban purchases when they go to a grocery store. And each Manitoban is being impacted by these costs, but I don't think they entirely know why or what. They understand that their grocery dollar isn't going as far as it used to, but I don't think that they know individually why that is.

So that's why I thought it was important to reach out to Stats Canada to try to get them to provide me with these sort of details, so I could provide them to the record to try to convince the government that BITSA needs to provide relief for these very significant issues that people are buying each and every day.

I'm just going to finish off on the groceries, Honourable Speaker, before I move on to other items. But—okay, so this is one I think everybody will know—but coffee has increased 30.8 per cent. Now, I'm not going to get into a big debate about whether or not

coffee is an item of necessity; I would think that, for most North Americans, they might feel strongly that it is. And there are lots of reasons why coffee has increased, right? There has been disease that's happened. There's a litany of issues that aren't all related to government and that aren't all related to supply chains, and they might not alleviate themselves. But it's still a reality, right? I mean, I think that for the average Manitoban—and I'm not talking about, like, you know, \$7 lattes. I'm talking about, like, going to a grocery store and buying coffee, you know, up 30 per cent. I mean, I think most Manitobans would look at that and go, well, you know, it's sort of part of my daily routine. It's a little bit part of my daily staple, and this is really impacting me from a cost-of-living issue. And I think we need to talk about that as well.

Just to round out on the issues of groceries before we move on to another item, StatsCan said to me that tortillas are up 5 per cent, confectionery items are up 7.1 per cent, fresh or frozen beef is up 17.7 per cent, and I don't know that that increase of cost is necessarily being passed on to the farmers because I'm not hearing that they are necessarily doing all that much better.

So that's a bit of a snapshot on what, you know, we'd consider to be some of these broad items on groceries, but a really common item on groceries. I wanted to ensure that people understood that this was a part of it.

Now, I want to move on to a different topic or a different related topic, and that's the issue of restaurants, and I haven't had the opportunity to speak to this. The issue of restaurants has become a pretty significant issue in this debate about whether or not BITSA goes far enough or really provides tax relief to Manitobans. And it's not one that doesn't have some degree of controversy and I understand that. But I think that the Restaurant Association has made a pretty compelling case that if you're going to remove the PST off of items like prepared foods at grocery stores, junk food, the now-famous rotisserie chickens whose sales have probably increased 30 per cent since the budget. If you're going to remove the PST from those items, then why wouldn't you be removing the PST from the prepared foods that restaurants provide?

And it's a compelling argument for a couple of reasons: (1) There's just an intuitive logic to it, right, Honourable Speaker? Right? Like, you know, what you're picking up sometimes at a grocery store that's a prepared food item feels a lot like a prepared food item at a restaurant. So restaurants feel that they are sort of

disadvantaged. In the same way, I guess three hours ago, I mentioned that the Manitoba jobs agreement divided Manitobans into sort of, you know, both the winners and losers, but it's dividing Manitobans, right? Unionized, non-unionized. In the same way, the restaurant industry feels that they're also being divided because they're not part of the government wanting to remove PST from prepared food at restaurants.

And, you know, when you—when you add on to the fact—you have to think of what's happening in the restaurant industry, Honourable Speaker. We see this in Winnipeg. We see it in Manitoba more broadly. We're seeing restaurants that have been a part of our lives—you know, for those who've lived in Winnipeg for a long time or Manitoba—that are closing down. And some of it's succession issues. Some of them are family-run restaurants, but a lot of them are saying, you know, it's been a double whammy. First we had COVID, now we have the inflation costs. We're not getting any relief from the government. Sometimes they talk about crime, right, that's happening at restaurants, having to continue to replace windows and that sort of thing in the restaurants. And we're losing a lot of these really iconic restaurants.

So the government made a choice in BITSA to not remove the PST from those prepared items. And I think the question is: Why? Because that's a value choice as well.

Now, there were some changes, right, when this application came about about where it would apply, you know, to convenience stores or just mainline grocery stores. And I think at first the Premier (Mr. Kinew) said, well, the lawyers had told them that you couldn't do it, you know, because of regulatory issues or something—regulation issues—sorry, Honourable Speaker. There was regulations that couldn't be changed. And then he sort of, you know, did a one-eighty and said, oh yes. No, actually we can do it. And then they changed that, so convenience stores are more captured into the PST issue now on prepared foods.

*(00:10)

But restaurants have now got a hard door slammed, right? They're at a hard no. For whatever reason, this government has clearly drawn a line and said, we're not going to, you know, to choose restaurants.

Now, the reality is—I mean, some folks might say—and I, you know, again, this might be going back to

my comments about evidence, right, and how evidence would be important, as spoken about in the reasoned amendment—some folks might say, but I don't have the evidence to back it up because the government procured no evidence for it, they may say, well, is that a discretionary item, restaurants, that sort of thing.

The reality is, in today's world, you've got single parents, you've got families who are rushing from one thing to the next, a lot of them simply have to stop at a restaurant and pick up something quick before they're heading off to something else, kids are going to school, whatever, right? And it's—doesn't feel discretionary to them, and yet, the PST is going to remain on their item. And I think that that, ultimately, is a choice that the government has made in BITSA and one that they need to sit down with the Restaurant Association and have a real discussion about why that is.

Now, there has been discussion in the past, Honourable Speaker, in past budgets and in past election campaigns, about removing the PST from restaurants altogether. Some of that was in response from the—you know, outcomes of the pandemic and how restaurants were hit during the pandemic. Some of that was mostly affordability issues, trying to help some of the restaurants. But, regardless, a conscious decision was made within this particular BITSA bill not to have that.

And I think that this is an opportunity for the government to reconsider this decision. The restaurant industry isn't, you know, it's not an adversarial group to government. It's not a group that's trying to poke a stick in the eye of government. There are many family-run businesses, some of them are, sort of, iconic Manitoba businesses that, frankly, may not survive. Like, I've talked to the executive director of the Restaurant Association and he said, you know, you might be surprised how many of these restaurants are really just hanging on. And this feels to them, not only like they've been ignored, but that it puts them at something of a competitive disadvantage. And I just think it's something that really needs to be looked at and needs to be considered by the government.

So hadn't touched on that before, but I did want to specifically mention the restaurant industry. I think it's an important industry. By the way, it's an industry that employs many young people, and, at a time when young people are having a more difficult time—speaking of affordability—more difficult time finding

jobs and unemployment rates are going up for young people across Canada, the restaurant industry is a great employer of young people, giving them flexible work and the ability, you know, through tips and other things, to make pretty good money, right? So I hope that this government will reconsider the particular stand they've taken on restaurants.

Now, I want to move on to a couple of new items, Honourable Speaker, and one is, you know, the affordability crisis and the desperation that the reasoned amendment speaks to as it relates to charitable organizations and food banks, in particular. I mentioned earlier—not to tread over ground a second time, but for context, I do want to say, like, I helped run a food bank for many years. I was vice-president of a food bank in Steinbach for about a decade or so. Felt it was just a way to give back to the community, learned a lot of things about how people find themselves in difficult situations, most often for reasons that are not of their own making, and they just need support, often just short-term support.

But I'm—but I've been following closely what the economic crisis has done to food banks, not just in Manitoba, but Canada more generally. And you want to talk desperation, like what the reasoned amendment speaks to, the desperation that many food banks are feeling is palpable. And some of them, I—you know, are, like, considering what kind of—it's never been the case where you've wanted to, sort of, question people why they're at a food bank, but I think some of them are feeling a pressure of, okay, how do we ration this or how do we deal with situations where we're increasingly having a hard time getting our shelves filled because there's an affordability crisis and people may not be able to give as much, charitable donations are down. They talk about that; we've heard that at organizations like Siloam and others who've had donations decrease over the last few years.

So food banks are feeling that on the one hand when it comes to donation of food, but then, on the other hand, the line, right, I mean, out the food bank door is only increasing. I recall one of the early meetings that we had when I was vice-president of the Steinbach food bank was—you know, our goal was always, hey, wouldn't we like to put ourselves out of business? Wouldn't it be great if there wasn't a need for a food bank?

Well, you know, it was a little idealistic and it was never going to happen. And that's just—that just wasn't realistic, but that would have been the goal, right?

But then nobody would have been needing food. That's what probably government's goal should be.

But now you've got food banks who are dealing with this double-ended pressure, the pressure inside the facility where they're having a hard time, you know, garnering the donations, financial or food donations, so that they can keep their shelves filled. And on the other side, you have the pressure of people lining up outside the food bank because there's just such a need.

And I was listening to a report—speaking of affordability, I was speaking or listening to a report on CJOB, I think it was yesterday or the day before, you know, and they were saying that increasingly the people who are going to food banks are people who are like working full-time. And there's always been an element of that, right, because, you know, even if you're working full-time but at minimum wage, there's a gap. And if you have a family at home and you've got kids, it's hard, right, to make those ends meet. But the report was saying that because of this affordability crisis and because people are needing to augment their grocery supply, they're turning to food banks that have never done it before. So you are getting, actually, food banks now who are kind of inquiring with people why they're there, not to like say that they can't be there, but they're trying to get a sense of how deep is this crisis.

And it's something I think this government should look at. Like I do think this was a miss in the BITSA bill. What is it that specifically is supporting and helping some of these non-profits? Now, I'll go back and say, and this received some criticism from the NDP, but if you're looking for things that could be in the BITSA bill that could help on affordability, there was a proposal at one point: What if you increase the charitable tax deduction, right, to maybe help with food banks or across the board or—you know—that discussion didn't get into that level of detail.

But could you do something to help incentivize those who have the money to give—not everybody does—but those who are able to provide to food banks or to other charitable organizations, could you provide them, you know, a greater tax relief? Now that comes at a cost of the Treasury and that would be reflected in BITSA and be reflected in the budget bills. But wouldn't that be meaningful, right? Like, you know, could there be evidence, going back to the reasoned amendment wording, could there be evidence that would suggest that if you provided something of a greater tax credit that you might see more support for

these organizations that are helping others? It's something that's worth examining, I think, in an affordability crisis.

And it speaks to the issue that the government hasn't gone very far. You know, we're just hung up on taking taxes off of junk food. But when you really look at the crises that are happening in the community, that are happening at that level of people who are struggling to find food, that are struggling to find shelter, how can you engage the community more broadly—those in the community who can afford to help—how can you engage them? So listen, I mean, tax receipts or tax deductions, again, comes at a cost to the Treasury. Not the only thing. I'm sure that there are other things that you could do to incentivize folks to engage, right, with these organizations.

Government's not always going to be the solution to all these problems, but they have to be a facilitator. And a bill like BITSA is the ultimate facilitator of that sort of thing. When there's an affordability crisis or food banks are under pressure, the ultimate facilitator comes through the monetary powers of a government. And that's expressed in a BITSA bill. And all this government has really offered up is a few pennies on junk food.

Moving on to a different topic, I'm not sure where I am in my time, but I will—I've got a few more things to say. I want to, you know, express when it comes to—we talked about food, and I could give some other, some other examples. But I do want to talk about sort of the items that add to the cost of living and the affordability crisis that people have to use for a variety of other reasons.

And a lot of it has to do with housing and shelter, Honourable Speaker. So, again, hat tip to Stats Canada, who was able to provide some information on a relatively short time frame for me. Here are some of the things that they provided.

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They indicated that when it comes to increases of water services over the last few months—increase of 4.4 per cent—4.4 per cent. I mean, you know, that's on top of the increases that would have happened the year before and that would have happened the year before.

But, you know, people who are living in homes, these are not discretionary items, right? It's not like you're sitting around the kitchen table, as a former premier used to say, and you're making a budget and you're going, okay, let's just not pay the water bill, right? Because everybody knows what happens when

you don't pay the water bill. So there is a significant increase of cost there that people are seeing this adding to the crisis. Not addressed, right, in BITSA. But, if you increase the basic personal exemption, it would give people that opportunity.

Things like—routine things: 4 per cent on the increased costs of lumber; if you're going to paint in your home, increased costs of 4 per cent; electrical services, you know, 5 per cent. Now, some people might say, okay, some of these might be more discretionary; families can decide not to do things. Well, electrical services—if you don't have electricity, you've got to get that fixed, right? So, I mean, increased costs.

These costs are being pushed down to the service providers. It's not like people who are running electrical businesses are becoming rich, right? They're paying increased costs; they're passing it on to the consumer.

So how does the reduction of PST on Slurpees and Cheezies help address those particular costs? Well, it doesn't.

But, if you did raise the basic personal exemption and you put \$3,000 back into the pockets of Manitobans, you absolutely would provide them that sort of release on those basic sort of things that they're dealing with.

I was maybe not surprised to learn that mortgage interest rates have increased by 5.3 per cent over the last number of months. When you look at what's happening in the service sector—and there's no question that the affordability crisis that the government has failed to address through BITSA is, you know, living within the money markets as well, because you've got a Bank of Canada who is looking at what's happening globally. They're trying to make an assessment on what the growth rate will be of Canada. They're looking at inflation. They have a target rate for inflation, and they use interest rates to try to ensure that that target rate is hit at some point.

So, as you have continued increased inflation, the Bank of Canada has a motivation to keep interest rates higher so that it puts downward pressure on inflation, but that puts upward pressure on mortgage costs and other costs for consumers. Don't see the relief that's provided in BITSA for the public on that particular issue. And it's a very real issue that everybody who owns a home, more or less, is dealing with that particular issue, right, when it comes to mortgage costs. But it gets passed down, you know, for those who are

building or have rental units, I mean, these costs all get absorbed into those costs, as well, and it might be a disincentive for them to be building other homes or affordable housing.

And sometimes you need to have—and by the way, like, this is an interesting point that—what BITSA, I think, lacked when it comes to affordability and dealing with the affordability crisis, is it lacked creativity.

And I'll give a shout-out to the Steinbach Credit Union and a developer in Steinbach, Waldo Neustaedter, who came up with a plan to allow for 1 per cent down payments on housing. So that's outside of, you know, Canada mortgage corporation rates, I believe. But they've come up with a plan, like, how do you get people into homes with only 1 per cent down? Now, that's creative. It made national news, by the way. A little shout-out to the Steinbach Credit Union and Mr. Neustaedter. But it made national news because it was a creative way of thinking.

What BITSA seems to lack is a creative way to deal with some of these issues. It has a carte blanche—going to, you know, take PST off of groceries that already largely doesn't exist. But I think that there was room for creative thinking.

So I use the example of tax deductions on charitable donations, whether there could be some movement there. Would that help out a food bank? Would that help out, you know, some of these organizations that are helping other people? Something to think about. But, ultimately, it's creativity.

There—look, there could be other ideas, right? I don't have a monopoly on creativity, Honourable Speaker. One would say I don't even have, you know, like, a competitive advantage on it. But there are lots of people within the Department of Finance, good people, smart people, you know, where there should have been a push on that.

I think what happened with BITSA bill and why we had to bring this reasoned amendment is that the government said, you know what? We're going to look for something flashy. What can we put on a billboard? Well, PST off all groceries was confusing for people for a little bit because a lot of people said, I didn't think there was PST on groceries. And then they realized they were basically right and they were just removing it off of, like, you know, 1 or 2 per cent of junk food.

But I think that ultimately the government thought, hey, this is flashy, right? It fits well on a billboard, easy to digest. But how is it dealing with the

issues that I'm raising? How is it dealing with what StatsCan says are 5 per cent increases in fruit, berries, 5 per cent on bagels, 5 per cent on buns, 5 per cent on rice, 5 per cent on flour, cooking oil, butter, cheese, milk? The list goes on and on and on. It's not dealing with any of those issues because there's no creativity involved in trying to deal with those issues.

Back to the issue, though, of housing and how BITSA fails to address, you know, the issues of affordability that people have in housing. We've heard of some creative ways. Plumbing services, up 3 per cent. Roofing services, up 4 per cent. Home repairs, up 4 per cent. Home insurance, up 3 per cent. And, you know, by the way, it's worth mentioning at this point, because we're just talking about PST and affordability, that there was a time when the PST was exempt from home insurance and it was the Selinger government who added PST onto home insurance. And it was the Progressive Conservative government who took it off because they wanted to not make it unaffordable to insure your home. So that's an important point, I think, to make as well.

You know, then there's items where I sort of look at—I'm coming to the end of some of these household items and I'll get into a few other things before I move on. But, like, pillows. So this goes to my example, Honourable Speaker. You might be—I can't see you in the Chair, but, you know, you might be going, okay, like, pillows, is this really a thing? Yes, pillows went up 5.2 per cent. But the reality is most people use pillows, but they wouldn't think about it, right? It's not like the gas station example where you're driving by the gas station and you go, oh, you know, buck eighty-nine; that really went up. Well, no, pillows, you don't really notice it. But at the end of the day, you have less and less money.

Towels went up 5.2 per cent, and this would be the last one on this vein, Honourable Speaker. Storage containers, which, you know, everybody uses to some degree, went up 5.2 per cent according to StatsCan in the most recent reporting item. So that's an example of things that aren't high on the radar, you know, that people buy. I mean, they're buying pillows or buying storage containers or they're buying towels, but they're not attuned to the cost because they're not buying them every day.

So when you're buying gas every week, you kind of know, right? Like, I mean, it was what I paid last week and now I got to pay this this week. But you're not buying pillows every week, generally, and you're not buying towels every week,

generally, and you're not buying storage containers every week, generally. But if you're—so you don't know that the price has really gone up as much, but you feel it. You feel it at the end of that budgetary period or at the end of the year when you just know that somehow you had less money for those sports programs, for all those other sort of priorities.

And it goes to the point, Honourable Speaker, of why the basic personal exemption is the choice that the government should make. They should come across to the opposition, and they should make a pitch in terms of how we can ensure that every Manitoban can do a little bit better by looking at some of these costs.

Now, there's one last set of costs I'm going to just discuss, Honourable Speaker, and members will be disappointed to know that I am actually coming to the end of my comments at some point relatively soon. I know, it'll be—come to great disappointment to members. And I am sorry to disappoint you.

But the costs that I want to speak about now are sort of like service costs, right? So they're—again, I wouldn't consider them to be discretionary costs. Some of them might be, but I think in today's world, they are costs that, you know, people have—it's part of their life, right? It's not maybe something 30 years ago we would have thought about, but they are.

So cellular services. Well, you know, woe to you who tries to eliminate cellular services. Social media is a different sort of issue, obviously, and I think there's, you know, good reason to have that discussion. But cellular services have gone up 12.7 per cent in that reporting period of Statistics Canada—12.7 per cent. I mean, that's a real significant thing. And what are the options, right? I mean, people use their cellular services for their work. People use their cellular services to connect with their kids. People are using cellular services for everything, right? To stay connected to the world.

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Now, I can argue and others can argue that maybe we're a little too connected and we should disconnect in some ways, and I get that. But I don't think that anybody's going to entirely disconnect and move away from these services altogether.

So a 12.7 per cent increase in what is essentially a basic item—I don't think anybody would argue that this isn't a basic item anymore—is a real hit to affordability. So, I mean, what could the government have done about that?

You know, we've had these sort of discussions about—and I'm not going to get too much into the grocery prices and restrictive covenants, but this probably goes a little bit to what the reasoned amendment talks about real. When the reasoned amendment talks about what is actually real, one of the things that doesn't feel is real is on issues of restrictive covenants. And let me be clear, I don't care about restrictive covenants. No restrictive covenants, that's fine, makes absolutely no difference in my life. The question is whether or not ending restrictive covenants would actually lower grocery prices, because that's ultimately what the issue is, right?

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) at one point came out and said, well, you know, there are two empty places in Steinbach that you can't put grocery stores in. I think he was referring to a building that was sold about six years ago and has Manitoba's largest RV centre in, and another one that has a furniture store in. They're not empty buildings and so the restrictive covenant wouldn't change that.

And grocery stores like Sobeys, for example, they have western Canada pricing, right, so the pricing that you have in Alberta is the same pricing that you have in Manitoba. So the competition isn't necessarily the issue either. So that becomes of, is it real?

And, again, I don't really care about restrictive covenants. I care about real solutions to real problems that people are dealing with. These are not real solutions. They are not dealing with the meaningful crisis that folks are having. So, I mean, that's my issue on those particular sorts of things.

Internet access services: up 5.1 per cent. I mentioned water bills already. Sewer charges: up 4.4 per cent. Streaming services: up 5.1 per cent. Cable: up 5.1 per cent. Satellite TV: up 5.1 per cent. Now—music subscriptions: up 5.1 per cent.

Now, at some point, maybe there's somebody in the Chamber on the government side saying, well, you know what, like, those are things people can do without, right? Like, you know, cut your streaming services and cut your online access and cut your Internet services. You know, that's not the reality of the world that we live in these days, and we have to deal with what is it that people are generally using, what is it that people need. They need basic services; they need to be able to connect to the things that they do for work, for life, for living; they need to be able to have affordable food that's fresh food, that is healthy food; they need to be able to deal with their

household items, some of them that I've named, that have gone up—very, very significant increases on those household items. That's the reality of what people are dealing with today. That's backed up by the StatsCan report that they provided me.

And yet, what is BITSA responding to, what are we getting in BITSA? Well, you know, they say we're going to reduce the cost of Slurpees. That's nothing to do with the reality—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable member is getting quite repetitive again though I've cautioned him about that a couple of times already, so I would ask him to quit being—talking about the same thing over and over again.

Mr. Goertzen: Sure. I'll move on to other items that Stats Canada provided me. Thank you for your direction, Honourable Speaker.

So they also provided me—saying that mobile data plans have increased by 12.7 per cent. They indicated that device protection plans have increased by 5.1 per cent. Smart home monitoring has increased by 5.1 per cent. Which, of course, that relates to safety and issues of safety within our community, and, you know, people want to ensure that they're protecting their homes. Monitoring programs is only one way to do that, but a significant increase.

So, you know, you look at BITSA, and we've heard from the government in the past where they've said in their budgetary documents that they were providing security cameras, as one example, and that they were going to subsidize security cameras within the budget bill.

Well, what we've heard mostly from those who are accessing these security cameras or other sort of, like, devices is that it's not a way to prevent crime. At best, it's something that can be used to try to track somebody down after a crime has been committed. Well, you know, I'm not saying that that has no value, Honourable Speaker, but it doesn't seem like that's necessarily the best way to deal with a crime crisis and an affordability crisis, because the two are obviously linked.

So—move on to other new items. Computer accessories: StatsCan reports are up 5.2 per cent. Printer ink is up 5.2 per cent as well. So where does this all end up? Where does it all lead to? I'll provide some concluding comments over the next few minutes.

Ultimately, when you look at the reasoned amendment, it did a number of different things. It—(1)—provided an opportunity for government to take another look at whether or not this really is the right way to deal with an affordability crisis. It gives them time to reconsider. It gives them time to connect with their constituents. The reasoned amendment is very specific in what we're asking for. We're asking for assurances about affordability. We're asking for evidence for those affordability measures. We're asking to ensure that they're real and to deal with something that is clearly a crisis. It's been identified by everybody as a crisis. Those are the asks when it comes to the reasoned amendment.

What are the reasons that a government wouldn't accept this kind of reasoned amendment? I don't think that there's members—I'm trying to be charitable, Honourable Speaker, at this late hour—I don't think that there's members opposite who don't believe that the affordability crisis is real. I suspect that they talk to the same sort of folks that we talk to, and they hear it every day, right? That these are real issues; these are real matters. These are real sort of things that Manitobans are ultimately dealing with.

So they're not, you know, accepting some of these suggestions, I don't believe, because they don't believe that the situation is real. So, absent that, why would they not provide real, meaningful relief for the many, many issues that I've outlined and the different issues that are increasing in costs around affordability on housing, affordability on food, affordability on streaming services and other connected devices?

Part of it, I think, is just simply because it's coming from the opposition. And this is the real challenge because we've sort of got into a position, it seems, in politics where, if the idea doesn't come from the government, if the idea only lives in the minds of the opposition, then it can't be accepted. And I would ask, you know, in the few minutes remaining that I have, Honourable Speaker, that the government looks past that, that the government looks past a pure partisan discussion. BITSA itself is really, you know, a bill that's not laden with partisan terms.

I said before that the budget has become very much a political document in the last many years. We've seen that from governments federally and provincially. A budget becomes as much a political document as anything else. That's not what BITSA is. BITSA implements very specific things that impact people either positively or negatively. BITSA ultimately touches on issues of specific affordability.

Now, in a time of crisis, one would expect them to go beyond where we're at now.

Well, there'll be some people who'll look and go, well, you know, 2 cents on junk food, I guess that's 2 cents I didn't have before. I suppose there'll be a handful of people who feel that way. I don't think that that would be the view of the majority of Manitobans, Honourable Speaker. I think the majority of Manitobans wanted real relief. They were expecting real relief because it's what the Premier (Mr. Kinew) said that they were going to get, and it hasn't been provided.

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So where does the government go from here? The government can do a few different things. They can do nothing, and they can—we can just continue on with this sort of debate. They can ultimately pass the BITSA bill and it will remain exactly as it is. I imagine that they'll put out some more advertising on the PST grocery things, to their detriment. I think people have caught on to it. I think, by and large, people understand that's not real. It's not significant. It's not going to impact my life. To a lesser degree, I think some people are just laughing about it and find it comical and the government isn't getting much out of it. So that's an option, though. I mean, the government can just sort of plow ahead and do that and go through this whole process and receive essentially no real measurable political improvement for it. That's a pure politics thing.

The other thing that they can do is they can sit down with the opposition and say, all right, you've proposed this on the basic personal exemption, we've proposed something differently, let's see what we can work out. Can we make it better? Maybe, you know, it's not everything we're asking for, and it's certainly not where they're at now. That's actually part of the legislative process.

And my guess is that our very reasonable and esteemed Finance critic for Midland, together with the very capable Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine), would absolutely be willing to sit down and have a discussion with the government about how to better the lives of Manitobans and to make this bill better than how it exists today. So those are two distinct paths that ultimately this is—the government has to make a decision upon which way they're going to go.

But I don't want to leave it just at that, because that sounds like, Honourable Speaker, that I'm just

talking about political parties. And I really 'amn't just talking about political parties. That's not really what matters to me in this moment.

I think in the three-plus hours that I've had, what I've been trying to demonstrate is that there is a real tangible crisis. And yes, I know, Honourable Speaker, it might have felt repetitive, you know, to be listing off all the things Stats Canada provided to me, and I apologize if that was the case. But those are real things, right? Like, I mean, Manitobans are dealing with real things on—every day, and they're making real choices, and they're having to make real decisions for their families that are not just impacting them today, because they don't know when this crisis is going to end. They don't know if it's going to go on for three more years, two more years. They're holding on decisions. They're maybe staying in jobs that they might not otherwise stay in. They're holding off on purchases, perhaps, because they don't know where it's going to go and they don't feel the government has their back on it.

So I may have framed it, you know, as though it was an opposition government thing. And, yes, ultimately, that's how the legislature works, and the two parties have to come together and come to some sort of agreement or not. But the not option doesn't actually impact the PC Party of Manitoba or the opposition. And maybe the government doesn't feel it impacts them either, but it impacts Manitobans.

To do nothing, to keep this bill exactly the way it is today without any change to make it meaningful and to make it real, hurts Manitobans. And that's what this debate is about. That's what all of this is about. It's not about political parties. It's not about, you know, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) or other sorts of things—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Once again, the honourable member is being quite repetitive. He's said all of these things several times already. If he has nothing new to add to the debate, then perhaps he should quit speaking. If he has something more to add that's new—the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

Mr. Goertzen: I will add a couple of new things, and then I'm going to move on as you've said.

So I just want to conclude by buttressing some of my comments by some of the things that other Manitobans have said, because I think it's important that, as I conclude my comments, that it's not left as though it was simply my feelings on these things. They certainly were my feelings, but it's not just my

feelings. So, Honourable Speaker, let me conclude by providing a couple of comments that have been provided by others on the particular bill.

We've seen the Canadian Federation of Independent Business specifically say that they were looking for practical measures to help investment and to grow businesses, and that remains absent. That's a real thing when it comes to affordability. If we don't have small businesses, we don't have job creation and we don't have work for a lot of people who otherwise would get it.

You know, we've got some of the people who would traditionally support the NDP government, like the centre for—Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which, by the way, I don't spend a lot of time, sort of, quoting the organization, but they specifically mentioned the issue of accessing food banks and how hard it is for people to survive day to day. And I absolutely think that they're right.

Yes, I touched on those comments, but I think it's important, Honourable Speaker, that I cite somebody else other than just myself on that issue. We've heard from some of the union leaders, actually, who talked about the issue of health care in BITSA and how it's difficult to ensure that we're going to get the sort of health-care support that we need to, as an example, open the Portage hospital, which has been mothballed by the NDP government.

We heard from those in the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and I do often quote them more often—Gage Haubrich, who said that ultimately this is bracket creep when you talk about the decision to remove the indexation from taxation levels and from different levels of income. And that's very real. Even the climate action team had something negative to say about this particular budget.

So regardless of where you go, and some of this relates to the interprovincial comparison of tax rates, and I know that the business community was concerned that we're not competitive when it comes to tax rates across the province, that our basic personal exception hasn't kept up. All those things are very real. So I wanted to conclude my comments on that, Honourable Speaker, to say that yes, I have raised my own concerns about BITSA.

I have, I think, in a, I hope, non-partisan way, tried to show that the government could find a solution to some of these things, but that ultimately these aren't just my comments, Honourable Speaker. There's people who one might consider to be traditional allies of the

opposition. There would be people who would be considered traditional allies of the government and they're all saying the same thing; that it fell short of the affordability needs of Manitobans.

They might have different reasons and they might look at it in different ways in terms of how BITSA fell short, but ultimately they all have come to the same conclusion: that we're involved in a crisis and that this bill doesn't meet the moment of that crisis.

So, Honourable Speaker, with those few words, I expect that I have colleagues who also want to add some words to the record and I will turn it over to them.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I want to just, if you'll indulge me for just a moment, just thank my colleague, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), for his wise words. I think that all of us in this Chamber who took the time to listen to his remarks over the last several hours will have learned a lot about the affordability crisis facing Manitobans and the rationale for the reasoned amendment that one of our colleagues, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), has put forward today, and I certainly—the member for Steinbach has been a mentor to myself and to others in this Chamber who are newly elected. I have known him for many, many years, having been a former staffer in this building, and he has always provided a good example for us to follow, and I just want to thank him for that.

That being said, I have no idea how to follow that remarkable performance but I'm going to do my best.

And, today, of course, I'm here to speak to the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Red River North, my colleague, and the amendment that he's proposed reads that this House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need. And that really is the issue here.

* (00:50)

The NDP government continues to insist that this budget contains affordability measures but Manitobans are not convinced. We know that there is an affordability crisis in this province. When I'm speaking with my constituents, when I'm knocking on doors, when I'm greeting them as they enter my constituency

office, when I'm responding to their emails or giving them a call back, the No. 1 issue that I'm hearing, and I would venture to guess most of us in this Chamber are hearing from constituents right now, is about affordability.

And, you know, my colleague, the member for Steinbach, did a remarkable job of illustrating the many ways that affordability has been impacted in Manitoba, and I just want to touch on a few of those.

Broadly speaking, we know that Manitoba leads the country in inflation, and the reason for that in Manitoba right now is largely due to property taxes and food inflation. And we've seen the evidence of that. We know that food bank usage in Manitoba is up, and that's because the cost of staple items that are already PST exempt has risen sharply.

And, you know, my colleague from Steinbach mentioned several of those, citing Stats Canada evidence. Everything from rice to ground beef, dairy, all of these items that are increasing in cost that Manitoba parents need to feed their kids, that seniors rely on to remain healthy, all the food items that Manitobans need have increased in price. And that's contributing significantly to the affordability challenges that Manitobans are facing.

But the other thing that's driving inflation in Manitoba is property taxes, and that's something that the current NDP government has a direct hand in. And when we talk about the city of Winnipeg, in particular, we know that property taxes have gone up significantly since the NDP took office.

In Louis Riel School Division, they've gone up by over 43 per cent since the NDP were elected. In my constituency—Roblin has two school divisions within the constituency, but the majority of Roblin is within the Pembina Trails School Division, where property taxes have gone up by 37.3 per cent since 2023, which really is a very direct illustration of the affordability challenges that are facing Manitobans.

Because whatever, you know, the NDP government says that it's doing about property taxes, it doesn't negate the fact that under their watch, property taxes have risen in these school divisions by these levels because school divisions are not adequately funded from general revenues, and that leaves them with no choice.

And that's something that Pembina Trails School Division Superintendent Shelley Amos made very clear to media when she was discussing the proposed property tax hike in Pembina Trails for this year, and

she told media that because of underfunding from the provincial government, that Pembina Trails would either be forced to make cuts to programming or significantly raise taxes.

And, of course, Manitoba parents certainly don't want to see cuts to programming in our children's schools. If anything, we know that many kids in schools and teachers require additional supports right now. They want to see increased investment in education. They don't want to see cuts. But neither should property owners be on the hook for something that should be funded by the provincial government.

So that's taking a real—that's having a real impact on Manitobans' pocketbooks and on affordability in this province, and that's one of the leading contributors to the incredibly high rate of inflation in Manitoba that, again, leads the country.

We know that income taxes are going up in Manitoba. And that, of course, takes money out of Manitobans' pockets. And the reason that income taxes are going up is because the current government made the choice to de-index income tax brackets, which leads to something called bracket creep, which really reduces the purchasing power of every dollar that every Manitoban makes.

Hydro rates are going up. Pharmacare deductibles are going up, which means that Manitobans are paying more for life-saving medications that they need. The cost of insurance is going up. Home repairs is going up.

Clothing, for sure; basic clothing that, you know, as a parent, any parent will tell you it's a—it can be a significant cost driver when your kids are growing. I think one of my sons is on his third pair of shoes this year, and not because he's particularly hard on shoes, but because he's just been growing like a weed. And those things get expensive.

Another significant cost driver that's impacting affordability for Manitobans that wasn't addressed through BITSA is, of course, the cost of kids' activities.

And, you know, you—I guess you could make an argument that those are luxuries, but I think all Manitobans would agree that as many kids as possible should be able to participate in sports or the arts or other extracurricular activities that enrich their lives. But, unfortunately, they're becoming very cost prohibitive for many families. You know, I'm very privileged—my kids are very privileged to be able to participate in a lot of activities. And I can tell you that the cost of every activity that they've done has gone

up over the last year. That's just where we're at with inflation in this province.

But there's nothing in Bill 53, in BITSA, that addresses those challenges. There was really only one so-called affordability measure proposed in Bill 53, and it doesn't put a significant amount of money back in Manitobans' pockets. And, you know, we on this side of the House have proposed a real affordability option and really urged this NDP government to incorporate that into BITSA. And that, of course, is raising the basic personal exemption to \$30,000, which would leave significantly more money in the pockets of Manitobans to pay for all of these things that are going up in cost, right?

And Manitobans know best how to spend their own money, whether that's that their kids need new shoes or their son or daughter would like to try a new activity, whether they just want to make sure that their basic bills get paid. You know, Manitobans are facing an affordability crisis and that's why we needed this reasoned amendment, because, as the amendment states, the bill does not provide any real and meaningful affordability measures, measures that Manitobans desperately need.

And I've talked a little bit about the affordability measures for individuals in Manitoba, but I also want to talk a little bit about affordability measures for businesses, because that's important too. We know that businesses are asking for real cost relief. They're dealing with many of the same affordability challenges as the rest of us. And this is, again, another thing that Bill 53 failed to address, and that's going to have real impacts for Manitobans.

You know, a significant cost driver for many businesses is red tape. And I've talked about this a little bit before in the Chamber, but it's because it's something that I believe strongly is that red tape comes with a tangible cost for business owners.

And, unfortunately, under the current NDP government, Manitoba has gone from best in the country to the worst when it comes to regulatory accountability and red tape reduction, because the current government repealed regulatory accountability legislation. They gutted it and have allowed red tape to grow unchecked, and that's had a significant negative impact on businesses. It's a disincentive for businesses in Manitoba.

And Bill 53 didn't provide any incentives for businesses to grow and to create more jobs. And as a result, business optimism is at an all-time low.

And businesses will tell you that rising costs are the biggest barrier to growth because businesses, too, are facing an affordability crisis. Every item in a small business's budget is going up—all of their input costs, you know. Food, for example, is a significant cost driver for many businesses. I'll talk about that in a little bit. Labour costs are going up. Hydro rates for businesses. We also know that property taxes have increased under the NDP for businesses significantly.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook) seems to have froze up.

* (01:00)

Seeing as the member's connection has been lost, we—[interjection]

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on House business.

The Speaker: On House business.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I think it's very important that we all give our best effort and should be in the House here, and I would like a quorum count.

The Speaker: The honourable Opposition Leader has called for a quorum count.

Order, please.

So a quorum count has been requested. The division bells will ring for one minute. And I would ask all members present—okay, the one-minute bell will ring now.

So the one minute for the ringing of the quorum bell has expired. I would now ask all members present to rise in their places and ask the Clerk at the table to count those present.

A QUORUM COUNT was taken, the result being as follows – Members present: 36.

The Speaker: So a quorum is present. So now we'll move on to the next speaker.

The honourable Opposition Leader has—the honourable Opposition House Leader has suggested that he called quorum count before I said we'd move on. He did not. So, therefore, the honourable member for La Vérendrye has the floor.

The honourable Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes. I'd like to challenge that ruling, please.

The Speaker: So the honourable member's attempting to challenge a matter of order which cannot be challenged.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, again, for the opportunity to speak to the amendment brought forward by my colleague from Red River North on the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which we often refer to as the BITSA bill.

And I want to begin by saying this very clearly: This bill does not meet the moment. It's clear that this government is offside on this bill and on their entire budget, and that's why we bring forward this amendment.

It's clear to see, Honourable Speaker, that the government, the NDP, are outside of their comfort zone when trying to represent the concerns of Manitobans. See, the NDP government have never been strong on the economy, clearly not strong on affordability and definitely not strong on balancing budgets. What they are strong on is increasing debt, driving affordability out of the reach of the average Manitoban and burdening the business sector of our province, chasing away investment and opportunity for entrepreneurs.

See, Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are struggling. Families are paying more for groceries, more for gas, more for hydro, more for MPI, more for rent, more for mortgages and more for the education property taxes on their property tax bills.

And what does this government offer them? Well, what we're seeing is pennies on Slurpees, pennies on junk food, pennies on a handful of prepared grocery items. Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are smarter than that, though. They know the difference between real affordability relief and simple political spin.

This government wants Manitobans to focus on the few cents they might save at the till while ignoring the hundreds and thousands of dollars being taken from them through higher taxes, higher utility costs, higher school taxes and the higher debt.

Honourable Speaker, that's not affordability; that's a shell game. And when it comes to agriculture, economic development and job creation, this budget is even worse. It has no serious plan to grow the economy, no serious plan to support producers, no serious plan to attract the investment that we need. This budget has no serious plan to make Manitoba competitive once again. That's why we, through the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), have brought forward the amendment.

Honourable Speaker, I'd like to focus firstly on agriculture, one of the foundations of Manitoba's economy. It feeds our families, supports our rural communities, creates jobs, drives exports and keeps this province moving. But under this NDP government, agriculture producers are seeing more regulation, more red tape, higher costs and very little support.

Producers are facing high fuel costs—record high fuel costs—high fertilizer costs, high equipment costs, rising interest rates and the global uncertainty. They're being asked to produce more, compete harder and carry more risk, all while this government makes it harder, not easier to conduct their businesses.

* (01:10)

And the frustrating part is this: The demand is there. That's the most frustrating part, Honourable Speaker. The world wants what Manitoba can produce. Global demand for food, protein, grains, fertilizer, value-added processing and agriculture exports continue to grow. We are not lacking customers; we are lacking competitiveness. We are watching opportunity pass Manitoba by because our regulatory system and approval processes are moving slower than the economy around us.

I've brought forward many examples in the recent months, as we've seen things getting worse and worse with the economy, an economy that's growing amongst the slowest in the country, all while we have strong entrepreneurs waiting to expand their businesses, to bring wealth and opportunity to not only their communities, not only to our province of Manitoba, but to the country of Canada. And they'd like to do it right in their backyard, right in Manitoba.

But, Honourable Speaker, see, this government is unwilling to make contact and connection with those that are willing to grow our province. And we're seeing the effects. Processors in Manitoba's agriculture sector are left feeling helpless while opportunity sits right in front of them. Investors, they want answers; entrepreneurs want timelines; businesses want certainty. Instead, they get delay after delay after delay.

Honourable Speaker, an example of this that I brought forward was a company in my corner of the province. This is a company that was looking to make food affordability a real thing for Manitobans in their segment of the agriculture market. This is a value-added food processor taking protein crops, soy beans and turning them into food. It's NPI in Blumenort, Manitoba. This is a company that has opportunity knocking on their doorstep, and all that

they needed was a government to simply get out of the way. This wasn't a company that was looking for handouts. This isn't a company that was looking for any financial help in any way from the government. What they were looking for is for government to let them operate the same way that companies similar to theirs function and operate in other jurisdictions across our country.

But what they were faced with was a convoluted, complex regulatory system in this province that's unique to the rest of the country. And what that did, Honourable Speaker, was a spiral effect that not only affected the growth and prosperity of that business, the potential of job growth for the employees that they would have hired and the employees that they currently do hire; the families that they support throughout southeast Manitoba. But the company that was to provide the equipment to produce this food, to essentially make food more affordable in Manitoba, they are a Canadian-based company that produces agriculture processing equipment right in Quebec, right in our country, and they're set up, their dryers as well as processing equipment all across the country.

So at the same time as they were looking to set up, you know, multimillion-dollar equipment investment in small-town Blumenort, Manitoba, employing dozens of people currently and expanding to employing hundreds of people, they looked to Manitoba as a logical central location to the country to distribute their products, employ people in southern Manitoba to manufacture their product.

But what they were faced with was this unique regulatory burden that doesn't exist in any other province. So as they were setting up their processing equipment in other provinces, they were faced with the burden that exists in Manitoba.

As a result, Honourable Speaker, this company, that—their goal, their purpose, their business model is exactly what this government is asking for in this BITSA bill, or the signal that they're trying to put forward of food affordability. And this is at the base of creating and supporting food affordability.

But because of the headwinds that they were faced with, this company was so discouraged with Manitoba that they have now moved to our neighbouring province to set up manufacturing. That's the jobs that we could have had in Manitoba are now in Saskatchewan, and everything that comes along with it.

So, Honourable Speaker, along with that, this local company has also—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I'm not entirely sure how any of what the honourable member is talking about is relevant to the BITSA bill, so if he could keep his comments relevant to the bill we're here discussing, that'd be great.

Mr. Narth: So I might try to explain what it has to do with the BITSA bill, and not only the BITSA bill, but our amendment to the BITSA bill, and that's—the amendment is giving—is more opportunity to be able to bring some real change and affordability measures to the budget bill.

Honourable Speaker, this is an example of a company that is actually set out to create that affordability—the grocery store affordability.

So a main portion of the BITSA bill that this NDP government has been promoting, and what we're debating, is if it actually includes real affordability measures. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) gets up, the Finance Minister gets up—you know, the minister that I hold the critic portfolio for, responsible for economic development, gets up and says that this budget bill brings forward real affordability by taking the PST off of grocery items that weren't included prior, so those are the junk food items, the chips and pop and prepared foods.

So what I was getting at, Honourable Speaker, with my comments about the food-processing business is that we actually produce the food in Manitoba. We have the capacity to produce food, and the greater ease that government supports food production in Manitoba, the more affordable the food will be at the store. So when we talk about making food more affordable, it would sure be a lot more advantageous to Manitoba grocery shoppers when they go to the supermarket and they're able to buy protein food products that are produced, you know, 20, 30 miles away from the grocery store. That would be real affordability.

And these are suggestions that we bring forward to the government. The processors that we have unfortunately are left feeling helpless while that opportunity sits right in front of them. And eventually what happens as what has happened with Law-Marot, the company that produces the equipment to support this type of food processing, as well as the food processor, Natural Proteins, NPI, out in Blumenort, Manitoba. They stopped waiting, and that's what has happened. They stop waiting.

* (01:20)

And that's what this government refuses to understand. Capital does not wait around forever. Investment does not simply wait forever. Jobs do not wait forever. Businesses out there have options, and it isn't too far that they need to go for those options. And increasingly, those businesses are deciding to expand somewhere else instead of Manitoba. And, Honourable Speaker, that's what we saw with that example that I provide.

We are seeing it not only in agriculture, we're seeing it in manufacturing. We're seeing it in the trucking industry, we're seeing it in processing and we're seeing it in mining and resource development. We're seeing Manitoba businesses decide that it is easier to invest in Saskatchewan, Alberta or Ontario than it is to deal with the uncertainty and bureaucracy right here at home.

That is something that should alarm every member in this House, and that's why we bring forward the amendment as we have. Because when investment leaves, the jobs leave. With the jobs, the families leave. That's young people leaving. That's the tax revenue that this government is so caught up on protecting, it also leaves. And that means that all opportunity is leaving.

Honourable Speaker, our caucus brought forward a resolution calling for a single-desk permitting system and approvals model. We have shown that we are willing to work with this NDP government to bring forward common sense ideas that support affordability, economic growth and the prosperity and future growth of our Manitoba economy. That idea is something that we could have said if this was a strictly politicized discussion, is something we could have saved for the upcoming election, you know, along with our raising of the basic personal exemption to \$30,000. But we're not. We're sharing what we're hearing from our constituents and Manitobans across the province. We're sharing that.

And that's the purpose of debate here tonight, is that we would like to bring forward some of the ideas that we're hearing from those people that have come to our province to invest, those that have built business and would like to continue to invest and the employees that are dependent on not only those businesses, but are dependent on raising their families here in a more affordable Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, getting back to our recommendation of a single-desk model, this is something that's a one window, one process, clear timelines, clear accountability, one place for investors to go instead of

being bounced from department to department with no certainty and no answers.

And it's a prime example of what happened with NPI and Law-Marot. But what did the government do when we brought this idea forward? They would not even have the discussion. Very comparable to debate on the BITSA bill. They're not even having the discussion.

We see the government benches sitting here late into the evening, unwilling to have a discussion on bringing forward real affordability for Manitobans. I'd rather sit there for—I don't know how long they're willing to sit here and not bring any productive debate forward, but we're willing to stay here and work for Manitobans.

Honourable Speaker, while we brought forward the idea of a single-desk model, all while that was happening, while we were willing to stand here to debate, to formulate a model that works for Manitoba, Saskatchewan was moving forward aggressively to streamline approvals, attract investment and grow its economy.

And what are we seeing? We just saw building permits in Saskatchewan increase significantly; 29.9 per cent, that's—you know, basically, we can say 30 per cent increase in building permits. We're seeing a steep decline in Manitoba at the same time; that's obviously a correlation. We can tie the economy and the performance of the economy directly to the building permit increases in Saskatchewan.

Honourable Speaker, figures from this government, from the minister responsible for economic development, has published that we saw a 27.7 decrease in Manitoba exports. So, remember, when we tie it all back to NPI and Law-Merot, those companies that I used as examples, well, they're exporters. They're exporters of products and, you know, even more relatable, exports of products that are consumable food, human consumption food.

Honourable Speaker, I would say there is a close correlation between 29.9 per cent and 27.7 per cent. So I would say, without jumping to any assumptions, we can draw the line between the decrease in exports that we're seeing in Manitoba and the increase in building permits in Saskatchewan.

So you know what's happening? The same thing as Law-Merot and NPI: they're moving from Manitoba and they're setting up their new production, that new investment, the new money that is coming into the—

not only the province, but the country—they're moving it over to another province. It's simple.

Businesses are here—like I go back to talk about, you know, the minister responsible for economic development, together with the Premier (Mr. Kinew), together with the Finance Minister, are deadly scared of Donald Trump and the United States and tariffs, and we have to blame absolutely everything that is wrong with Manitoba on the President of the United States. Absolutely everything is related to the President of the United States.

But, Honourable Speaker, the fact is, as I've—as I started my debate here tonight, is that there is not a shortage for demand for Manitoba products—no shortage for demand. What these companies are lacking is the opportunity to be competitive, and these companies simply go elsewhere.

The investment confidence is growing in these other provinces, and that means that businesses are building there. It means employers are expanding, and it means people believe the economy is moving in the right direction. And that's what we're seeing in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario and other provinces across our country.

And this all does not happen by accident. The growth, it follows the confidence. Investment follows certainty. Jobs, they follow that opportunity. But this government still believes the answer to every economic problem is another announcement, another press conference, another government program, another handout, another study, another layer of bureaucracy; that's the answer, Honourable Speaker.

Governments do not create prosperity; people create prosperity. There's been no economic growth in the western civilization in history that has been built on a government program. And that's a fact, Honourable Speaker. That is a fact that cannot be disputed. Government does not build wealth.

Entrepreneurs create prosperity. Farmers create prosperity. Manufacturers create prosperity. And, Honourable Speaker, this is all tied together by the workers. They create the prosperity.

The 'grole' of government is to create the conditions where growth can happen, Honourable Speaker. Competitive taxes, predictable rules, reliable infrastructure, efficient approvals, access to labour, investment certainty: these are all those fundamentals. And this government is failing on every single one of them.

* (01:30)

That is why this budget misses the mark so badly: because affordability is not just about saving a few cents on those prepared food items we talk about. Affordability is about growing people's paycheques. Affordability is about creating higher paying jobs. Affordability is about reducing the tax burden on working people.

See, Honourable Speaker, it's a fundamental difference. On that side of the House, they think that you need to take the tax dollars and create economic spending and, you know, things like a government-supported and -sponsored jobs agreement, union partnerships. They think that that's what creates the wealth, but the wealth has to come from somewhere. It's all great that—you know, I go back to the point that I made that one role is infrastructure, and government can have a role in supporting that. But, Honourable Speaker, that is not done without the independent prosperity that businesses create together with the independent employees that support those businesses.

And, Honourable Speaker, the time is evaporating, unfortunately, but I could go to extent, as a lifelong employer, about creating wealth for the employees of an independent entrepreneur and how that supports the communities around them. And I can tell you, Honourable Speaker, I have many employees that have many friends that work in the public sector. And as much as those people provide value to the communities and to our economy, and as much as they are needed, Honourable Speaker, those jobs do not create the wealth of the province, as much as they are needed.

Honourable Speaker, affordability is about building an economy where people can actually get ahead again. And that is why our caucus has proposed raising the basic personal amount to \$30,000. Because, unlike this government's gimmicks, that is a real affordability relief.

And there is also well-established economic theory behind why lowering income taxes can strengthen an economy and recover much of the lost revenue through simple economic growth. And I know this is something that interests the government benches because they can't seem to wrap their minds around this concept.

Economists commonly call this supply-side economics. The principle is very straightforward, Honourable Speaker: When workers, entrepreneurs, farmers and businesses are allowed to keep more of what they earn, they are more likely to work, invest, expand, hire and take risks. That increased economic activity

grows the overall economy, and when the economy grows, government revenues grow with it. So that's more money for the programs that we talk about. That's more money for the government spending that we see in this BITSA bill, in the main bill—the main budget bill that's been brought forward for this fiscal year.

And we know this because economies are not static, Honourable Speaker. Manitobans do not simply take tax savings and bury them in the ground. They spend it in local businesses; they invest it into their farms; they purchase equipment; they renovate their homes; they expand their operations and they hire more workers. That spending circulates throughout the economy multiple times. And economists often refer to that as the multiplier effect.

And I'm seeing my time run out. Hopefully, I have another opportunity to speak to the economic theory behind this, because, Honourable Speaker, during my studies in my economics degree, this is something that I found very interesting. So I took that theory into my local town as a student and did a study on this actually, and the paper to support it, following a dollar through a local economy.

And, Honourable Speaker, it is amazing the affordability that the single dollar creates by the time it has exited your local community.

So, Honourable Speaker, this is why we have brought forward this reasoned amendment. It is because we are passionate to represent the concerns—the affordability and economy concerns that Manitobans have and, in turn, our province has. So I look forward to the opportunity for more time.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Today we are debating Bill 53. And our position—the PC caucus's position—is simple. We have brought forward a reasoned amendment because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurances that Bill 53 provides the real and meaningful affordability measures Manitobans desperately need. That is the issue before us this morning, late into the morning—or early into the morning—as we sit in the Legislature, because Manitobans are in crisis. And this bill by this NDP government does not meet that moment.

Honourable Speaker, for those listening today, it is important to understand what a reasoned amendment is and why it matters. A reasoned amendment is one of the few tools available to this Legislature to

say, stop; this bill has failed to meet the threshold required to move forward.

It is not a delay tactic for the sake of delay. It is not obstruction. It is not opposition for the sake of opposition. It is Parliament doing its job. It is the opposition doing our job that we are elected to do, and that is to hold this failing Kinew government to account for their actions, to account for their failures, to meet Manitobans when they are in a crisis. It is the House saying we have reviewed the legislation. We have examined the evidence and we have listened to Manitobans. And we have concluded that this bill has failed to provide the assurances required to proceed.

Now, it's not only us on this side of the House. It's actually all of Manitoba now. If you look at any of the NDP members, Honourable Speaker, you know that they love their TikTok; they love their Instagram; they love their Facebook. They love posting pictures of them making cakes and dancing in the hallways.

But maybe they should spend some time and look at their comments. Their comments from Manitobans are clear as day that this Bill 53, that what this NDP government is proposing, is not meeting the minimum threshold of what Manitobans are asking for.

So that is why we have brought forward a reasoned amendment. We've concluded that this bill has failed to meet the bare minimum of what Manitobans are asking for. That's exactly what this amendment says. It says to this House that it has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that Bill 53 provides the real and meaningful affordability measures Manitobans desperately need.

And that's evidenced by right here what's happening today. What's happened this week, last week, the week before, the week before that. Not one member on that side of the House—on the NDP side of the House—has stood up to defend their own budget. Not one of them wants to speak.

What do they want to do instead? They want to sit in the Chamber, play Candy Crush or Angry Birds or get on Instagram and not speak to Manitobans. Not one of them has gotten up today and spoken to why this budget, their Bill 53, is important. Not one of them has spoken against the reasoned amendment that we have brought forward saying that this NDP has failed to meet the threshold. Has one member on that side of the House gotten up to speak? It's a lack of courage; it's a lack of conviction; it's a lack of belief and faith and trust in this NDP government and their failing Premier (Mr. Kinew).

Evidence: Why hasn't one of them stood up? Are they lazy? Are they incompetent? Are they embarrassed, or do they just not believe in their own budget bill? And the reality is, it's actually all of the above. Not only are they lazy; they don't believe in their own budget bill, Honourable Speaker. That is why, on this side of the House, we will hold them to account regardless of what time of day it is—morning, evening—we are ready to work for Manitobans.

* (01:40)

When inflation is among the highest in Canada at 4.3 per cent, when food inflation is the highest in Canada at 4.9 per cent, when gas prices have risen to historic highs of 65, 80 cents in just the last few months under this NDP government, when property taxes are the highest they are in the entire country under this NDP government—three times the national average increase here in Manitoba under this NDP government, as high as 43, 47 per cent; 20 per cent on average across the province property taxes have gone up under this NDP government—when nearly half of Manitobans are within \$200 of insolvency, this NDP government refuses to meet that moment, refuses to step up to the plate and make meaningful changes to their budget bill to help Manitobans.

Not only will they not make changes; they won't even stand up and defend their own budget. That is how useless, I will say, this government is when it comes to meeting the need, the demand, the ask of Manitobans. This House has an obligation; we have an obligation, as elected officials, to ask: Is this bill enough? And our answer is clear: No. Manitobans' answer is clear: No. It is not enough.

Bill 53 does not meet the moment. Workers are hurting, seniors are hurting, young people are losing hope and fleeing the province at rates never before seen in this province. It is sad what has happened to this province under this failing NDP government, and that's only two and a half years in. Life is simply becoming more expensive, unattainable, unsafe under this NDP government.

Honourable Speaker, it's clear that this government doesn't even want to stand up and defend their own budget. It's clear that Manitobans are suffering. And the Premier is not a serious premier. The Premier takes every opportunity he can to launch personal attacks, to laugh, to ridicule, to bark in the Chamber, to laugh at Manitobans, to think that they're not as intelligent as they actually are and they can see through his arrogant smile when he laughs in the camera and says we're going to save you pennies on a

Slurpee, 7 cents on a can of pop, 21 cents on a bag of chips, pennies at the gas pump. It's embarrassing. His behaviour is unbecoming of a premier, and he needs to do better.

Not only does he need to do better, you would ask the bench across, the NDP members, for someone to stand up, for someone to have the courage to say: Premier (Mr. Kinew), what you're doing is not right. You are hurting Manitoban families. Bill 53 is not enough. The NDP's budget bill is not meeting that moment. Honourable Speaker, \$200 within—Manitoba families are \$200 away within—of solvency—50 per cent of Manitobans.

Imagine that. That's one unexpected bill. Might be one trip to the grocery store; might be one purchase you have to make for your kids—\$200, and this government offers you pennies.

Manitobans are struggling. I simply can't understand why this government refuses to budge, why they refuse to listen to Manitobans and help Manitobans when they are begging for support. When they are begging to make life more affordable, this NDP bill simply does not meet that moment.

Yet what does Bill 53 actually offer if it doesn't offer any affordability? Well, not structural affordability, not transformational affordability, not meaningful affordability. It offers symbolic affordability, symbolism by this NDP government. Big, flashy announcements; no backup. Big, flashy announcements by the Premier that they're—he's going to reform bail in 100 days, and crime is worse than it's ever been in this province. Big, flashy announcements that they're going to magically fix health care with the wave of a wand, and health care is worse than it's ever been in this province. Wait times have doubled, tripled and quadrupled—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the honourable member to keep his comments relevant to the things we're here tonight to talk about.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I appreciate your guidance on that.

When it comes to health care, as I was mentioning, it is a complete failure by this NDP government, which is reflected in their Bill 53, in their budget bill, Honourable Speaker. When their budget bill is not a reflection of the needs of Manitobans when it comes to health care, it is moved by a reasoned amendment that it doesn't meet the moment. That is outlined

within Bill 53. That is what a reasoned amendment is bringing forward.

So when we talk about health care and the failures of health care, how Manitobans are dying in the hospitals, how health care has doubled, tripled and quadrupled, that is not meeting the moment of Manitobans. When it comes to affordability on taxes and this NDP government is offering pennies, that is not meeting the moment, and that is what a reasoned amendment is being called forward for to speak today. Manitobans can understand that within their bill, that this NDP Bill 53 does not meet that moment when it comes to the topics I'm referring to here today.

Young families are losing hope when it comes to living under this NDP government, this suffocating, tax-grabbing NDP government. There's—young families can't afford homes. Young families can't afford rent. They're asking themselves, is there any hope in this province? Will I ever get ahead? Will I ever be able to even afford to live in Manitoba? And those are questions no government should want its young people to ask.

And so what's happening in this province is young people are leaving. We are seeing that they're getting educated here and they're leaving. Families don't want that. I don't want that for my son. Manitobans don't want that for their communities. But under this NDP government, there is no hope. There is no hope when they sprinkle pennies at your feet.

There is no hope to keep people here when Saskatchewan had—is a province that is offering incentives, that is offering signing bonuses, that is luring Manitobans away; when businesses, like my colleague from La Vérendrye brings up, move from Manitoba to Saskatchewan because it is a friendly environment for them to work there and to grow their business there. But here under this NDP, they're being crushed.

Families are losing hope. The youth are leaving. Housing costs continue to rise. Mortgage rates are increased. Down payments are harder to save for. Rents are climbing.

And young Manitobans increasingly feel ownership is moving farther away. Parents see it, grandparents see it, brothers and sisters see it. Young adults are staying home in their parents' house longer than they've ever done before because they simply can't afford to move out.

Now, I understand those are lots of factors that are tied into that, but the fact that this NDP government

has done nothing to meet that moment is why a reasoned amendment was brought forward. That this government won't even stand up to defend what they so claimed to be a great budget bill misses every mark that we've spoken about, that our colleagues have spoken for hours upon hours about, to have dialogue, to have debate on this. It's hard to have debate with a brick wall. I think everyone will agree that a brick wall's not giving anything back. Maybe it's a pile of garbage, maybe it's, I don't know, an empty well. You're shouting down at it; nothing's coming back.

This government is refusing to even engage in the basic democratic process of having dialogue, of debating what they believe to be important. Manitobans, as I mentioned, Honourable Speaker, are struggling with rent, groceries, hydro, property taxes; and the NDP's government answer, clearly outlined by everything they've spoken about for the last few months, is a junk food tax. This NDP government wants to save you pennies on your junk food.

And we'll take a step back and let's dive into what that actually means: 95 per cent of groceries—between 90, 95—between 90 and 95 per cent of groceries are already PST exempt. So what are they offering you? A small percentage, maybe, of what is going to be taxed. And what's going to be taxed? Processed food, junk food, chips, pop, cookies—all unhealthy items from the grocery store.

I was driving with my kid the other day in the car, and he looks up and he sees the billboard, and he says, oh, Dad, what's that all about? And I said, which one? And he goes, well, July 1, they're going to take the PST off of food. What does that mean? And I said, well, what do you think it means? And he goes, well, I guess you got to pay taxes on food? And I said, yes, and I said, do you think all food is taxed? And he goes, well, I think so.

* (01:50)

And I said, well, no, son, only—about 90 per cent of your food items aren't. He said, well, what's taxed? I said, junk food, pop, chips, cookies, ice cream, chicken rotisserie or rotisserie chicken. He said, but Dad, don't we want people to not eat that stuff? I said, yes. He said, well, why is the government offering them savings on that? I said, I don't know; they think it's going to help you make your life more affordable; it's going to help you make your life better.

He goes, well, why don't they just help you save money on, like, broccoli and fruits and vegetables? And like, chicken and beef and stuff that people need

to be healthy so that they can live a healthy life? This is a 13-year-old kid having this conversation with me. He gets it. But for some reason, this NDP government doesn't get it.

Manitobans get it. Look at any of their social media feeds, Honourable Speaker. They will say that this Bill 53 does not meet the moment, and that's why a reasoned amendment must come forward.

And if they believe in their Bill 53, why are they not speaking on Bill 53? My 13-year-old son gets it, and yet this Minister of Health, this Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), this Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), this Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), this Premier (Mr. Kinew) do not understand simple common sense. Saving Manitobans pennies on junk food is not going to help them live a better, healthier life.

So the next logical question to my son: I say, well, what should we do? And he says, well—the conversation goes back and forth. And I said, what do you think will help people that are struggling to pay their bills, to get by in life, to buy healthier food, to play in sports? He goes, well, Dad, all that stuff costs money. And I said, it does cost money. I said, so what do you think we can do? He goes, well, is there a way to help give Manitobans back more money? Great idea. He gets it.

That's why we, on this side of the House, propose an increase of your basic personal exemption. That's why we propose increasing your basic personal exemption to \$30,000, giving you and your family \$3,000 back of your hard-earned money, letting you keep \$3,000 of your hard-earned money.

He goes, that's a lot of money, dad. I said, it is a lot of money. I said, what could you do with that? He said, well, we could do everything we talked about. I said, exactly. He said, you could pay your bills. You can put gas in your car. You can buy healthy food. You can put your kid in sports. You might be able to take a little trip, even, with your family. You won't have to worry about being within \$200 of insolvency and going broke and losing everything that you've worked your entire life for.

He gets it. And yet, for some reason, this NDP doesn't get it. They haven't offered one explanation as to why they won't support the basic personal exemption. So much so that on our side of the House, we brought it yesterday to have a debate on the bill, and they said no. They didn't want to discuss where we're at today. Well, here we're at—here we are right now, past 1 a.m. in the morning on Wednesday morning, and we will

continue to sit to debate to try to convince, try to reason, try to instill some common sense on this NDP government and why Bill 53 is not meeting the moment and why a reasoned amendment had to be brought forward.

Why? That—because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurances that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need. It's a very simple reasoned amendment that we brought forward that if they don't agree with it, they can speak to it. They can stand up and say no, you know what; you're wrong; this is why we believe that this is meeting the moment.

And they won't do it because they know they're a majority; they can do whatever they want. They can pass the bill, they can implement their changes. That's why they're not setting up and speaking. Or, again, to my earlier point, it might be just because they're lazy. It might be because they're incompetent. It might be because they don't believe in their bill. We haven't heard anything.

So we're led to believe that they don't want to speak to it, and yet they want Manitobans to support it. They know they have the majority, so that's probably why they're not speaking. They're going to do it anyways. Well, if they're going to do it anyways, it goes against every single thing that this Premier (Mr. Kinew) has said about needing our support, that we have to bring it forward. He can implement those changes if he chooses to, and he's choosing not to. He's choosing to play political games, not only in this Chamber but with your life, with your family's life.

With affordability means for your family, this Premier is laughing and making jokes and playing political games. His mentor, Greg Selinger, increased the PST in this province without going forward with the BITSA bill, without it passing. He implemented those. Brian Palliser [*phonetic*] reduced the PST by 1 per cent. Mark Carney removed the federal gas tax without bringing forward a bill passing. They can implement all these changes because they're the majority, because he's the Premier.

He knows that. They know that. That's why they're not speaking tonight. They had the opportunity yesterday to pass it. They said no. They have the opportunity today, tonight and this morning to speak in favour of their budget bill, and they won't do it. But every single member on our side of the House has passionately stood up and explained why this bill doesn't meet the moment, and this NDP government can't even put one

member up to speak in favour of their Bill 53, their budget bill.

Manitobans need help. They're struggling in every aspect of their life to get by, and this government refuses to do that. It's not leadership, Honourable Speaker, it's plain and simple distractions by this NDP government. We've seen time and time again that this Premier is more concerned with making a splash on social media for his TikTok followers than he is for Manitobans. He cares more about his likes and his tweets than he does about actually making real change for Manitobans.

It's proof by him going out and attacking Manitoba Teachers' Society. When they are asking for more funding and more money and more supports, which is not reflected in this bill, the Premier goes out and attacks teachers and says he's going to ban YouTube from teachers. Manitoba Teachers' Society president says, instead of the Premier going out and attacking, why won't he sit down? Sounds like political theatre, is what she said. Quote, political theatre.

Manitoba Nurses Union says the same thing, that this government is not listening. Manitoba jobs agreement put forward by this NDP government divides Manitobans: 88 per cent of Manitobans on one side, 12 per cent of union workers on one side. This government is dividing Manitobans. They're laughing at you when they think with such arrogance that they can do whatever they want and not even stand up to defend it, because they will go forward and just get it done anyways.

The Manitoba jobs agreement, which should be something to grow this province under this NDP government, is just dividing the province. Clearly laid out within their budget bill that they are going to give preferential treatment, and they're going to give first rights and dibs to union workers over non-union workers.

The Premier has said it, the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) has said it, every member on that side of the House has said it: Join a union. Don't choose where you want to work. We want to take that choice away from you. We're going to force you to work for unions because we don't want to support the non-union shops, is what this NDP government says—88 per cent of Manitobans choose to work in an open shop, and this government refuses to do it.

Within their own budget bill it says that 85 cents from every hour worked on a project will go to a slush fund where there's no accountability, there's no

transparency, there's no reporting on where that 85 cents goes. Think about that, Manitoba: 85 cents from every hour worked on a project in Manitoba under this Manitoba jobs agreement will go to a slush fund with no accountability, no transparency, no reporting. That's your money. That's hundreds of thousands of dollars up to millions of dollars going to a fund where no one has any eyes on it other than this government, where there's no reporting.

And when I asked the Premier (Mr. Kinew), what did he do? He barked. He laughed. Simply asked him, where's the 85 cents going? People have a right to know where their taxpayer dollars are going.

* (02:00)

Construction Association of Rural Manitoba came out and said that—along with Winnipeg Construction Association—that this Manitoba jobs agreement under this NDP—this job-killing agreement, essentially, will add approximately 20 per cent onto every project in Manitoba: 20 per cent will be added onto every project. That means on a \$50-million project, \$10 million are going poof. Where? Administrative burden, red tape, bureaucracy, artificial hurdles.

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the honourable member to keep his comments relevant to the bill we're here tonight discussing. We're not talking about the jobs agreement.

Mr. Khan: When it comes to the Manitoba jobs agreement, it is directly related to making lives more affordable, Honourable Speaker. When you are taking 88 per cent of a workforce out of jobs to grow the economy, to pay for bills, to provide for your family, you are removing 88 per cent of Manitobans out of that pool of prosperity and wealth to pick your 12 per cent of ideological supporters.

That directly affects affordability. If you don't have a job, you can't pay for anything. I think everyone would agree with that. You need a job to pay for your—to pay for food, to support your family.

Manitoba needs to create jobs to grow our economy, which is ranked dead last under this NDP government. You need to create jobs in all sectors to continue to generate that pot of wealth, not tax the existing Manitobans that are working more and more and more, like this NDP government is doing, but grow that pot. That's how the Manitoba jobs agreement ties in to Bill 53, which is why a reasoned amendment has been brought forward. It all ties in to the same

thing on making life more unaffordable under this NDP government.

Oh, this is an interesting one: Former long-time NDP MLA Marianne Cerilli came out and publicly said that the government's junk food tax, quote, makes no sense. A former long-time NDP supporter says it makes no sense. Manitobans are saying it makes no sense.

Manitoban families are asking for help. Local businesses are asking for help. Restaurants are asking for help. They're saying: Why, Premier, why can someone choose to go to Costco or Sobeys, a billion-dollar company, and buy a pizza and not pay PST, but if they come to our local restaurant they have to pay PST? Mom-and-pop shops that create jobs that are the backbone, that support our communities, that give our jobs kids, and give them the skills they need to go on, to go continue to grow in their life. This government is saying, we don't want to support you; we're actually going to make it a competitive disadvantage for you and we're going to support the big guys.

The whole dream of working hard, learning those skills, getting good education, moving forward in your life, are all gone under this NDP government because all you have to do in this NDP government is pay more taxes. Pay more taxes; don't ask any questions. Because if you ask the questions, we're not going to answer them. If you ask the questions, we're not going to even debate them. We're not going to even bring them forward in the House.

This bill fails on every single 'measurab' that you can put forward. Taxes rise, costs are higher, debt under this government is higher. On page 7 of this NDP's own budget documents, it says that education and property taxes have been increased by \$1.1 billion—\$1.1 billion of education and property tax increases. At a time when homeowners are opening tax bills wondering how much more they can possibly absorb, this government takes \$1.1 billion out of your back pockets, Honourable Speaker.

Spending is out of control under this NDP government. They've accumulated a debt of over \$5 billion in just the two and a half years they've been in government. They promised last year a deficit of about \$800 million. It ballooned to \$1.3 billion. This year they're saying—on rosy projections, magical projections with the wand—that they're only going to be \$500 million in deficit. And they applaud themselves for being \$500 million in deficit. It's a joke. *[interjection]* It's shameful. It's comical.

The Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) wants to heckle right now. He has lots of words to say, but he doesn't want to stand up and defend his own budget. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: You can hear the Minister of Finance heckling. He has every opportunity for the last eight hours. For the last eight hours, he could have stood up, but he doesn't want to. It's shameful that he wants to heckle when he has the opportunity to stand up. So will he stand up today? We'll see what happens in 35 seconds, and I guarantee you he won't stand up, Honourable Speaker.

This NDP government, this failing Finance Minister, has failed every single Manitoban. They have let them down. They have made life harder for every single Manitoban, and yet they offer you pennies at your feet. With distractions of smoke and mirrors and prosperity, they pretend by sprinkling pennies at your feet.

On our side of the House, we're calling for real affordability measures. When will the NDP get onside and do something right for the people of Manitoba?

The Speaker: Order, please.

As there are no further speakers, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Speaker: Question before the House is the reasoned amendment to the second reading of Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Speaker: All those in the House in favour of the adopting, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Respectfully, Honourable Speaker, I would like a recorded vote.

The Speaker: A recorded vote has been called, please call in the members.

* (03:00)

Order, please.

The one hour for the ringing of the bells has expired, so I'm requesting that the bells be turned off.

But before proceeding to the vote, I want to inform all members that due to staffing challenges, there will be no French-to-English interpretation available after this vote is concluded until sometime tomorrow.

So all—the question before the House is second—or the reasoned amendment to the second reading of Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

Do members wish to have the motion read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: So the motion is,

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT" and substituting the following:

this House declines to give second reading to Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that this bill provides real and meaningful affordability measures that Manitobans desperately need.

Division

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

Ayes

Balcaen, Bereza, Byram, Ewasko, Goertzen, Guenter, Johnson, Khan, King, Nesbitt, Schuler, Stone, Wharton, Wowchuk.

Nays

Asagwara, Blashko, Brar, Bushie, Cable, Chen, Compton, Corbett, Cross, Dela Cruz, Devgan, Fontaine, Kennedy, Kostyshyn, Loiselle, Maloway, Marcelino, Moroz, Moses, Moyes, Naylor, Pankratz, Redhead, Sala, Sandhu, Schmidt, Schott, Simard, Smith, Wiebe.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Tim Abbott): Ayes 14, Nays 30.

* (03:10)

The Speaker: The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

The Speaker: We will now resume debate on Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, standing in the name of the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

Mr. Wowchuk: I rise today to speak to Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, and I think it's important before getting into the details of this legislation to recognize the broader reality facing Manitobans today. Across this province, people are worried. Families are worried, workers are worried, seniors are worried, young Manitobans trying to build a future are worried.

And the reason they are worried is simple. Life has become significantly more expensive, and many people are no longer feeling confident that they're getting ahead. In fact, many feel like they're falling behind despite everything right. People are working hard. They are budgeting carefully. They're cutting back on spending. They're delaying purchases. They are postponing vacations. Some are taking on second jobs or extra shifts just to keep up with rising costs. And yet, despite all of that effort, too many Manitobans still feel like every month becomes more difficult than the last.

That is the environment in which this bill is being debated. And that is why Manitobans expect legislation to provide meaningful, substantial affordability relief. Unfortunately, when Manitobans actually look at the contents of this legislation, many are left wondering how the government could possibly believe these measures are equal to the financial pressures families are carrying today.

Because while this NDP government continues speaking about affordability, Manitobans are living through a reality where almost every major household expense has increased dramatically. Housing costs have increased, mortgage costs have increased, rental prices have increased, food prices have increased, insurance costs have increased, utility bills have increased, transportation costs have increased. And in many cases, wages simply have not kept pace.

That's the affordability crisis facing Manitoba families. It's not theoretical. It's not political. It's real. And Manitobans experience it every single day. They experience it at the grocery store. They experience it

when they pay their hydro bill, and they experience it when they fill up their vehicle. They experience it when they open their property tax notices. They experience it when they try to determine how to stretch a paycheque far enough to cover another month of rising costs.

This is a reality outside this Chamber and I think that reality matters, because too often the NDP speaks as though affordability can be solved through small, symbolic announcements and carefully crafted messaging. But families know the difference between political messaging and meaningful relieves—relief. They know the difference between a headline and actual savings and they know when government measures fall short on the scale of the problem.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

This government's 'primarily' affordability measure in this bill is the removal of PST on certain prepared foods sold in grocery stores and convenience stores—junk food.

Now let us think honestly about what that means for a Manitoba family. A family may save a few cents here and there on a prepared food item. Meanwhile, they're paying hundreds more each month on housing, more on groceries, hundreds on the other—on utilities, hundreds on transportation, hundreds more on interest payments. So while this Kinew government celebrates these narrow exemptions, Manitobans are looking at a broader picture and asking a very reasonable question: How does saving pennies improve affordability?

Because affordability is not determined by one isolated transaction at a checkout counter. Affordability is determined by the overall cost of living. It's determined by whether families have enough left over after paying all their bills, and increasingly the answer for many Manitobans is no. People are dipping into their savings; people are carrying more debt; people are delaying retirement; young people are delaying home ownership; and families are postponing major life decisions because financial uncertainty has become so widespread.

That should concern every member of this House, because when families lose confidence in their financial future, it affects the entire economy of the province. Consumer spending slows, business investment slows, population retention becomes more difficult. Young professionals begin looking elsewhere in neighbouring provinces, which is happening all too frequently in Manitoba, and communities suffer the consequences.

One of the biggest frustrations I hear from Manitobans is not simply life has become more expensive; it's that this NDP government is disconnected from how serious the situation has become. Families don't feel like they are being heard. They don't feel like government truly understands the pressure they are under because when this NDP government promotes pennies as savings as though it's a transformational affordability measure, people feel their struggles are being minimized.

People aren't worried about saving a few cents on a prepared snack item; they're worried about paying rent and worried about mortgage renewals and worried about utility bills and worried about rising fuel costs. They're worried about whether their children will be able to afford homes in Manitoba and stay near to their families. They're worried about whether retirement is financially possible. These are serious concerns and they require serious policy responses.

Another major issue connected to this legislation is the taxation, because while the NDP speaks constantly about affordability, it has also made decisions that increase the tax burden on Manitobans. Last year, this Kinew government removed indexation from Manitoba tax brackets and basic personal amounts. Now, for many Manitobans, that may sound technical or administrative, but the consequences are real.

When tax brackets are not indexed to inflation, workers pay more tax over time, even if wage increases simply keep pace. That is bracket creep and bracket creep absolutely functions as a tax increase. A worker may receive a modest raise simply to offset inflation. The government takes a larger share away. That means less money remaining for groceries and for the housing and for savings, less money remaining for families.

So while the NDP talks about affordability, relief on one hand is quietly increasing the tax burden on the other. Manitobans understand that contradiction and they're increasingly frustrated by it because people want consistency. If a government truly believes affordability is the defining issue facing families, policy decisions should consistently move toward lowering the overall financial burden on households. Instead, Manitobans often feel like government gives with one hand while taking away with the other.

* (03:20)

That's exactly why our PC team has focused so heavily on the basic personal exemption. Because unlike narrow tax exemptions that only apply to

specific purchases, increasing the basic exemptions provides broad relief to every working Manitoban. It's simple, it's fair and it's meaningful. Our proposal to Manitoba toward a \$30,000 basic personal exemption would allow Manitobans to earn more income before paying provincial income tax. That means real relief for workers, real relief for families, real relief for the seniors continuing to work and relief for young Manitobans trying to establish themselves financially.

This matters because broad tax relief recognizes Manitobans themselves know best how to manage their household budgets. Families do not need government deciding which individual purchases deserve tax exemptions. Families need room to breathe financially, and they need more flexibility and more control over their own earnings, and expanded basic personal exemption accomplishes all of those needs.

For Manitoba families, that means thousands of dollars remaining in household budgets every year. That money that can help pay rent and cover groceries; the money can help offset hydro bills, child-care costs, fuel costs and mortgage payments.

And, importantly, broad-based relief through the basic personal exemption helps every sector of the economy. When Manitoba keeps more of their own money, they spend more locally and they support small business. They invest in their communities, create economic activity—or activity organically from the ground up. This is how you strengthen affordability while also strengthening 'eonic'—or economic growth.

And then, unlike selective tax measures, an increased basic personal exemption doesn't create confusion about what purchases qualify, doesn't create administrative complexity. It provides straightforward, visible relief that Manitobans can actually feel in their paycheques. That's the difference between structural affordability policy and symbolic affordability policy.

Structural affordability changes the long-term financial position of families; symbolic creates announcements without materially changing household finances. Manitobans deserve structural relief, especially at a time when the cost of living has risen so dramatically.

We also need to talk seriously about property tax because this is another area where families continue feeling squeezed. Across Manitoba, homeowners are seeing higher assessments and higher property tax bills. For many seniors living on fixed income, this is becoming increasingly difficult to manage. Some seniors are genuinely worried about whether they can

continue remaining in their homes long enough. They—should concern all of us. People who worked hard their entire lives shouldn't feel financially insecure because the cost of staying in their own homes continues rising year after year.

Young families are feeling their—the pressure as well. Many first-time home buyers are—already stretch themselves financially just to enter the housing market. Now they're dealing with higher interest rates, higher insurance costs and utility costs and rising property taxes all at once.

And for small business, rising tax create additional pressure at a time when many businesses are already struggling. This matters because affordability is interconnected. Rising taxes affect household budgets, and utility costs affect household budgets. A house—or rising housing costs affect household budgets. And when all of those pressures combine simultaneously, families reach a breaking point.

That is why isolated measures cannot solve a broader affordability crisis. Families need comprehensive relief. They need a government focused on reducing the overall burden that they are carrying—depends on creating an economy where people believe opportunity exists, but affordability and competitive are deeply connected.

In Manitoba—if Manitoba becomes less competitive economically, families suffer the consequences. Business invests elsewhere. Workers leave for higher wages, lower taxes. Economic growth slows and opportunities become harder to find.

That's why government policy matters so much. Tax policy matters, regulatory policy matters, energy policy matters, investor confidence matters. And, unfortunately, this NDP government often appears more focused on political messaging than long-term economic competitiveness.

Small businesses in particular are facing enormous challenges right now. Many local businesses are operating under intense pressure. Borrowing costs are higher, payroll costs are higher, supply costs are higher, insurance costs are higher, consumer spending has weakened because families themselves are under financial pressure under this NDP government. And despite all of this, businesses are expected to absorb more costs and more uncertainty.

When governments fail to create competitive conditions for growth, small businesses suffer first, and when small businesses suffer, communities suffer. Jobs disappear, investment declines and economic confidence weakens. That's why affordability cannot

be separated from economic growth. Strong economies create opportunity. Strong economics creates jobs. Strong economies increase wages and improve financial security.

And that's why our PC team continues advocating for broad-based tax relief and economic competitiveness, because Manitobans deserve policies that are—that strengthen the overall—the economy overall, not narrow-targeted measures designed primary for political branding.

We believe Manitoba should keep more of what they earn. That's why we propose significantly increasing the basic personal exemption, because broad tax relief helps every working Manitoban. It helps seniors and young workers and families and people trying to save for the future.

And unlike selective exemptions, broad-based relief is straightforward and transparent; people understand it. When Manitobans keep more earnings, they spend more in their communities. They go out—you know, they support local retailers. They support restaurants. They support family-owned businesses. That economic activity strengthens communities across Manitoba.

Right now, many Manitobans no longer feel that confidence. Young people question whether they'll ever be able to purchase a home. Seniors question whether their retirement savings will last. When people lose confidence in the future, they stop investing, they stop spending, they delay major life decisions, businesses delay expansion. Communities lose momentum and economic growth weakens.

Government should be focused on restoring that confidence. Instead, too many Manitobans feel this government is managing decline rather than building growth, and that's a serious concern, because Manitoban—Manitoba has enormous potential. We have hard-working people, strong communities; we have natural resources, agricultural strength, manufacturing capability and tremendous talent. But potential alone is not enough.

This bill also contains a number of other policy changes beyond the government's affordability messaging. There are changes involving tax administration, changes involving trust reporting and taxation, there are provisions related to accommodation taxes and short-term rentals. There are provisions connected to carbon storage legislation and measures affecting post-secondary institutions. These are not significant changes; these are policies with real implications for industry, municipalities, business and taxpayers.

That is troubling, because legislation at this scale deserves careful scrutiny. Manitobans deserve transparency. They feel government is more focused on communication strategies and long-term results, and people can sense the difference. At its core, this is about whether the NDP government truly understands the scale of affordability and challenges people are facing. And, increasingly, many Manitobans believe the answer is no, because if government truly understood the pressure families are under, it would focus on reducing the total financial burden on households.

* (03:30)

Families need more than announcements, meaning—they need meaningful relief and stability and confidence. They need governments that understand affordability that is not measured headlines; it is measured everyday life.

And right now, too many people feel the uncertainty instead of optimism. That should concern all of us. Manitoba should be a province where hard work creates opportunity; should be a province where businesses want to invest and expand. And it should be a province where people believe the future will be better than the present.

Unfortunately, many Manitobans no longer feel that confidence under this NDP government, and this legislation does not do enough to restore it. It offers selective measures, while broader affordability pressures continue intensifying. It offers relief, while the overall cost of living continues rising. And it asks Manitobans to celebrate policies that don't match the scale of financial pressures families are feeling.

Manitobans deserve better. They deserve affordability policies that are substantial. They deserve a government focused on long economic growth and competitiveness, and they deserve policies that strengthen opportunity rather than weaken. And, above all, they deserve leadership that recognizes how serious affordability challenges have become for families across the province.

I move, second by the honourable member from Riding Mountain,

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT" and substituting the following:

Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day five months hence.

Motion presented.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): The amendment is in order.

The floor is now open for debate.

Mrs. Stone: I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion that we have brought forward. And there's a few reasons why a motion like this is important, and the main reason for that is time.

Clearly, this NDP government hasn't consulted with Manitobans as to what their true needs are during this affordability crisis. This NDP government has not consulted with industry as to what is needed during these challenging economic times. And this NDP government has really missed the moment in what Manitobans desperately need.

Because, as I've mentioned and as I've spoken about, Manitoba and Manitobans are in a cost-of-living crisis. Manitoba has the highest inflation rate in the country at 4.3 per cent and the highest food inflation in the country at 4.9 per cent. Fuel costs are very high. Property taxes, specifically education and school taxes, are also at historic highs and over 50 per cent of Manitobans are reporting that they are within \$200 of insolvency.

And the current budget bill, as presented, simply does not meet the moment to address the significant cost pressures that Manitobans are facing. Because families across Manitoba are struggling under rising costs, rising taxes, rising mortgage payments, rising utility bills, rising grocery prices and continued rising economic uncertainty, and this government has not offered Manitobans the relief that they need.

BITSA only offers pennies, but what Manitobans need right now is significantly more meaningful tax relief and more meaningful support. And we all know that affordability is the No. 1 issue facing Manitobans right now. When I go to my constituents and I ask them, you know, what is the No. 1 issue that you would like me to advocate for in the Manitoba Legislature? And they say cost of living; they say affordability. When I go around Manitoba into the constituencies of St. James and Lagimodière and Waverley and McPhillips and Tuxedo and River East Kildonan, and I ask them—I ask those Manitobans—what their No. 1 issue is, and they say affordability. And what those people are telling me and telling our PC caucus, is that this BITSA bill does not give them the relief that they need during these difficult times.

And that's why this motion is important. Because by delaying for five months, this gives the NDP the opportunity to get something right. They will then still

have an opportunity to make the changes that they need and that Manitobans need within their BITSA bill.

This is exactly why we've brought bills forward in the past to include budget bills—BITSA bills—to go to public committee, and I spoke about this earlier today. Because it's during those committees where Manitobans have the right to have a say. And we bring bills forward to committees. Every other bill comes forward to a committee, except arguably the largest, most important bill facing Manitobans—that being a BITSA bill. Large-scale omnibus bills that deal with taxpayer dollars and that implement tax changes affecting Manitobans, and Manitobans don't have a say. If Manitobans had a say, then perhaps changes would be made within BITSA, the necessary changes that Manitobans need right now because there are a significant number of gaps.

And this is where five months—the NDP can take and consult with Manitobans and those industries that are being left out of BITSA. It gives the government time to ensure that the BITSA bill is done right and that it meets the moment, and so I'll just talk about some of those gaps and this is where the NDP could use some more time to consult with Manitobans.

They left out restaurants from their PST cut. The restaurants industry, Restaurants Canada, restaurants Manitoba have indicated that this is not fair. They've indicated that this is not a tax cut on food; it's a tax shift between competitors that creates winners and losers and it provides relief only if consumers change where they purchase their food, which in turn favors one type of seller over another, even when the product itself is identical.

* (03:40)

So this is another example of this NDP government picking and choosing winners and losers in the province of Manitoba. And they started with only giving this benefit to large grocery chains. At the beginning, when they first brought—or made their announcement, they didn't even consider the mom-and-pop shops, the convenience stores, the gas stations. So when the NDP starts picking and choosing winners and losers, Manitobans, in general, lose out. All Manitobans lose out.

But, particularly, the restaurant industry is losing out with this change. The restaurants industry has indicated that, for many Manitobans, restaurants are often the most accessible and practical source of prepared meals. And so while taxing those options,

while exempting grocery and convenience store alternatives, it does not expand affordability; it limits it. Lower income households also spend a higher share of their income at restaurants than higher income households, meaning equitable tax treatment would deliver proportionally greater benefit to those most in need.

Restaurants Canada has indicated that this policy creates a clear and unjustifiable imbalance and it applies different tax treatment to identical products based solely on where they are purchased and, in doing so, actively shifts demand across the food marketplace.

So by giving the government and by the government taking additional time to consult with the industry, and perhaps there are other gaps within the BITSA bill, as well—and we certainly are seeing them—but that extra time for the government to properly consult with what the restaurant industry needs, with what Manitobans need—and that's why this motion is important.

Because, clearly—and we've seen this time and time again, and I spoke about this earlier today as well—this government makes rash decisions. They make announcements without thinking through what their legislation means in practice, and when that happens, Manitobans lose out, businesses lose out.

This NDP government is picking and choosing winners and losers, and so all Manitobans lose out. We saw that with the Manitoba jobs agreement, picking and choosing winners and losers. This NDP government is intentionally choosing to leave out 88 per cent of the construction industry on public projects.

So when we talk about budget bills and we talk about the importance of public-sector accountability and government accountability to the public and how taxpayer dollars are spent, that's what budget bills are for, is that important public accountability and transparency. But that's not what's being done here, because this NDP government is showing, time and time again, that they want to avoid transparency and accountability, that they want to ignore consultation, they want to ignore Manitobans' needs, they want to ignore industry's needs.

The construction industry has spoken up and said: We were not consulted. They've spoken up and said that this NDP is going to skyrocket public project costs by up to 20 per cent for a school in Brandon, all because this NDP government is not listening. They're not listening, they're making rash decisions and

announcements without thinking through the consequences and they're picking and choosing winners and losers, and Manitobans are losing out.

We have brought forward a motion, an important motion, and have called on this NDP government to raise the basic personal exemption to \$30,000. That would return \$1,500 to that single mom, return \$3,000 to a dual-income household.

We know that every family's budget is different. Every household budget is different. Some families are struggling to put healthy food on the table; this money could go towards that. With Manitoba having the highest food inflation in the country, beef, pork, fruit, vegetables, flour, items that are already PST exempt, well, an extra \$3,000 a year could help pay for those healthy food items.

An extra \$3,000 a year could also help pay—help families pay for fuel to get to and from work, to get their kids to school, to get their kids to sports, to daycare. That \$3,000 could be used to help parents pay for their kids to go to summer camp, which is incredibly expensive. Or that money could be used for parents that are trying to make the decision as to whether to put their kid in hockey or dance or whatever sport their kid wants to do. Sports are also expensive.

Well, that money could go a long way in helping those parents cover those costs. Or that money could help those families who want that extra family night out: a pizza night out, movie night out, bowling, possibly going to the Rec Room. Those moments that mean a lot to children, youth and families, that quality time with a little bit of fun that a lot of families are just not doing right now because they simply can't afford it.

So that's exactly why we've called for the basic personal exemption to be increased. Every other province has included indexation during times of inflationary pressures, except for Manitoba. BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI, they've all brought in indexation of income taxes. The only one that's not included in that list is Manitoba. In fact, Manitoba went the opposite direction. We had indexation; PCs brought it in. While the PCs also almost doubled the basic personal exemption when they were in government, but the NDP government's doing the opposite. Every other province has recognized that inflationary pressures are hurting their residents and their citizens, except for Manitoba.

This Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and this NDP has made a direct decision to cancel indexation, pushing more Manitobans into a higher tax bracket. And they've frozen the basic personal amount. But we know that Manitobans need those extra dollars.

And that's why this government needs more time. They need time to include real affordability measures in their budget bill. And they still can. At any point in time, they can include these affordability measures in BITSA.

And, deputy Speaker, it's not for lack of trying from our side. We have come to the table asking the NDP to co-operate. We have sent letters. We've asked in question period. We've asked through the media. But this NDP government is just not willing to listen.

And so, for those in the Chamber and the thousands of Manitobans that are listening to me speak right now, I do want to read this open letter that I did send and was posted to just show how willing, on our side of the House, we are willing to co-operate with the NDP. And this was an open letter to the Minister of Finance.

And it said: Manitoba families are under real financial pressure, and the affordability measures currently contained within the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act simply do not provide meaningful relief. Families need more than small savings and temporary measures. They need action that will make a real difference in their monthly budgets. That is why our Progressive Conservative caucus is urging your government to significantly increase Manitoba's basic personal exemption. A \$30,000 basic personal amount would save individuals up to \$1,535 annually and provide more than \$3,000 in relief for many two-income households.

As Manitoba has the highest inflation and food inflation in the country, raising the basic personal exemption is a practical and immediate way to provide Manitobans with the affordability relief that they so desperately need. And we have been clear that if the government is prepared to strengthen the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act through meaningful changes to the basic personal exemption, our caucus is prepared to work constructively to ensure legislation proceeds. And this is an opportunity for all members of the Legislature to work together and deliver real savings for Manitoba families.

So that letter was sent to the Minister of Finance on May 19. I have not heard back, but it shows a willingness for our side of the House to co-operate.

* (03:50)

I then went even further and I called on the minister to have a meeting with myself during question period last week. I again have not received an answer. So here we are in the wee hours of the morning, talking about the importance of affordability for Manitobans, because the NDP is ignoring our letters, ignoring our calls to co-operate, and they're not listening to Manitobans.

But, deputy Speaker, we are. And that's why we're here in the wee hours of the morning talking about the importance of affordability for Manitobans, because our PC team understands the struggles that Manitobans are facing right now. And we are trying our best to get the NDP to listen to Manitobans. We're hearing from them; we're hearing from their constituents. Their constituents want to see the basic personal exemption increased. Their constituents want to see indexation come back because that is the standard across Canada at the very least.

And we went even further, deputy Speaker, in the spirit of co-operation. We understand that this NDP government, they have other priorities. We get that. They're in government. They have other priorities within their BITSA bill.

So we said, you know what? Yes, okay, we're willing to compromise on the basic personal exemption. So why isn't the NDP bring up the basic-increase the basic personal exemption in line with Saskatchewan and Alberta? That brings us a third of the way to \$30,000. Seems reasonable.

Just another example of how our PC team is willing to stand up for affordability for Manitobans and willing to co-operate with the NDP government. Because we are listening to Manitobans, but the NDP isn't. The NDP is not listening to Manitobans and the very real cost-of-living struggles that Manitobans and Manitoba families are facing. They're not listening. They don't care. They don't even believe in their own budget bill. They haven't even stood up to discuss it—not a single one of them. If they truly believed in their budget bill and in BITSA, then they would have lots to talk about. They'd have lots to say about it.

But, deputy Speaker, I think they're embarrassed because I think they realized that they didn't do enough. And I think that they're embarrassed that they should have added more affordability measures

during this cost-of-living crisis. And I think they're embarrassed that their own constituents are reaching out to them, asking them to adopt the Progressive Conservative proposal to increase the basic personal exemption. And so, that's why they're not willing to talk about their own budget bill. That's why they denied sitting yesterday to talk about their budget bill.

But, deputy Speaker, you know what is great is they get to listen to us talk about why their budget bill is so bad. For hours and hours, we've been talking about real affordability relief for Manitobans, and so they can sit there and listen. And Manitobans are listening, too. And Manitobans are appreciative that we're willing to stand up for affordability relief—real, meaningful affordability relief; not just pennies that the NDP is offering, but hundreds and thousands of dollars—that hundreds and thousands of dollars that Manitobans desperately need right now.

So let's talk about why Manitobans desperately need those additional dollars. As I mentioned, Manitoba has the highest inflation rate in the entire country at 4.3 per cent, the highest food inflation in the country at 4.9 per cent. So for those that aren't aware, when we look at CPI and we look at Manitoba's inflation and Canada's inflation, there's some key things that are included. Call it the CPI basket of goods and services. And it's divided into basically eight major components to measure price movements over time.

And so, those include shelter—so housing, rent, mortgage costs; food, like groceries and restaurant meals; transportation, purchase of vehicles, gasoline, insurance; household operations, furnishings and equipment such as appliances, cleaning supplies and communication services; recreation, education and reading, so things like toys, hobby supplies and recreation services; health and personal care, medicines, care services and personal care; alcoholic beverages and clothing and footwear. So just want to speak to a few of the items as to where Manitoba is worse off compared to other provinces.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Property taxes was one of the things that Stats Canada indicated when their CPI numbers came out last week. So let's talk about property taxes here in Manitoba because our property taxes and Manitoba's property taxes have increased as a direct result of decisions that this NDP government has made.

This is exactly another reason why we need more time with BITSA, why this government needs more time with BITSA, to make changes that are necessary. Because the system that we have now,

where homeowners are bearing the brunt in an unsustainable way, cannot and should not continue into the future, because we've seen the damage that that has caused. Property taxes have increased by 20 per cent since just last year.

School divisions across the city of Winnipeg: we've seen Louis Riel School Division has seen a 43 per cent increase just since the NDP came into power. Seven Oaks School Division has seen a 39 per cent increase just since the NDP came into power. Pembina Trails has seen a 37 per cent increase, just since the NDP government came into power. And the list goes on and on.

We saw last year every single school division across the province increase their rates by double digits. The NDP, they came in; they made a rash decision. They removed all the guardrails protecting homeowners. They removed the 50 per cent education property tax rebate. They removed the 2 per cent cap on school divisions. They did not fund school divisions to inflation. We've heard from superintendents and school divisions across the province that the Minister of Education hasn't funded them to what they need, hasn't funded them to inflation.

So when you remove all three of those guardrails, what do you think happens, Deputy Speaker? Property taxes go up, education property taxes go up, and Manitobans and Manitoba homeowners are bearing the price. They're bearing the brunt of it. Homeowners are bearing the brunt of this NDP's bad decisions.

And as I talked about it earlier today, last year, okay, it was sloppy. They didn't really think things through. They said, yes, well, we'll cancel all these things and we'll put in a flat credit that doesn't take into account increasing property values or assessments. So, fine, it was sloppy and they didn't think it through.

But then they didn't make any changes this year. They've kept the same system that created the problems last year. Winnipeg homeowners are still missing their rebates on their property tax bills. Hundreds and thousands of dollars in extra property taxes this year again, and this NDP has no plan to fix the system.

The PCs had a plan. The PCs were working on a fair and equitable, sustainable, provincial funding model for Manitoba school divisions, at the same time as working to remove education property taxes off of property tax bills altogether.

Because the PCs had the foresight and forward look to know that property values are increasing, assessments were coming and that Manitobans cannot keep absorbing these costs. Education is a provincial responsibility, but all this NDP government has done is duck responsibility and blame the school divisions.

And, in fact, the first time the City of Winnipeg was so embarrassed at the decisions that this NDP government made that they put in their own insert explaining that a property tax bill is actually two different bills: a municipal bill and then the NDP school tax bill. And the bulk of that property tax bill is this NDP school tax scheme. And that is the reality that homeowners have been faced with and are being faced with.

* (04:00)

So this is just another example, Deputy Speaker, as to why the motion that we are speaking about now is so important. It is so very clear that the NDP needs more time to talk to Manitobans about what their needs really are, because this BITSA bill, it really has missed the moment at a time when affordability is the No. 1 concern facing Manitobans, at a time when Manitobans are living in a cost-of-living crisis. And there is nothing in this bill to help Manitobans in a meaningful way. Pennies does not help Manitobans in a meaningful way.

Let's go through those numbers again, Deputy Speaker: 4.3 per cent inflation, highest in the country; 4.9 per cent food inflation, also the highest in the country; and over 50 per cent of Manitobans are within \$200 of insolvency. Manitobans are within \$200 of not being able to afford to pay their bills. More numbers came out today indicating that while other provinces are trending in the right direction of their citizens being less reliant on credit card debt, Manitobans are becoming more reliant.

That's not the direction we want to go. That just shows these cost pressures that are being put on Manitobans. And in other provinces, things are better. They're better than they are here in Manitoba. That's why Manitoba has the worst inflation. And that's why Manitoba has the worst food inflation. And that's why over 55 per cent of Manitobans are within \$200 of insolvency. And that's why more Manitobans are putting more onto credit card debt in order to pay for things, basic necessities: food, fuel, clothing—basic necessities. That's what Manitobans are putting themselves into debt over, because they're living in a cost-of-living crisis.

And the fact that these NDP government isn't listening to Manitobans, and they don't care to listen to Manitobans about the real affordability relief that Manitobans need right now, is deeply disappointing. But that's exactly why this NDP government needs more time. Because if they were to go out over the next five months and actually talk to Manitobans, then they would hear from those Manitobans that Manitobans need more during this cost-of-living crisis.

They would hear from the restaurant industry that fairness matters and that this tax policy is just a tax shift. Pitting a grocery store against a restaurant, a convenience store against a restaurant, despite the food being the exact same—a prepared food, a prepared meal. But restaurants aren't being treated the same despite contributing \$3.5 billion to the Manitoba economy—42,000 jobs—majority of those being youth. Manitoba had a youth unemployment rate of 14 per cent earlier this year.

The restaurant industry is a key employer of youth in Manitoba. Whether it's through summer jobs, university jobs, evening jobs, youth really rely on restaurants for jobs and employment. And so it's very disappointing that this NDP government continues not to listen, but we are.

Thank you.

Ms. Byram: I know it's been a long night here, maybe going to be a long day ahead as well, but I'm happy to stand here and put a few words on the record regarding the current amendment or current motion that's been brought forward by my colleague from Swan River.

I do want to just take a moment prior to getting into things and just say thank you to those that have spoken before me and the member from Midland, who put some words on the record here.

And I also want to acknowledge the member from Steinbach, who did a fantastic job with his introduction during his speech and he, too, put some wise words on the record. The MLA from Steinbach has great experience in this building, in this Legislature here. He's a wealth of knowledge, and I'm sure we can all appreciate that. And I'm kind of sad that we missed out on hearing about his stories and experiences of Churchill, but perhaps that'll be in another time and another opportunity.

I am happy to present here at this hour, and, again, I want to thank the member from Swan River for bringing forward this motion for bill 30—or Bill 53, the budget implementation and statues amendment act,

be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day five months hence.

So this motion is important. And having put this forward, it will give the government time to reflect and sit down, perhaps collaborate and do the right thing to help take pressure off Manitobans. Like the member from Steinbach said earlier in his comments, this is a gift. This is a gift for this NDP government to take action, to take some meaningful change—or to make some meaningful change, with tangible results that will have an impact and help families with the affordability crisis that we are seeing here across our province.

I'll tell you more. I'll tell you that it would be an opportunity. It's an opportunity for this government to sit down and not just hear from Manitobans, but also to work with us on this side of the Chamber and to collaborate. It's—be a positive step. It would demonstrate leadership. It would demonstrate collaboration, partnership—perhaps, even—unity, that we are all here for—on the—on a united front to help make Manitoba a better place. It's—it would also be an opportunity for consultation to happen.

We know that this NDP government did not take the time to do proper consultation with stakeholders. They didn't necessarily take the time to consider the impact this inflation and affordability crisis had on Manitoba families and learn and hear about the struggles that many are facing.

They didn't necessarily take the time to consult and consider the impact that this legislation had on small businesses in our province of Manitoba and the impact this would have on a much bigger level in terms of the economy here in the province. It's going to have a negative impact, and we heard that from many organizations, businesses, stakeholders—and I'll get to that part as well, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Manitobans deserve better, and—we certainly do. Every one of us, we deserve better than what we're getting from this NDP government. I believe many expected better from this NDP government in this—what this BITSA brought forward as well. This NDP budget failed on many fronts.

And we heard from many that this left them feeling kind of flatlined; it just deflated. And the Premier (Mr. Kinew) had built this up like it was going to be the biggest, the best announcement, the best budget there was ever, full of great savings. And that's what everybody heard, was the sound of deflation; this was just absolutely nonsense and full of

disappointment for families, for businesses and for the Manitoba—for Manitoba's economy. There was, you know, no hope, I guess, sort of left.

And this debate matters, honourable Deputy Speaker, because the issues Manitobans are facing right now are very real. Families are struggling. Businesses are struggling. Communities are struggling. And that's why this amendment before us here tonight is so important.

* (04:10)

It's not an unreasonable proposal; in fact, it's very constructive. It's an opportunity—and, again, an opportunity for this NDP government to pause, reflect, do the proper consultation and, like I mentioned, work collaboratively with us to produce legislation that actually addresses the affordability crisis that we are living through here in Manitoba today. And like the member from Steinbach said, this is a gift. This is a gift to the NDP for them to go back, take a serious look at this, and make some meaningful, tangible improvements to what would truly help Manitobans.

Families deserve better. Workers deserve better. Businesses. Seniors—we've heard from many seniors that are struggling with their rent, affordability for those that are living on this—a fixed income, struggling to pay their rent, struggling to buy food even just for themselves or their partner—just a small senior couple are having a hard time making ends meet and not seeing any sort of relief to help them in times of affordability crisis. And young people who are trying to get ahead in life. Some, we know, are maybe putting off raising a family simply because they are not going to be able to afford that right now in their—in this crisis that we are seeing. And rural Manitobans certainly deserve better.

And I believe many—the way this Premier hyped this to be—many Manitobans were except—expecting something much bigger—something much bigger. And Premier spent weeks building this up, suggesting this would deliver real results. Major affordability relief was going to come with this; meaningful savings were going to come to all of Manitobans.

Nothing—this just deflated. It was a disappointment for many, and when we—when Manitobans saw the details, they were very, very disappointed and frustrated. The government tried to present this as though it was transformational. And the only thing that it confirmed was life wasn't going to become easy. Life was even going to get more difficult, more expensive.

And government doesn't appear to understand the scale or the problem that many families are facing. And clearly, they don't care to hear about it either, or they would have taken this to committee if they were serious about this.

And, you know, being the listening government that they claim to be, why didn't they take that opportunity to hear directly from Manitobans? They closed the door on that. Manitobans wanted to hear, what is this NDP's vision for the future? What is this NDP's vision for growing the economy? They wanted something that's going to provide tax relief, promote business in the province, promote investment, maybe even see a strategy that would indicate there's going to be a level of competitiveness here for business, to attract business.

But instead, what they received was a budget full of small political talking points, no affordability measures—very limited, if any—and all failed to meet the reality families are facing. And we can—*[interjection]* Oh, sorry.

Parents are trying to figure out how they can afford extracurricular activities for their children. And working Manitobans are seeing more of their paycheques disappear to rising costs. Those costs are: increase in hydro bills, fuel prices that we all see when we go to the pumps and—I've mentioned this before—the transportation costs are going up. Insurance costs are rising and the education property tax are continuing to climb. Everyday expenses continue to put pressures on household budgets with the 44 per cent natural gas hike, 12 per cent more in hydro, and, also, the plan to raise that every year going forward has got to be scary for all of us here in this province.

And yet, what is this government celebrating? What is this government trying to tell us in this BITSA bill? There's nothing to celebrate in this. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) is in denial, or he refuses to come clean and admit these tax 'hise'—tax hikes are impacting Manitoba seniors, Manitoba families and those that are living in low- or fixed-income households.

Premier travels around Manitoba in the country boasting about, you know, removing this PST from snack foods and prepared grocery items, as though this is solving the affordability crisis that we are living here in Manitoba. Meanwhile, it's just not going to save families from insolvency. This is not going to be the answer that is going to provide the real relief that these families are seeking.

The savings a family might save with this budget is a mere few dollars annually. This is savings on the rotisserie chicken or the chicken rotisserie and a bag of potato chips or Cracker Jacks or the Cheezies. But those families, they are—they're paying hundreds more in taxes with all the rising costs. And that is not—again, that's not affordability.

This government cancelled the indexation of tax brackets and the basic personal amount, but Manitobans know exactly what that means. It means bracket creep. It means a stealth tax increase on hard-working Manitobans at a time when we can least afford it.

The government is taking far more away from Manitobans than it's giving back. Revenues have risen from \$667 million that was forecasted in the 2023 budget to now almost \$1.1 billion in the 2026 budget, for this fiscal year. That is why our PC team is clear: Bill 53 needs real changes if it's going to earn our support. It needs to have proper consultation, and, again, with our motion that the MLA from Swan River has brought forward, it's an opportunity to give them time, opportunity to do that consultation, maybe revisit, maybe say, you know what? We didn't get this right. This is where we really need to focus. And this motion gives them that time. It allows that opportunity.

And we on this side of the House are offering solutions. We are offering constructive ideas. We're prepared to work collaboratively and responsibly to improve this legislation. And the member from Midland was clear and spoke of some of the correspondence that she has forwarded to members on the other side of the House, clearly stating: we're willing to work with you; let's sit down; let's talk about this; let's collaborate. But nothing has transpired on that side of the House, honourable Deputy Speaker.

And, again, that's not because we haven't tried at this side of the House. We've proposed meaningful affordability measures, including a significant increase to the basic personal amount, moving toward a \$30,000 over time with an immediate increase to at least 21. Honourable Deputy Speaker, that puts real money back into the pockets of Manitobans. That is a real solution. It's not symbolic savings, it's not gimmicks, it's not political slogans. It's real tangible results, real savings, real solutions. This could actually impact families significantly.

* (04:20)

This gives them money right back on their kitchen table. It helps put—whether it be pay their mortgage down; maybe it'll help cover the cost of rent. It could

help buy groceries, maybe pay for children's activities. And, you know, it could help seniors, perhaps, even stay longer in their homes. Savings like this can be real for Manitobans and provide the immediate relief many are seeking.

This, you know, could allow families to put their children into extracurricular activities. And I believe that's important for any young child to be involved in other activities, whether it be something physical—hockey, gymnastics—maybe it's something in the arts, whether it's dancing or painting, something that gives these children or these young people an outlet for different exposure. But it's also promoting a healthy lifestyle. And when we raise our children in a healthy environment, providing them with healthy opportunities, it enables them to grow up healthy.

And also, you know, it can take pressure off in a health-care system that's exasperated, so to speak. It—you know, when we raise a healthy family, it could potentially keep individuals out of the ER, and we know the situation that our province is in with health care these days where wait times are up, especially in ERs and diagnostic services. So, when we promote a healthy lifestyle, when we live a healthy lifestyle, we can alleviate the pressure of our health-care system as well.

And by putting money back on the kitchen table in households in Manitoba—gives us an opportunity to live a healthier lifestyle as well and make some healthier choices in our day-to-day lives. And—which also leads to better mental health, better mental health not just for our youth but for our—for us, all of us here in this Chamber. We—you know, we're always challenged with different things in this space for sure and some of which plays—has an impact on our mental health.

But for families who are struggling with affordability, having that extra bit of income or that extra bit of cash right now in real time can help provide a healthy environment not only for the parents but for the children as well.

And our proposal would provide broad-based tax relief that benefits every working Manitoban. It doesn't just pick winners and losers. It doesn't divide Manitobans into categories. It provides fairness, affordability, relief right across the board. And what the NDP have done here in their legislation is pick winners and losers, honourable Deputy Speaker. And they have done that consistently. That is one thing that this NDP government does very well, is picks winners and losers.

And with our proposal of a \$30,000 basic personal exemption, it provides that tangible relief that—in real time. And that—not only does that help families, but imagine what that can do to attract workers to the province of Manitoba. It can attract entrepreneurs. It can attract professionals. And do you know what that would do, honourable Deputy Speaker? It would 'intract' investment into our province. And what does investment do here in the province of Manitoba? It helps build the local economy here.

But, instead, this NDP government is moving Manitoba in the opposite direction. And, you know, we heard of several situations from the member from La Vérendrye who was speaking about some businesses and some of the stakeholders that he's met with, where just given the red tape and the taxes that are required here in the province of Manitoba under this NDP government, many businesses have moved their businesses outside the province, but there's also some that have maybe considered coming here, but once they realized what they have to go through under this NDP government, they've opted not to invest here in our province of Manitoba. They said, you know what? We're out of here. If we want to grow our business, we got to go. So they go to Saskatchewan—

An Honourable Member: No NDP in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Byram: No NDP in Saskatchewan, so business must be good because here in the province of Manitoba, we're chasing them away. And businesses are noticing, honourable Deputy Speaker.

And I do just want to make a reference here to not just businesses, but those stakeholders that are important here in our province of Manitoba.

And, you know, we've heard from restaurants. I'm going to go to the restaurants specifically because restaurants are such an important part of our economic fabric here in the province of Manitoba. Restaurants provide 42,000—about 42,000 jobs. And that's—you know, includes some of our youth too. And they also provide \$3.5 billion in annual sales, honourable Deputy Speaker. That is significant in the province of Manitoba. That is economic value brought here.

But what are the restaurants saying? I'm going to just quote from Restaurants Canada. This is not a tax cut on food. So this is in reference to this PST, this junk food tax that this NDP government have brought forward. So Restaurants Canada states: This is not a tax cut on food; it is a tax shift between competitors that creates winners and losers.

So you know what, it's not just us here on this side of the House that can identify that the NDP pick winners and losers, but we're also seeing and hearing that from stakeholders. And Restaurants Canada is a national industry association that represents restaurants, businesses in Manitoba and across Canada. So they are feeling and seeing the impact that this PST junk food tax is going to have too.

And I'm just going to read a few more quotes here, because I think it's very important because it highlights the fact that this government, this NDP government, have not done the consultation that is required in such legislation.

So here we hear from Ben Wickstrom, Manitoba Association of Crown Attorneys: You can hire more police to respond and investigate crime, but if you don't hire more prosecutors, there won't be anyone to prosecute the cases the police are working on.

And here's one. This one is from Dr. Nichelle Desilets, who is the—from Doctors Manitoba: We are disappointed the government's budget included no signs of fulfilling their election promise to add 250 team-based providers in physician practices.

And how about we hear from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, honourable Deputy Speaker? You want to know what they say? Manitobans haven't forgotten that Premier Wab Kinew hiked their income taxes last year with bracket creep while he keeps borrowing more money. The government needs to provide real tax relief instead of painting over tax hikes with inadequate measures that leave taxpayers worse off overall.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I'll remind all members that even when we're quoting a document, we can't use members' names. We have to use either their portfolio or their constituency name.

Ms. Byram: Manitoba Chambers of Commerce: We are looking for a little bit more.

How about the Canadian Federation of Independent Business? Do you want to know what they said? However, practical measures to support investment and growth for small firms remains absent in this legislation.

So those are just a few notes made from some of the stakeholders that weren't consulted in this or, you know what, were very disappointed in what they saw in this BITSAs. And, you know, municipal leaders raised concerns regarding the infrastructure.

There wasn't funding mentioned about the infrastructure for municipalities.

And you know, it talks about the rising deficits. We're going to see the debt grow and have very little to show for it. And that is something that we are all going to have to carry. And I know this—I mentioned this earlier; that is something that we'll all carry here, our children will carry. And unfortunately, it'll be something that our grandchildren will have to bear as well, is these, you know, financial burdens that they are going to have to pay for one day.

* (04:30)

Manitobans are facing longer emergency wait times, and I did make a small reference to that. We're also facing housing shortages, infrastructure challenges, rising costs and the growing economic—all of this under economic uncertainty.

Time and time again, this government drafts legislation in isolation and ignores the stakeholders, forcing legislation through this House and then later going back to fix the problems that they created. And, you know, that's why we are bringing this forward, this motion forward here, and be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day five months hence.

So what that does is it allows this NDP government to take a minute, to take some time and to go back and say, you know what? Let's do the proper consultation. Let's maybe revisit some of this. Maybe this gives them an opportunity where they can come to us, on this side of the House, and say, you know what? Let's work together. Let's work together on this. Let's come up with a plan that is going to provide real solutions for the residents of Manitoba, where we can all make a difference and do the right thing. And this isn't about picking winners and losers; this is about a win-win for all of us here in the province of Manitobas—or province of Manitoba.

Had the government consulted with stakeholders before the drafting of this and had the government taken the opportunity to sit down and collaborate with this side of the House, we might not be sitting here today. We provided that opportunity and they didn't want to sit down and have those conversations, not just with us but with other stakeholders, and hence where we are today at 4 or 5 in the morning here and debating this, giving this government another opportunity to revisit, to rethink, to go back and do the right thing.

And this government claims that they're a listening government. They go on about talking about how they've met with different individuals, stakeholders across the province. They listen to everybody and—so they say. But this is clearly an opportunity where they can really sit down, do the right thing. They know that it's our job in the House to work with them, to scrutinize what their legislation is, to debate these matters here in this Chamber.

And they know that committee reviews matter. They know that committee meetings make a difference. It's an opportunity for the public to come, bring their concerns forward. It's an opportunity to, you know, be a part of what we have here in our great province of Manitoba, and that's the democracy.

And I just want to end on this: Families don't need slogans. They don't need photo ops. They need real leadership and real solutions providing real, affordable relief here in Manitoba.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to the next speaker, I'll just ask if the quotes that the member was making, were they from public documents?

Ms. Byram: I'm sorry. They were public documents, yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record. And in the words of my good friend and colleague from Lac du Bonnet, here we go.

So let's look at what we're doing here. We have moved that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word that and substituting the following: Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day, five months hence.

And so, honourable Deputy Speaker, it's important to recognize that five months hence is a very important date. Because if we look at the fact that this will go through and be voted on probably on Friday—that would be the 29th—so five months hence will bring us to October 29, a few days before Halloween. And therefore, the junk food tax will come into play because people will be able to buy candy for all of the kids to enjoy. So that's—you know, that's something this NDP government can look forward to, is implementing their junk food tax for the kids that are

going to be out trick-or-treating on Halloween. So, you know, it's important that we look at that.

But, in all honesty, five months hence is going to give this NDP government a chance to do what they ought to have been doing right from the very beginning, and that is consulting with Manitobans. Manitobans put each and every one of us—all 57 of us—into this Chamber to act on their behalf. They want us to do the good work, and they want us to be able to consult with them.

We're one of the few provinces that still have the ability for people to come to committee and bring their concerns forward and talk at committee and share their ideas, share their thoughts and share why they feel this is or is not a good bill. And I can guarantee many, many, many, many Manitobans will be here at committee to say that this is not a good bill. It is actually something that, you know, it's putting pennies in their pocket as compared to thousands and thousands of dollars that the PC amendment, bringing in a personal basic income—raising that up to \$30,000 will put \$1,535 into each working Manitoban's pocket. So a family of two: \$3,070 into their pocket to help spend in our economy and stimulate the economy—an economy that, I might add, under this NDP is a dying economy.

So, honourable Deputy Speaker, it's about 20 to 5 in the morning here on May 27, and, you know, this reminds me of working night shifts in my previous profession when I was a police officer. And something that I loved to do was solve crimes. And I think the biggest crime that we have going on right now is the fact that with this NDP government not agreeing to the basic personal exemption going up to \$30,000, they're robbing Manitobans of \$3,000 that they could use. And—typical—each one of them has been released back out on bail to sit in here and continue to torment Manitobans.

So it's very similar to being in policing when I look at what's going on here tonight when we're looking at this. It's very difficult. And we're here to talk to Manitobans, to help Manitobans and to try and bring real affordability and real measures forward. We don't want to talk \$50 to renters or \$100 to homeowners; we want to talk about thousands upon thousands of dollars in their pockets.

* (04:40)

And, again, in this motion, it says: be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day five months hence. That will be five months

that this NDP government can go out and talk to Manitobans and consult with them. We've heard it on our side just being out in our constituencies and I can tell you I hear it in Brandon East, as well, when I'm out talking with residents. They're frustrated; they're having a hard time with affordability. Everyone in Brandon is and it's just—it's actually quite deplorable that each and every person that I'm talking to is saying please, do something about affordability. That's the No. 1 issue here in our province and we are suffering because of it.

And so it's important that we have an opportunity for people to consult. They're consulting with us and we're bringing their message forward here in this Chamber. But what's not happening is the ability to consult at committee and really have their words put on the record about how they feel about this BITSA bill and how it's not helping them.

You know, they'll probably bring forward the fact that there is billions of dollars of debt that has occurred under this NDP government with nothing to offer. There is no stimulated economy. There is no growing GDP. We have one of the highest inflation rates in all of Canada and our food inflation is off the charts, and it's difficult for families and I feel for the families, for the young families, for families that are just starting out, for families that want to start having children and raising their offsprings. It's difficult; it's next to impossible.

And if people are working a minimum wage job or a job where they may not be making significant dollars, there is a number of factors that come into play. And families have to have two-income workers out there working just to make ends meet. And, on top of that, they have to try and afford proper food, proper nutrition for their children, for their families, and it's just—it's causing them to lose faith in Manitoba.

And we're seeing many people exit Manitoba and that's not something that we want. We're all Manitobans. We're all people that want to make sure that our constituents are taken care of. We want to see Manitoba grow. We want to see Manitoba become a have province. And I'm sure every single one of us in this Chamber want that.

And why wouldn't we want that? It's something that would be such a great achievement for our province. And we have the ability to do that here in our province. We have a number of critical minerals. We have water resources. We have businesses. We have entrepreneurs that are ready to bring in lots of dollars to this province and stimulate our economy.

But that's not happening under this NDP government. Families across this province are under pressure like never before. Manitobans are stretching every single dollar further and further just to keep up. And I mentioned it earlier about trying to raise a family.

Well, it's no wonder Canada and Manitoba is having a declining birth rate and a declining population because people can't afford to have the children to help grow our population.

And this NDP government is not making it any easier on those individuals to try and have a family, to try and have children that can grow up and that can work and contribute to our economy here in Manitoba. And that's the goal for all of us as parents.

And now, as grandparents such as myself, I have five grandchildren that I am concerned about here in Manitoba. I'm concerned about their ability to buy a house, their ability to afford a car, never mind the cost of gasoline to put in it. We've called on this government to eliminate the gas tax totally so that at least that will give some relief to Manitobans. But, again, this government does not like to listen. They don't like to have any ideas other than their own acted upon.

Families are having a difficult time keeping up. They're paying more for groceries, more for fuel, more for rent, more for other forms of transportation, more for utilities, more for school taxes and more for nearly every single basic necessity that they need to survive.

Let's go back to school taxes for just a few moments, honourable Deputy Speaker. The fact is, we have incredibly high school taxes that have increased exponentially over the last two and a half years since this NDP government has come into power. When we're talking double digits and in the high 30s per cent increases for property taxes, it's become an embarrassment, so much so that the City of Winnipeg put in a pamphlet within their bills when they sent them out to say, lookit: 54 per cent of this tax is actually the responsibility of this NDP government because they're concerned about the cost. They're concerned about what the public is saying to them, as councillors and as mayor, when they're sending out these tax bills and people are seeing whopping increases of 35, 38 per cent—into the 40s. It's just unfathomable how much that they have to now pay for all of this inefficient use of resources that this NDP government has brought forward.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, people are worried. I'll tell you, young parents are especially worried.

We talked about that already, about the cost that it takes. And I know when we were raising children—my wife and I—at that time I believe they used to say it cost about \$120,000 to raise a child from birth to 18. *[interjection]* Yes, unfortunately that has also skyrocketed and it's difficult for families to raise children and try and do it affordably.

And we want to help them out. We want to help the families, here on this side of the House, with an additional \$3,070 for every working family so that they have that extra disposable income to assist in whatever they choose to do, whether it's putting their children into sports, whether it's doing some sort of recreational activity, whether it's the arts, whether it's learning music—having that great outlet.

There is so many different opportunities for these individuals, but, unfortunately, they don't get to have a say. They don't get to have a say in what's happening, and that's why we brought forward this hoist amendment. And it's important that we say—what this amendment says is that the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word that and substituting the following: Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day, five months hence.

Therefore, we want the NDP government, the government of the day, actually listen to the people that want to have a say. This government said that they're a listening government but they're not a hearing government. There's a huge difference to that. You can listen all day long but you actually have to hear what people are saying and then act on it. I know it's a novel idea but it's an idea that, you know, I'll lob over to the NDP, and maybe they can look at that.

* (04:50)

I think there's a song that goes something like, do you hear what I hear? And, you know, we have to hear what the people are saying, and the people are not happy. And I think if each and every one of the members on that side of this House actually thought about conversations they've had with their constituents, they would have one of those moments where they went, you know what? The PCs are right. And it's okay to agree with them. It's okay to agree with them.

You know what? We can be friends. We can work together, and that's what we've been calling—we've been calling on this government to work together, to work in harmony with us, to try and bring affordability back to this province.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself said he wants to see this become a have province. Well, you know what? We're willing to work with him and make this a have province because right now, it's a have-not. It's a handout province, and the hand has reached out to the feds with billions upon billions upon billions of transfer payments coming to this NDP government, the highest that we've ever seen for transfer payments.

And, unfortunately, we kept—keep seeing the debt go up by billions and billions and billions of dollars. So the math isn't mathing here with the NDP, honourable Deputy Speaker. When we have billions upon billions of dollars coming in from the federal government and we have billions and billions and billions of dollars of debt, that's not mathing. Something is not right; something is not happening proper on that side of the House, and Manitobans are concerned.

And that's why we brought this hoist motion amendment forward, because we want to give the NDP the opportunity. We're—it's like a gift. It's like a gift from the PC government over to the NDP, saying, you know what? Just agree with this. You don't—you can even save face and come back and say, do you know what, constituents? We were wrong. You don't even have to say that. You can just say we want to consult with you further, and we want to find out what you want as Manitobans.

Our member for Midland (Mrs. Stone) actually brought legislation forward into this Chamber to do a minimum, bare minimum, of 10 hours of consultation on this BITSA bill. But that, again, was turned down.

And I really don't understand what the fear is. Every day, our job is to talk with people. It's to talk with constituents. It's to hear what they have to say. And remember, not just listen to them, but hear what they have to say. And you know what? That's something that—*[interjection]* Yes, that is something that really has to be done.

So here's a lob for you. Agree with this hoist motion and then go out and consult.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I'll remind the member to direct comments through the Chair.

Mr. Balcaen: I got very passionate about this.

So, yes, through the Chair, this NDP government—I'm throwing a lob to this NDP government here. They could take this hoist motion and run with it, and they could consult with Manitobans. That's what they're waiting for. They could actually hear what they have

to say, and they could go on with the fact that they want an affordable province. They want legislation that brings true affordability, something like what was offered up by this PC government: \$30,000 exemption under the basic personal exemption puts \$3,070 into every family in Manitoba.

Yes, and that's huge dollars. And I know some people may not think so, but just think what you could do with \$3,070 if it magically appeared in your pocket. And it doesn't even have to be magic; it can just be an agreement by this NDP government and bam, there it is for each individual within this province that has a family.

But you know what? It's okay, too, if you're a single parent or if you're a single income earner, because that will get you \$1,535. So just imagine what you could do as a single person with an additional \$1,535 in your wallet. You know what? That's money on your kitchen table that you get to decide how to spend. You know what? Do you want to bring cereal out to that kitchen table? Do you want to bring toast or do you want to bring eggs Benedict? It's up to you how you spend your money, but then you can stimulate this economy.

You know, we started talking a little while ago, honourable Deputy Speaker, about young parents, but let's go to the other side of this spectrum and talk about seniors. Do you know what? The seniors in this province that need the support—I can think of many seniors that are close to me that are simply living on either OAS and CPP, or a small amount, and it's difficult for them to get by.

Could you imagine having some extra dollars available as a senior, so that you could actually go out and do something to benefit yourself? Maybe you'd get a membership—and locally in Brandon there is the Brandon University Healthy Living Centre, and it has an indoor walking track, and a lot of the seniors use that. And that's the dollars that could be used for the seniors to get out there and stay active and enjoy their remaining years and be active and, you know, be contributing members, and it's very important.

So single parents are also worried. And we talked about that a little bit ago, honourable Deputy Speaker, about single parents and the fact that our proposal would give them \$1,535 extra in their pocket a year. And that's real dollars. It's not pennies that is being saved on a junk food tax. It's real dollars: \$1,535 to do what they want with that.

Yet this government continues to present small, symbolic measures, as though they are some sort of transformational affordability solution. And that's just not true. Manitobans deserve much more than symbolism. They deserve meaningful relief. Tradespeople are starting to be concerned about the rising costs and they're talking about the Manitoba jobs agreement, the job-killing agreement. And it's killing jobs for 88 per cent of the construction workers here in Manitoba: 88 per cent. You know, that's almost an A+.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I will remind the member that the Manitoba jobs agreement is not part of BITSA and it is not relevant.

Mr. Balcaen: Yes, I was just trying to talk about affordability and how this is hampering affordability under this jobs agreement for many, many Manitobans, 88 per cent, actually, that work in that trade.

And that is what we're talking about on BITSA is affordability issues. And many Manitobans are suffering because of it. And that's the point that I was getting to, not that the job agreement is actually embedded in BITSA, but the fact is that it's driving our economy into the ground and the affordability is not there for the average Manitoban. It's, as I said, impacting 88 per cent of those.

* (05:00)

And that's why we brought forward this hoist amendment, to talk about this bill five months hence, so that they have a chance to consult with people like construction workers, open-shop contractors across Manitoba, and ask them about affordability and ask them what they can do here to do—to make sure that they keep up with affordability.

The concerns extend directly to Bill 53, honourable Deputy Speaker, because consultation matters and committees matter. And, again, I mentioned it earlier, but Manitoba is one of the few provinces that still offer a committee and for people to express their concerns. And I know—I've been to many, many committees and oftentimes we go through—until midnight or later, or sometimes, if it's in agreement, throughout the night, like we're doing tonight, to talk about and to hear Manitobans put their voice forward. And that's important.

And that's the opportunity that, again, we're affording to this government if they want to take that and run with it and be able to actually talk with individuals, because at the end of the day, democracy matters here

in Manitoba. And you know what? We're on the side of democracy, we're on the side of listening and we want people to have a voice.

So we're fortunate to have that committee process here and I would hope that the NDP takes advantage of that: that they go out, they consult with people and then they agree to our bill to do at least 10 hours of consultation when it comes to BITSA and talk about—you know, hear from Manitobans about what they want to hear.

Savings are something that Manitobans want to make sure that they have, but unfortunately, under this government, we have seen so many costs rising and people are concerned. Hydro rates continue to rise under this government. Fuel prices continue to rise. Education property taxes continue to rise.

And to my good constituents in Brandon West, you recently got your 2026 tax bills mailed out. I apologize for the high taxes that you have just seen on your education property taxes; gone up 6.7 per cent in the city of Brandon. So my apologies that you have to suffer that additional financial strain that is being placed on each and every one of you.

Insurance costs continue to rise. Transportation costs continue to rise. Manitoban families are starting to feel this financial pinch, and it's difficult for them to keep their head above water when they look at what's happened to them—and it's not even a flood season right now, honourable Deputy Speaker, but they cannot hardly keep their head above water with the issues that are happening.

There's been so many broken promises by this NDP government. The government promised Manitobans they would not raise taxes, but they broke that promise big time. That promise has been broke. They promised to index tax brackets, and they broke that promise. They promised affordability, yet Manitobans continue to pay more and more and more.

A couple of other promises. They promised to fix bail in the first 100 days; now two and three-quarter years into it, not a thing has been done. And they lobbied to fix health care, and by every measurable standard, health care is worse in our province.

So, honourable Deputy Speaker, it has been my privilege to speak to BITSA on behalf of the residents of Brandon West, and all of Brandon, to try and bring real affordability measures forward—

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

Mr. Nesbitt: When Manitobans think about affordability, they are not thinking about legislation titles, government press releases or carefully crafted political announcements; they are thinking about whether there is enough money left at the end of the month.

Mrs. Rachelle Schott, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

They are thinking about mortgage payments that suddenly look much larger than they did just a few years ago. They are thinking about rent increases that continue to outpace wages. They are thinking about grocery with bills that somehow cost more every week, utility statements that seem impossible to predict and property tax notices that continue climbing.

That is the conversation taking place around kitchen tables across this province, and that reality is exactly why Bill 53 deserves careful scrutiny. And this motion will give the government five months to go out and consult with Manitobans around their kitchen tables in constituencies like Dauphin, Riel, I think McPhillips. I think the kitchen tables there would be a great place to consult with people on this BITSA, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

Because, while this failing NDP government has attempted to present this legislation as a meaningful affordability package, Manitobans won't be fooled. They understand something very clearly: small announcements do not solve big problems.

Today we are debating this motion as part of the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, better known as BITSA, a piece of legislation that touches multiple areas of taxation, affordability policy, property taxation, municipal governance, industry regulations and broader economic policy.

Legislation of this scope should never be viewed casually, it should never be rushed and it should never escape proper public examination. Because decisions made in this Chamber ultimately affect the lives of real people, people who are already feeling stretched financially in ways many have not experienced for decades.

Honourable deputy Speaker, affordability is not a talking point. It is the issue that increasingly defines whether Manitoba families feel hopeful or discouraged about the future. It determines whether young families believe they can put down roots. It determines whether seniors feel secure staying in their homes. It determines whether workers believe their effort is still rewarded. And, increasingly, Manitobans are asking a

very simple question: If people are working hard, why does it feel harder than ever to get ahead?

That question deserves an honest answer because for many people the pressure is no longer occasional, it is constant. Every decision has become more difficult. Families think twice before buying groceries. They think twice before taking vacations. They think twice before replacing a vehicle or making repairs to their homes. Some are delaying their retirement. Some are postponing major family decisions. And many are simply trying to stretch paycheques that no longer stretch far enough.

That is why this debate matters: because affordability policy should never be about political optics. It should be about whether families genuinely feel relief. And if families do not feel relief in their day-to-day lives, then government should not pretend affordability has been solved.

* (05:10)

Honourable deputy Speaker, again, affordability is not a talking point; it is the defining issue facing Manitoba families right now. Across this province, people are carrying an enormous financial burden. Families who once felt financially secure are suddenly worrying about bills they never worried about before. Seniors on fixed incomes are watching their purchasing power shrink while costs continue rising. Young Manitobans are questioning whether they can realistically afford to stay, buy a home, raise a family and build a future here in this great province. Small businesses, the background—or the backbone of communities across Manitoba, are trying to survive under mounting operational costs while consumers, themselves, are spending less because household budgets are under pressure.

And while all of this is happening, this NDP government continues presenting narrow, highly selective affordability measures as though they somehow represent transformational relief. Manitobans know the difference. They know the difference between genuine affordability and symbolic affordability. They know the difference between policies that sound good in announcements and policies that genuinely improve financial security.

Because, at the end of the day, affordability is simple: either life is becoming easier or it is becoming harder. And for far too many Manitobans right now, life is becoming harder. That is the context in which we must evaluate Bill 53; not through government

slogans, not through carefully selected headlines, but through the lived experience of Manitobans.

So let us examine one of the measures this government has repeatedly emphasized. One of the headline announcements attached to this legislation is the removal of provincial sales tax on selected prepared food items sold in grocery stores and convenience stores. The government has spoken about this measure repeatedly as though it demonstrates a major commitment to affordability, but let us take a realistic look at what is actually being proposed. We all know most groceries in Manitoba are already exempt from PST. This policy change applies only to a relatively narrow category of prepared food items.

At the same time, Manitobans are facing rising costs virtually everywhere else. Fuel remains expensive. Hydro costs continue to rise. Insurance premiums continue increasing. Mortgage renewals are placing enormous pressure on household budgets. Rent continues rising. Property tax continues climbing. Household expenses across nearly every category of life remain elevated. And after all of that, Manitobans are expected to believe that saving a small amount on selective prepared food purchases somehow meaningfully addresses the affordability pressures they face every day.

Honourable deputy Speaker, families cannot build financial security on pennies. That is the problem with the government's entire affordability approach. The government offers small, selective savings while simultaneously presiding over broader cost increases in nearly every other aspect of life.

A few dollars saved at a checkout counter does not offset rising property taxes. A limited PST exemption does not offset higher Hydro bills. A small reduction on prepared food items does not help a family facing a dramatically higher mortgage renewal. And delayed future rebates do not help families struggling to pay bills today.

That is why so many Manitobans feel increasingly disconnected from this government's messaging, because what they are hearing from government does not match what they are living in reality. People are not worried about saving 50 cents on a prepared snack item. They are worried about keeping their homes. They are worried about whether their children will be able to afford a future here. They are worried about transportation costs. They are worried about whether wages can keep pace with inflation. They are worried about how much money is disappearing from their

paycheques before they even have a chance to spend it. That is the reality, honourable deputy Speaker.

And when Manitobans feel ignored in that reality, frustration grows. Because people do not expect perfection from government, but they do expect honesty. They expect government to recognize the scale of the challenge they are facing and they expect policies that are proportionate to those challenges.

What they do not expect is to be told everything is improving while their household budgets continue shrinking. That disconnect between government messaging and lived experience is becoming impossible to ignore. And that disconnect is precisely why many Manitobans increasingly feel this NDP government simply does not understand what ordinary families are experiencing. And affordability policy must reflect reality.

One of the major problems with this government's approach is that it consistently views affordability through isolated announcements instead of through the overall financial burden families experience. Because Manitobans do not experience affordability through one policy at a time; they experience affordability through cumulative pressure, through grocery receipts, through hydro bills, through insurance premiums, through transportation costs, through mortgage renewals, through rent increases, through property tax statements, through the amount left in their bank account when they get their statement at the end of the month. And, right now, for many Manitobans, there is less and less left over.

Honourable deputy Speaker, another issue this legislation cannot ignore is taxation, because despite government claims about affordability, this same government made decisions that have quietly increased the financial burden on Manitoba workers and families. Last year, this NDP government removed basic indexation from Manitoba's tax brackets and the basic personal amount. That matters enormously because without indexation, inflation automatically increases the tax burden over time.

Even when wage increases merely keep pace with inflation, Manitobans gradually pay more income tax. That is bracket creep. And Manitobans understand exactly what bracket creep means. It means government quietly taking more. It means middle-income families slowly losing purchasing power. It means seniors seeing greater pressure on fixed incomes. And it means workers paying more, even when they are not actually getting ahead. 'Thot'—that is not affordability; that is a tax increase by another name.

So when government removes indexation and quietly increases taxes through bracket creep, only to later announce selective exemptions on limited purchases, Manitobans naturally begin asking whether government is simply giving back pennies after taking dollars. And, frankly, many people across this province have already reached that conclusion.

Nowhere is that contradiction more obvious than education property taxation. Manitobans have seen education property tax revenues rise dramatically. Only a few years ago, projected education property tax revenues stood at roughly \$667 million. Now, honourable deputy Speaker, those revenues are approaching \$1.1 billion. That represents an enormous increase. And who pays for it? Homeowners, families, retirees, small businesses, people already trying to cope with rising costs everywhere else.

* (05:20)

Every year, property tax notices arrive. Every year, assessments rise. Every year, more families wonder how much longer they can absorb higher costs. And every year, government continues talking about affordability. Then Manitobans are told that sometime time down the road, the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit may increase another \$100: not immediately, not when people are struggling right now; one year or many years later.

Honourable deputy Speaker, future promises do not pay present bills. Families need relief today. And many homeowners already understand that annual increases in property taxes will likely cancel out any future affordability credit the government claims as relief.

That is why so many Manitobans across this province feel frustrated, because they feel squeezed from every direction. They see more money leaving their household every month while this NDP government continues insisting things are getting better.

But affordability is not judged by government messaging. It is judged by lived experience. And, increasingly, Manitobans feel they are falling behind. That concern should matter to every member of this Chamber because affordability is not only about dollars and cents, it's about confidence. Confidence matters.

When families lose confidence in their financial future, the consequences ripple across society. Young couples delay buying homes. Families postpone major life decisions. Graduates begin looking outside Manitoba for better opportunities.

Entrepreneurs hesitate to invest. Businesses scale back expansion plans. Communities lose momentum. And over time, economic stagnation begins replacing optimism.

And that, honourable deputy Speaker, should concern every one of us because confidence is fragile. Once people lose faith that they can get ahead, rebuilding that optimism becomes far more difficult. We cannot become a province where young people believe success exists somewhere else. We cannot become a province where home ownership feels permanently out of reach. And we cannot become a province where hard-working families believe the system no longer works for them.

That is why affordability policy must be ambitious, it must be serious and it must address the structural pressures families face, not simply the political opportunities of the moment, because Manitoba's success ultimately depends on whether people believe opportunity exists right here in Manitoba.

Honourable deputy Speaker, that brings me to competitiveness, because affordability and competitiveness are inseparable. When Manitoba becomes less competitive economically, affordability becomes harder to achieve: businesses invest elsewhere, skilled workers leave, economic growth slows, tax pressure rises, opportunity weakens and families pay the price.

Manitoba competes every day, not just with neighbouring provinces but with jurisdictions across North America. We compete for investment. We compete for jobs. We compete for skilled labour. We compete for economic growth. In that environment, policy matters: tax policy matters, energy policy matters, regulatory policy matters, certainty matters, confidence matters. Yet business owners repeatedly tell us the same thing: costs are rising, uncertainty is growing, government burdens and red tape continue increasing.

And many businesses, particularly small business that I talked to in my constituency of Riding Mountain, feel trapped. After years of economic instability and inflationary pressure, many are still trying to recover. They face higher wages, higher borrowing costs, higher supply costs, weaker consumer spending and shrinking margins. Then this NDP government introduces narrow tax exemptions and expects applause.

But business owners understand what government too often ignores: long-term affordability depends on long-term economic strength. It depends on investment. It depends on confidence. It depends on growth.

And it depends on government creating stable, predictable, competitive environments. That is one reason our Progressive Conservative caucus continues advocating for a very different affordability approach, because we believe affordability relief should restore confidence. It should empower families and it should create the conditions necessary for long-term prosperity.

Governments should not be focused on helping Manitobans move ahead—should be focused on helping Manitobans move ahead, not merely helping them tread water. The goal should not simply be survival; the goal should be opportunity. The goal should be creating a province where hard work still produces upward mobility and long-term financial security.

On this side of the House, we believe relief should be broad-based; we believe it should be immediate. And we believe Manitobans deserve to keep more of what they earn. That is why we have proposed significantly increasing Manitoba's basic personal exemption. Our proposal would move Manitoba toward a \$30,000 basic personal exemption.

I would submit that that is meaningful relief because real affordability means putting real money back into family budgets. Not symbolic savings; real savings, money families can use to pay rent, to cover mortgage costs, to pay utility bills, to buy groceries, to manage transportation costs, to create breathing room in their life.

And unlike selective afforded—affordability measures proposed by this NDP government, broad tax relief proposed by the PC caucus benefits everyone: nurses, teachers, tradespeople, truck drivers, young families, workers trying to get ahead, seniors working part-time to keep pace with rising costs. That is the difference. Meaningful affordability policy improves financial security broadly, rather than selectively.

* (05:30)

And, honourable deputy Speaker, there is another important benefit. When Manitobans keep more of what they earn, communities benefit: people spend locally, businesses grow, jobs are created, investment increases, economic activity strengthens naturally. That is how sustainable prosperity is built.

Honourable deputy Speaker, there are also many additional provisions inside this legislation that deserve much greater scrutiny than this government seems willing to allow. That is why five months will allow for these to be scrutinized more across the province. Bill 53 includes changes involving film tax

credits, bare trusts and beneficial ownership taxation, accommodation taxes on short-term rentals, school division borrowing, carbon storage legislation that will directly affect my constituency of Riding Mountain under a proposal that's out there, post-secondary institutional provisions.

These are not minor housekeeping adjustments. They are meaningful policy decisions with real consequences. And yet, once again, we see omnibus BITSA legislation packed with major provisions and move forward under limited public scrutiny. That is deeply concerning. Strong democracy requires transparency. It requires accountability. It requires consultation. Stakeholders deserve to be heard. Municipalities deserve to provide feedback. Businesses deserve input. Manitobans deserve a voice. That is why the amendment before us matters.

Committee review is not obstruction. Committee review is accountability. It allows Manitobans to participate directly in democracy, it allows experts to raise concerns, it allows improvements to be proposed and, ultimately, it strengthens legislation. If this government truly believes in its policy choices, then it should welcome scrutiny instead of resisting it.

Let Manitobans speak. Let homeowners discuss rising property taxes. Let seniors explain the pressures fixed incomes create. Let young families explain what affordability really means. Let businesses explain why competitiveness matters. That is how democratic institutions are supposed to function.

Honourable deputy Speaker, our caucus has made its position very clear: we are prepared to support real affordability measures, we are prepared to work constructively and we are prepared to support legislation when government demonstrates a willingness to provide meaningful relief. But this legislation in its current form simply does not meet the scale of the challenge Manitobans are facing, because the affordability crisis confronting this province is larger than selective exemptions and political announcements.

Manitobans deserve more. They deserve government policies that reduce the overall financial burden. They deserve a government focused on economic growth and competitiveness. They deserve a legislative process grounded in transparency and accountability. And most importantly, they deserve affordability measures equal to the pressures they are facing every day.

Before I conclude, honourable deputy Speaker, I want to return to the broader principle at the centre

of this debate. Affordability is not ideological. It is practical. It is measurable. Families know immediately whether life is becoming easier or harder. They know whether their budgets are improving. They know whether they can save for the future. And right now, too many Manitobans feel increasingly anxious about what comes next.

That reality should compel every member of this Legislature to demand more from public policy, because Manitobans deserve optimism, they deserve opportunity, and they deserve confidence that this province is moving in the right direction.

At the end of the day, affordability is measured very simply. It is measured at the kitchen tables. It is measured in household budget. It is measured when seniors decide whether they can afford to stay in their homes. It is measured when young Manitobans decide whether they believe their future exists here, and right now too many Manitobans are concluding that life is becoming harder, not easier.

That is why this motion matters, because before legislation of this significance moves forward, Manitobans deserve the opportunity to be heard. They deserve accountability, they deserve transparency and, above all, they deserve real affordability.

Honourable Speaker, I 'enclure'—I encourage all members of this House to support this motion to allow more time for this NDP government to come back to this House with changes to Bill 53—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Member's time is expired.

MLA Berezsa: I rise today—this morning, actually—to speak on the BITSA legislation, and I do so with very serious concerns about the direction this NDP government is taking Manitoba in. And that's why I'm speaking today on the amendment that is proposed by the member from Swan River.

And I just want to read the motion: that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word that and substitute the following: the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act be now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this date five months hence.

And that's referencing that the NDP need to take more time. They need to take more time to listen. That's why we are asking to wait for five months, because Manitobans are struggling. We see it every day when we're at the grocery store. We see Manitobans that are struggling to pay their utility bills.

We see Manitobans that are struggling to pay for fuel. Families are struggling with affordability. Again, we're seeing that every day.

We're seeing that with mortgages. We're seeing that with rent that people are having to pay, and sometimes they're trying to decide whether to pay rent, whether to buy groceries or whether to put their kids into a certain event. Communities are struggling with affordability. Communities are struggling with crime and disorder. Seniors are struggling to feel safe in their own homes. And, again, we're seeing some added drug issues that we're seeing out there because of the pressure that Manitobans are under.

Farmers are struggling under rising costs and increasing financial pressure. And that's why this motion—or, sorry, this amendment to this motion is so needed. Farmers are seeing record prices having to be paid for fertilizer, for chemicals, for fuel.

And places like North Norfolk, just west of me, are seeing their school taxes raised by over 43 per cent in the last two years under this failed NDP government. And vulnerable Manitobans struggling with addictions, mental health challenges and homelessness are not getting the meaningful help.

Honourable deputy Speaker, legislation like BITSA should provide Manitoba with confidence. And, again, I want to refer back again that the NDP need more time to listen. That's why we've put this hoist motion forward: confidence that communities will be safer; confidence that affordability will improve; confidence that mental health and addictions are finally being addressed with seriousness and urgency and we see a pathway to treatment centres and recovery centres.

But there is nothing in this legislation that provides that confidence. And that is exactly why the Progressive Conservative caucus cannot support this BITSA bill.

* (05:40)

Honourable deputy Speaker, I want to begin by speaking about seniors and the issues that are in front of them today under this NDP BITSA bill, because some of the most heartbreaking calls we receive come from seniors across Manitoba.

They are people that have worked their entire lives, people who have raised families, but because of the struggles that they're seeing, these families are moving home. The money that they have made and put into retirement is not enough. And now they're being forced even more because of this BITSA bill.

People who volunteered in their communities, people who built businesses, people who farmed the land and 'contributed' year after year to building this province.

These are Manitobans who have made sacrifices so future generations could have opportunities. Future generations are seeing a crisis coming a hundred miles an hour at them, and now, during what should be a peaceful retirement, many are living in fear. They're living in fear because this BITSA bill is being rammed through without proper consultation.

And that, again, is reasoning enough to bring forward this motion—or this amendment to this motion that we take five months for this NDP government to go to committee, to hear from families, to hear from individuals—and now during what should be peaceful, that retirement—as I said, are living in fear. Their fear in their own homes, their fear in their own neighbourhoods, fear in communities where they have lived for decades and decades.

Honourable deputy Speaker, we have heard stories from seniors describing that no one should have to live beside. We have heard concerns about propane tanks stacked near their homes in unsafe ways. When we are talking about BITSA, we need to take the time so seniors have the opportunity. They need to be heard, about jugs of gasoline that are sitting outside of houses. They need to be heard, about drug dealers moving in and out of neighbourhoods, traffic at all hours, threats being made, intimidation. And many seniors tell us they feel abandoned when they raise concern. They feel ignored, dismissed, told there is little that can be done.

Honourable Speaker, this is unacceptable. These seniors built Manitoba. They've built this province to what it is today. We need them to have the opportunity to be heard in committee. We need these people to be able to be heard, to be seen and be able to live comfortably for the rest of their retirement age. They deserve peace, they deserve dignity and they deserve safety. They should not live in fear and they deserve a government willing to stand up for law-abiding citizens like they've been all through their life.

Instead, this government has allowed conditions in many communities to deteriorate. BITSA can't fix that. But again, the amendment that has been put forward here would give that opportunity for a little more time out there.

There is nothing in this bill that restores confidence in our public safety. There is nothing in this bill that addresses the growing disorder many

communities are experiencing. There is nothing in this bill that tells seniors this government is listening to their concerns. And that's why the Progressive Conservative caucus cannot support this legislation as is.

Honourable Speaker, we also have to speak honestly about the addictions and mental health crisis facing Manitoba. Because this government continues speaking about compassion while failing to produce meaningful results. The reality is simple: people battling addictions need treatment, families need hope, communities need safety and vulnerable Manitobans need real pathways to recovery.

But what Manitobans are seeing today is worsening disorder, growing homelessness, more visible addiction and communities feeling less safe. Again, with the amendment that's being proposed, we're proposing a five-month hold until they—until this government can properly be with people so that they can have a say in this BITSA bill.

Honourable deputy Speaker, homelessness cannot be solved simply with announcements. Housing matters. But if someone is battling a severe addiction, untreated trauma or serious medical—mental illness, simply placing them into housing without meaningful support does not solve the root problem that we're dealing with.

And Manitobans understand that. They just need some time through the amendment to have some time. The NDP needs to listen to Manitobans and give them their time to come to committee, let them be heard, let them be seen.

How can someone improve their housing situation if their mental health is collapsing? Because they may not have enough dollars left over that they can look at, should I be buying medication or should I be buying food? How can someone recover from addiction without access to treatment and accountability? All of those can cost money. These issues are all connected. Mental health struggles can lead to addiction. Addiction can contribute to homelessness and instability. And when governments fail to address these root causes, communities suffer. This is exactly what Manitobans are witnessing today.

Honourable deputy Speaker, this government often speaks as though acknowledging these realities is somewhat controversial. But Manitoba sees what is happening. They see the open drug use. They see repeated theft. They see vandalism. They see businesses boarding up windows. We don't need to see that in Manitoba. We want to see our economy

continue to grow. That is why, under this amendment, that we're asking for five months for the NDP to be able to hear people at committee, to be able to have consultations. They see vulnerable people suffering in the open.

Honourable deputy Speaker, compassion without results is not leadership. Allowing people to remain trapped in that addiction is not compassion. Allowing communities to deteriorate is not compassion. True compassion means helping people recover. True compassion means supporting mental health before crisis occurs. Compassion is building those facilities where recovery can happen. There is nothing in this BITSA bill that shows that right now.

But maybe—just maybe—after listening to this hoist amendment, maybe with the amount of time that they would have to consult with that, maybe we would see things better.

True compassion means protecting communities while helping vulnerable Manitobans. And, once again, honourable deputy Speaker, there is nothing in this BITSA legislation that demonstrates a serious plan to achieve those outcomes—absolutely nothing.

* (05:50)

There is nothing in this legislation that meaningfully expands addiction recovery. There is nothing in this legislation that restores confidence in community safety. There is nothing in this legislation that demonstrates measurable action on mental health. And that is why the Progressive Conservative caucus cannot support this bill.

Honourable deputy Speaker, economic hardship is making all of these problems worse. And, again, when we see food inflation out of control, when we see our provincial debt out of control, the thing is to do is let's take some time, let's take a few months, as this hoist amendment shows, to make sure that this government has enough time to look at this bill properly.

Families are working harder than ever and falling further and further behind. Groceries cost more. Utilities cost more. Fuel costs more. Housing costs more. And Manitobans are exhausted. We hear from families who feel they're doing everything right but still cannot get ahead. As we've said before, a lot of Manitobans are within \$200 of insolvency. When you get to a point like that, you have to decide what you pay for and what you may have to wait until next month to pay for.

The problem is issues like that cause anxiety. They cause all kinds of health issues. Honourable deputy Speaker, when affordability collapses, social problems continue to grow worse. People become desperate. Communities experience more instability, mental health declines, addictions increase and, unfortunately, crime often rises as well. That is the reality many Manitobans are living through today.

Yet this government continues acting as though these issues exist separately from one another. But having enough dollars in your pocket, being able to eat a proper meal, plays a huge role. The economy matters; affordability matters; public safety matters; mental health matters; addiction treatments matter; housing matters. These issues are interconnected and Manitobans know it.

But once again, honourable deputy Speaker, there is nothing in this BITSA legislation that provides meaningful affordability relief—absolutely nothing. There is nothing in this legislation that gives Manitobans confidence life will become more affordable.

And that's why we're asking for this hoist motion to be passed, so that we can see some time taken for that reason. There is nothing in this legislation that addresses the financial pressures crushing Manitoba families. There is nothing in this legislation that restores hope for young families trying to build a future—trying to build a future here in Manitoba instead of heading west or heading east, but not heading in Manitoba's way. And, again, that is why the Progressive Conservative caucus cannot support this legislation as is.

Honourable deputy Speaker, nowhere is the frustration felt more strongly than in rural Manitoba. Our farmers and our agriculture producers are under enormous pressure. Input costs, as I've talked about, are on the rise. Fertilizer prices are ridiculously high. Fuel prices continue hurting producers. Diesel costs affect every stage of production. Equipment costs continue to rise. Interest rates have created enormous financial strain. And, on top of that, governments continue adding taxes and financial burdens.

Honourable deputy Speaker, agriculture is not just another industry in Manitoba. Agriculture is foundational to our province, and, again, we need to take some time. We need to consult with businesses or with organizations like Keystone Agriculture Producers, with the Manitoba Pork association, with the Canola Growers, with the grain growers so that,

again, that they can have a further word on this amendment that we're speaking of here.

Agriculture producers feed Manitoba and contribute enormously to our economy, yet many producers feel abandoned by this government. The NDP government opposite cut the tax rebate that our Progressive Conservative government introduced to put money back into the pockets of Manitoba and more money on your kitchen table. We believe Manitobans deserve relief. We believe Manitoba farmers deserve your support. We believe homeowners deserve fairness. The NDP took that relief away and rural Manitoba have not forgotten.

Honourable deputy Speaker, farmers are not asking for special treatment; they're asking for common sense decisions. They're asking for a government that understands the realities they face. They're asking for relief during difficult economic times.

But what are they getting instead? Higher costs, more pressure, more uncertainty and less confidence in the future. And, may I add, some of the most growing mental health issues that we see in Canada are happening in the agriculture business just because margins are so tight and the input costs are so high that they just don't know what to expect.

We hear from producers worried about passing farms down to the next generation. Years ago, it was an honour to have farms pass down to the next generation.

Now, again, are we burdening these—this next generation of farmers. Again, with this common sense amendment that we need more time to listen, that's why we are asking to wait for five months. We hear from younger Manitobans questioning whether they can even afford to continue on that family farm. We hear from communities worried about long-time economic survival because when farms struggle, entire rural economies struggle, local businesses struggle, communities shrink, main streets weaken and rural Manitoba suffers.

Again, if there is not enough business for that elevator that is probably the biggest employer in some of these rural communities, when the elevator goes away, the whole community is not far behind. Yet once again, honourable deputy Speaker, there is nothing in this BITSA legislation that provides meaningful relief for Manitoba farmers, nothing.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

There is nothing in this legislation that demonstrates this government understands rural Manitoba. There is nothing in this legislation that protects generational family farms from rising economic pressures. And that is why the Progressive Conservative caucus cannot support this legislation.

Honourable deputy Speaker, Manitobans are also deeply concerned about public safety, and they have every right to be. Families deserve safe neighbourhoods. Businesses deserve protection from repeated theft and vandalism. But, again, that's what it's come down to.

* (06:00)

And the part I see when I'm over in Point Douglas or over on north Main, north Logan, is nobody is out there saying that they want to steal. But it's the difference between starving and eating, and in this rich country of Canada and this agriculture-rich province of Manitoba, we should never run into issues like that. We need more time for this NDP government to have a look. Please, have a look at this hoist motion. This is an effective motion in order for people to have an opportunity to speak. Why wouldn't we want our citizens to speak? When they can't be heard, they think that something's being hidden from them.

We hear from businesses repeatedly targeted by theft. We hear from neighbourhoods dealing with constant vandalism. We hear from parents concerned about drug activity near schools. We hear from communities frustrated by repeat offenders cycling through the system again and again and again. And Manitobans are asking where the leadership is. Honourable deputy Speaker, governments cannot continue ignoring these concerns, because when people lose confidence in public safety, communities begin to deteriorate.

And once again, honourable deputy Speaker, there is nothing in this BITSA legislation that restores confidence in safer communities. But, again, under this common sense amendment, this hoist amendment, it would at least give more time for that to be looked at, and that is why the Progressive Conservative caucus cannot support this bill.

Honourable deputy Speaker, the members opposite often speak as though rural Manitoba—rural Manitobans do not understand what's happening. But rural Manitobans are smart. They understand economics. They are some of the largest business people that we have in Canada and in Manitoba. They understand community and they understand when

government policies are making life harder. They see rising taxes. They see increased costs and they know what shrinking margins look like. And, unfortunately, in a rich agriculture province like ours, margins are so tight that they cannot afford any more taxation.

Honourable deputy Speaker, Manitobans are compassionate people. We want vulnerable people helped. Unfortunately, this government continues refusing to acknowledge the consequences of its decisions. Instead of practical solutions, Manitobans see ideology. Instead of measurable outcomes, Manitobans see announcements without any substance. Instead of stronger communities, Manitobans continue to see worsening disorder. Once again, that reality is nowhere reflected in this BITSA legislation.

Honourable Speaker, I want to speak again about the connection between mental health, addictions, homelessness and affordability, because this issue cannot be separated.

A person facing crushing financial stress may experience declining mental health. I have heard from seniors that are very aged. I have also heard from parents of young children that are being affected by mental health issues. This sensible amendment that the NDP need more time to listen—that's why we're asking for this to happen. That is why meaningful recovery matters. These issues are connected. They're tired—Manitobans are tired of hearing promises while conditions continue to worsen.

Honourable deputy Speaker, it has been my privilege, again, to talk about this important motion.

Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Before recognizing the next speaker, the Legislative Assembly broadcast team have requested a two-minute recess to restart the public broadcast stream to ensure that there are no gaps in our broadcast.

Is there a leave for a two-minute recess? *[Agreed]*

The House recessed at 6:06 a.m.

The House resumed at 6:08 a.m.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

The House, please come back to order.

The floor is open for debate on the hoist motion to Bill 53.

Mr. Ewasko: Good morning.

It's eight minutes after 6 in the morning. Thank you to my colleagues, of course, for joining us here this morning on all sides.

It—again, honourable deputy Speaker, you took a bit of a—we took a bit of a recess here in the Chamber to reset the broadcast crew so that everybody can stream, the thousands of Manitobans that are up at shortly after 6 in the morning watching what's happening here in the Manitoba Legislature.

And it's interesting to see that, again, honourable deputy Speaker, no one from the government side wants to stand up and put any words, any positive or negative words, about their BITSA bill. And it's almost interesting to know, who are they representing? Who are they representing? Are they representing Manitobans or they're representing themselves?

Because it just seems that they're carrying on with their old, tired plan and the way—you know, they're almost taking the old playbook out of the Greg Selinger days, and they've just continued. But, I mean, that wouldn't necessarily surprise anybody here in Manitoba because we know that the former premier, Greg Selinger, was a mentor to the current Premier (Mr. Kinew).

* (06:10)

So let's recap a little bit. So it's shortly after 6 o'clock in the morning. We've gone through a few motions, reasoned amendments, brought forward by the MLA for Interlake-Gimli, Red River North, and now we sit and we are working on a hoist amendment, which, you know, has not happened in quite some time, and it's been brought forward by the MLA for Swan River.

And I would just like to read it out for those Manitobans that are watching or listening at home and maybe on their drive to work here in Manitoba. So the motion and the hoist amendment reads, and I quote: that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "that" and substituting the following: Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2026 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a second—be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day five months hence.

Well, honourable deputy Speaker, Manitobans are wondering, and I'm sure that some of the members on the government side are wondering, what does that mean? Well, the hoist amendment basically

means that when this passes—because I think common sense will prevail on the NDP side, and I think they'll actually vote for this hoist amendment.

And why is that? Because this BITSA bill, even though our side, the Progressive Conservative side, has attempted to talk some sense into the government, to take the BITSA bill to committee and have the public ask questions on whatever they want to talk about in the BITSA bill, especially if it's as good of a bill as the Kinew government is trying to sell it to Manitobans.

But I think in the big picture, they don't want it to go to committee because they know that their meagre tax savings—tax savings—are really not going to add up to too much. Very minuscule tax savings.

Now, what we have offered, and trying to work with this current government, is to bring forward a basic personal exemption. And what that basic personal exemption—with the basic personal exemption, we're looking at raising it to \$30,000, and what that means is that every Manitoban would be able to earn up to \$30,000 and then keep more of their hard-earned money. Matter of fact, it would add up to about \$3,000 on a dual-income household, and, as I've said earlier and a couple other times, this would—and many of my colleagues have brought forward this message as well—these are dollars that are going to go, probably the majority of them, right back into the economy.

Because people are in an affordability crisis right now, things are more expensive, and I'll get into some of the items that Manitobans are struggling with soon, within my allotted 30 minutes, honourable deputy Speaker. What we've been seeing coming from this Kinew government is that they want to—according to the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister, they're freezing the PST on groceries.

Well, as we've said earlier, many of us have said, the fact is that there's really not a whole lot of groceries right now that everyday Manitobans are purchasing that is not exempt from the PST, except for things like junk food. Now, that being said, many of us on this side of the Chamber—I mean, we haven't heard from too many of the government members, but I'm sure over the next few weeks we'll—they'll start to want to chime in on BITSA, or maybe even the hoist amendment that we're—that we've brought forward today.

What we're seeing is the rise in—I mean, we know that under the Kinew government, the health care has declined, gotten worse. Wait times got worse. We've seen a rise in diabetes. We've seen a rise in obesity.

And what this Kinew government's wanting to do is take the PST off junk food and continues to pat himself on the back to take the PST off of Slurpees.

Mrs. Rachelle Schott, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I've spoke earlier—earlier today, I guess—earlier—no, yesterday, but technically, because we haven't seen the clock, we're still technically on Tuesday, May 26. And so with that, I would also like to extend that happy birthday yet again, because it's one of those groundhog days, but to the MLA for Burrows. Happy birthday. It's been the longest birthday he's had for a while as far as a particular day. Because, again, this just continues going because we haven't seen—we-refuse-to-see-the-clock type of thing, so we're moving forward.

So what we've seen is, even though the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) patting himself on the back about taking PST off Slurpees and junk food, what we're also seeing is we're seeing a rise in crime. We're seeing a rise in drug use in the city of Winnipeg and in, unfortunately, other areas of the province as well. We're seeing 7-Elevens close. So I'm not sure how many Slurpees people are going to be buying. But that being said, I guess they're going to save a couple pennies on a Slurpee moving forward.

I think this Premier—I'm not sure what the Premier has against some of the restaurants and some of the smaller, you know, shops, but he is excluding some of those businesses from this PST exemption and we're hoping that he'll have a—take another look at this.

And that's why the hoist amendment has been brought forward, so that we can take that five months, go to the public over the next few months—summer-time—hear what the public has to say—Manitobans have to say, get their feedback and then come back and maybe put a different—put a little bit more effort into this BITSA bill.

Because what we've seen is that this BITSA bill is being rushed. This BITSA bill is being rushed. Usually, generally, when a government brings forward a BITSA bill, they try to bring it in in time for a deadline, for certain bills. And that deadline is around that 20th of March time frame

An Honourable Member: March 18.

Mr. Ewasko: March 18, to be exact, thanks to my colleague from Interlake-Gimli.

And—but what we've seen over the last few years since the Kinew government has taken over power here in our province, to the chagrin of many

Manitobans, is that they can't—somehow, they don't know the rules or they can't get organized enough to bring some of these bills forward in time for that March 18 deadline, so that that would basically make sure that the bills would pass by the time we rise for summer, which is by the backstop date.

And so, again, what the NDP—or what the Kinew government likes to do is finger point and they like to blame others for their lack of either knowledge or rules. And so that's why we talk about, you know, again, this hoist amendment on the BITSA bill.

So we've also tried, on this side of the House, to show and to prove to the Kinew government that we actually want to work with them, because we want to see affordability measures brought forward that are common sense, that are actually going to make a difference to—on Manitobans' pocketbooks and help with their way of life, especially, again, under this affordability crisis that we're experiencing here in Manitoba.

* (06:20)

And it's unfortunate that this Premier (Mr. Kinew) seems to not want to be actually listening to Manitobans. He's not listening to community members out there that are experiencing rise in crime, drug abuse within their communities, theft, the health-care crisis—I mean, for goodness sakes, the nurses are—every couple days, are in the news talking about how unsafe of a workplace under this Kinew government it has become.

And so with more dollars into the system making sure that Manitoba families are out there spending more of their hard-earned money that they were allowed to keep would then increase and grow the economy, which in turn would give more dollars back to the government to be able to afford and spend some more money on things like justice, crime and safety, of course, some real affordability measures in regards to—you know, I mean, the Premier's promised many things in the last election, and I don't think we're seeing a whole lot.

You know, maybe take the gas tax again completely off of gas. Because, I mean, when we take a look at our neighbours to the south, you know, even when you do the conversion from US gallons to just plain, old litres, you're looking at still a cost savings of—oh, and then, of course, you convert the dollar, the US dollar compared to the—our Canadian dollar. You're looking at fuel in the States still being 44 cents cheaper a litre. And so I don't quite understand why

this Premier would not take that gas tax completely off of fuel as we speak.

Because we know that—I know that some of my colleagues have already spoken about the ag industry and the devastating effects these high fuel costs are on the ag industry, and then that all trickles down.

What the NDP don't understand—and I don't quite understand why they don't understand, but—everything that people are purchasing somehow gets to the stores, gets to the—you know, whether it's fertilizer, whether it's groceries, all of those items eventually has to get here by some form of transportation that uses fuel.

And they just can't comprehend that, you know, the rotisserie chicken that they're talking about isn't just all of a sudden, poof, and it's in our grocery stores. I mean, there's a process on how these food items get to be consumed by everyday Manitobans. But I think the NDP members feel that all the food is either grown or raised or processed right in the grocery stores and they don't comprehend the fact that all of this sort of evolves around energy and the fuel that gets every-thing transported to the everyday Manitoban.

So back on the wanting to show that we're willing to work, not just on the basic personal exemption but pretty much on anything else, many of us on the opposition side has sent letters to our—as advocates or critics of portfolios, we have sent letters to the ministers.

We're seeing the lights have dimmed here in the Manitoba Legislature, and I think it's about—I don't know what time it is now, about 6. What time is it? 6:24? 6:24 in the morning, and it almost seems as if the affordability crisis has now hit the government a little bit. I don't—not sure if they've paid their hydro bill, because obviously there's something going on. But we'll continue.

And so I'd like to read into the record the letter that I had sent to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt), dated May 22. And so—and, again, this is now a public document. And so this is going along the terms of the hoist amendment, talking about BITSA and the fact that we're willing to work with them in order to make life more affordable for everyday Manitobans.

So: Dear Minister, parents across Manitoba are feeling the pressure of rising costs everywhere in their lives, including the growing expenses associated with raising and educating their children. School supplies, clothing, transportation, child care, meals and extra-curricular activities continue to become more expensive for Manitoba families already struggling to keep up.

As both parents and legislators, we know that strong schools begin with strong families. When parents are financially stretched, it affects every part of family life, including students' ability to succeed and participate fully in their education and communities.

That is why our caucus is urging your government to significantly increase Manitobans'—Manitoba's basic personal exemption as part of the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act. Allowing Manitoba families to keep more of what they earn would provide meaningful and immediate relief for parents while helping strengthen communities across our province.

And then it continues: Our caucus has made it clear that if your government is prepared to include meaningful changes to the basic personal exemption in this legislation, we are prepared to work constructively to ensure its passage before June 1. Manitoba families deserve more than symbolic affordability measures. They deserve real relief.

Sincerely, signed by myself, the MLA for Lac du Bonnet—and on the letter, kept it as critic for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba.

Now, I've often felt that as—with that title of being critic, I always like to change the term to advocate because, in the big picture, we're advocating for education and early childhood learning in this province and, I think, to make sure that life is more affordable and that parents and guardians and students and teachers and everybody involved in the education system need, at this time especially, during this affordability crisis under this Kinew government, some real tax-savings measures.

And it was the progressive—the former Progressive Conservative government that actually raised the basic personal exemption from around \$8,800 to \$15,000, which put in the pockets of every Manitoban an additional \$75 every pay.

And, I mean, I know that, you know, quite a few members on the NDP bench think \$75 isn't a whole lot of money, but it is a lot of money to Manitobans. And, again, whether they need it for food, sustenance, transportation or just once in a blue moon taking their family to a movie or to an extracurricular activity, I think it's very important.

And I think also what happened—when we did raise that basic personal exemption to \$15,000, we also indexed it to the rates of inflation where we would make sure that it would continue to grow as the inflation kept growing.

And with that, I mean, unfortunately, what did we see? We saw that this Kinew government had stopped indexing the income tax brackets and the basic personal amount by inflation. So in the big picture, that's called bracket creep. And it's a sneaky way—and we all know this—it's a sneaky way of hiking taxes.

Because of bracket creep, inflation can automatically bump taxpayers into a higher tax bracket and raise their taxes even though they can't afford to buy more because prices have gone up. And the cost of bracket creep compounds for taxpayers every year because of inflation.

* (06:30)

And I know that, you know, the Finance Minister has an economics degree. And I think what probably needs to happen, I'm not putting this solely on the Finance Minister, I think what needs to happen—and I've seen evidence of varying degrees of bullying here in this Chamber—I think the Finance Minister probably needs to have a good meeting with the Premier (Mr. Kinew), and the Premier needs to actually open his ears and listen to what the Finance Minister has to say.

Because I think the Premier is actually driving a lot of this wrong—some of these wrong decisions because he's hoping for an additional TikTok like—or some kind of notoriety. It looked like—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

I'd ask the member to draw his remarks back to the amendment at hand and refrain from deviating too far in any direction.

Mr. Ewasko: So, back to the hoist amendment and bringing forward, you know, the reasons why Manitobans can't afford what's happening under the Kinew government right now.

And I know that there are some colleagues in the Chamber on both sides, are hearing from their constituents and so the comments that I was making was I think fairly valid and I will square that circle and bring it back to specifically the BITSA and the hoist amendment, because we are talking about affordability.

And if the Premier cannot understand that some of the measures that he is doing is actually costing Manitobans more, well, that's why I think that some of his colleagues should be given that opportunity to have that conversation with him. And I think he needs to be open to that and listen to those recommendations. I mean, we've seen in this Chamber some of his

bullying tactics. And, matter of fact, we've seen it just recently on the national stage, which is absolutely unbelievable, of what he's—what he tried to grandstand, you know, in front of the premiers.

And, you know, I don't know if everybody in Manitoba has seen that—seen the video or the news conference where the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is—
[interjection]

So some of the members on the NDP think that it was absolutely wonderful where the Premier basically—our Premier of Manitoba—basically spoke down to the—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order. Order.

I've already cautioned the member to please draw his remarks back to the matter at hand. We're talking about the amendment to the main motion of BITSA. So, once again, please keep the remarks relevant.

Mr. Ewasko: I hear and I know that the Chairperson hears the Health Minister as well, trying to body shame myself here in the Chamber. And it's unfortunate, but there's nothing new with the tactics of the Health Minister.

And, again, in regards to the hoist motion, honourable deputy house—or deputy Chairperson, it'd probably be good if one of those members would stand up and speak to the hoist amendment. I mean, lots to say, sitting down on the front bench, but not a whole lot of anything coming from this Health Minister.

And all we see is many failed health initiatives. And, I mean, don't take my word for it. I mean, for goodness sakes, Darlene Jackson, the head of the nurses' union, are saying it on a day-to-day basis.
[interjection]

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order. Order. Order.

I'd like all members on both sides to just take it down a notch. It's been a long night, but we have refrained from heckling and interjections for quite some time.

The member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) has the floor.

Mr. Ewasko: So when we talk about affordability and the raise of taxes and those types of things, and I know that the Health Minister might sign in for a meeting with the Finance Minister so he could educate the Health Minister on some finances and maybe figure out a way on how to improve their own portfolio as opposed to being in here and chirping and heckling from their seat. And, again, those bullying tactics that

I—from what I understand, was something very—was something that the Health Minister would do when they were in various schools.

So when we talk about taxes, we can just talk about, you know, the various property taxes that are happening, and they're actually getting some of the—they're passing those additional costs. So instead of the Kinew government actually funding education properly, what they're doing is they're forcing Manitoba school boards to bring in double-digit tax increases onto Manitobans and forcing Manitobans to pay more.

So, for an example, I know that there's a couple members that represent areas around the River East Transcona School Division. And so, we take a look at the last three years of Progressive Conservative government. I mean, for River East Transcona, the PCs increased funding by \$25.3 million. In the last three years under this Kinew government, they only increased money to the River East Transcona School Division by \$12.4 million. So under the PCs—had given more than double the amount of money to River East Transcona. So what is River East Transcona doing? They're raising school taxes over these last three years by a whopping 36 per cent.

I mean, Manitobans just can't afford this Kinew government. And that's one example of many. Of course, we've heard, and I've said it in the Chamber, and the lack of answers coming from the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister—I mean, Louis Riel School Division—I don't know why it's so difficult to get together with some trustees and have a conversation about the financial pressures that school divisions are experiencing. But Louis Riel School Division had said, and I quote—in their budget consultation with their residents, had said that their financial position has eroded—has eroded.

So, under the PCs the last three years, we gave Louis Riel School Division \$23.2 million. What has the NDP given in the last three years: \$12.2 million. Thank you for asking: \$12.2 million. Again, about half. So then, what is that forcing Louis Riel School Division to do? They're raising taxes by a whopping 43 per cent.

Now, honourable deputy Speaker, I'm going to—because the system again is crashing here, I'd like—there we go. Just watch—trying to watch the clock. So I'm encouraging all members of the government side to stand up to talk to our hoist amendment—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Member's time has expired. Member's time has expired.

Before introducing the next member to speak in debate, I wanted to make sure everyone was aware that French-to-English interpretation is now available for all members.

And I want to take this moment to thank all of our interpreters for the services that they provide on an ongoing basis, and particularly this long sitting.

Mr. Johnson: I rise today to speak about the hoist motion that's before this House regarding Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

The motion before us is pretty straightforward. It asks this government to pause and it asks this government to reflect and it asks this government to reconsider a deeply flawed piece of legislation that fails Manitobans on affordability, fails Manitobans on transparency and fails Manitobans on economic growth.

* (06:40)

And frankly, honourable deputy Speaker, after everything Manitobans have endured under this failing NDP government over the last two and a half years, five months may be the minimum amount of time this government needs to understand just how disconnected this budget is from the reality families are facing across Manitoba.

This hoist motion is necessary because the legislation does not meet the moment. Families are hurting, seniors are hurting, young Manitobans trying to build a future are hurting. Businesses, they're struggling. Homeowners are opening their tax bills in disbelief.

And what is this NDP government offering in response? Pennies. Pennies on junk food. Pennies at the grocery store while they take hundreds and thousands of dollars out of your back pocket, throwing away—higher taxes. This is what the NDP is about: higher taxes, higher fees, higher hydro rates and soaring—soaring—education property taxes.

Honourable deputy Speaker, the people of Manitoba understand exactly what is happening: this government's putting pennies in your front pocket and pulling and twenties out of your back pocket. That is the reality that Manitoba families are facing here today, and that is why this bill deserves to be delayed. Take time to reflect and take time to understand Manitobans' needs.

Honourable deputy Speaker, Manitobans were falsely promised affordability. Manitobans were falsely promised relief. They were falsely promised this government would make life easier. Life has become

more expensive under this NDP government. Manitoba now has one of the highest—not one of, it is the highest inflation rate in Canada at 4.3 per cent. Food inflation in Manitoba has climbed to 4.9 per cent, the highest in the country. And our farmers produce so much here, and we have, still, the highest inflation in the country.

At the exact same time families are paying more for groceries, for fuel, housing and utilities, Manitobans' economy is projected to grow by a meagre 1.1 per cent. Think about that, honourable Speaker. Costs are rising nearly four times faster than our economic growth in this province. And we just learned today—this is fresh off the papers—Manitoba delinquency rate rises amid the cost-of-living strain. And delinquency rate has increased, has ballooned to 2.32 per cent.

Families, they're falling behind. Workers, they're falling behind, too. Businesses are struggling to keep up, and this NDP government knows, as they are expecting, hundreds, if not thousands of workers to become unemployed. And that's why they have put up a Building Up Manitoba Program, to absorb these workers that are falling out of the workforce under this failing NDP government. They'll spend 3 and a half million dollars on a program, but will they spend any preventative money? No, not under this government.

And yet, this government continues pretending that a tiny PST exemption on a few prepared foods and junk food is somehow amounting to something meaningful for Manitobans. The cost of groceries, it's up. Fuel prices, they're up. Hydro bills, they're up. Insurance rates are up. Property taxes are up. They're actually beyond up; they're skyrocketing.

After all that, the government arrives with the budget—and I should clarify that: education property taxes are skyrocketing under this NDP government. And after all that, the government arrives with a budget implementation bill offering a tiny tax change on prepared food items and junk food and tries to sell this to Manitobans as affordability.

Families in Manitoba, they're not fooled; parents trying to pay for groceries, they're not fooled either. Seniors on fixed incomes, they're not fooled; young families trying to pay a mortgage, they're not fooled either. They know the difference between real relief and political spin. And with this bill, it's nothing but political spin.

Honourable Speaker, the NDP continues to falsely boast about removing PST on the junk food. But let's

talk honestly about what it actually means. Most groceries in Manitoba are already PST exempt. This government is trying to convince Manitobans that removing PST from a handful of prepared items and junk food is transformational affordability policy. It's not. We know better.

But under this government, education property taxes have exploded. Trying to take your mind off of those. Bracket creep is silently raising income taxes on every single year since this NDP government has been in power. Hydro rates? Yes, they're rising too. Fuel taxes continue to rise, and families are paying more and more and more everywhere else.

The government wants Manitobans to focus on pennies at the checkout counter while ignoring the hundreds of dollars disappearing from household budgets every year because of this government policy, and bracket creep is the main culprit. That's why this host-hoist motion matters. It's because the legislation needs serious, very serious, reconsideration. They need to take five months to reconsider this legislation and bringing something forward for Manitobans that is meaningful.

Honourable Speaker—oh, I'm sorry; honourable deputy Speaker—one of the biggest failures of this government has been the decision to eliminate the indexation of income tax brackets and the basic personal exemption. Well, they've had many failures. I guess I should just say this is one of the many failures that this NDP government has had.

But this decision to—it represents a hidden tax, and that's why they call it bracket creep. It's a hidden tax hike on Manitobans, and every single paycheque, you could be having more on that paycheque. But no, it's going to this NDP government because they think they know how to spend your money better than you do.

So wages need to rise just to keep up, or what else would help? Yes, increase the basic personal exemption. Without this, Manitobans are pushed into paying more and more and more tax every single year. They're not actually getting ahead, Manitobans, with this sneaky bracket creep tax. This is the definition of bracket creep. Keeping it at a set level while your wages go up; the government takes more. Very, very sneaky tax increase. And it disproportionately hurts low-income and middle-income Manitobans.

This government broke its promise to Manitobans when it cancelled indexation. They promised a middle-class tax cut. That didn't happen. Nowhere to

be seen. Not just in this BITSA, every BITSA that they've introduced since forming their failing NDP government. But instead, they find it quite easy to deliver tax increases under their government. And now they want a round of applause for giving a tiny fraction back through BITSA for junk food.

* (06:50)

Honourable Speaker—sorry; honourable deputy Speaker—Manitobans deserve far better than this. The Progressive Conservative caucus has put forward a serious proposal to address affordability, a proposal focused on meaningful relief, a proposal that would put real money back into the pockets of Manitoba families—or I should actually say it would allow you to keep more of your money. This isn't a tax credit you get at the back—at the end of the year. Each and every paycheque you get would be larger. Less taxes taken off means more money in your pocket.

We have called for a major increase in the basic personal exemption amount. We have called for moving forward to a \$30,000 tax-free threshold. That would mean up to \$1,535 in savings for each individual Manitoban, so up to \$1,535 you get to keep, spaced out on every single cheque throughout the year. You know how to spend your money better, not the NDP government.

So—now, that's an individual. Family income, up to \$3,070 annually. That's a lot to help with raising the kids, isn't it? This is real affordability. It's meaningful relief. This is the kind of policy that would actually help Manitobans struggling to make ends meet, help seniors remain independent.

All of us that—in this Chamber, that talk to seniors, those of us who will knock on doors and actually get out to see our constituents—one of the seniors' top values, what they value at the top of their list, is to remain independent. This bracket creep takes money out of seniors' pockets and puts it into the NDP's pockets.

People that survive on OAS and CPP who never used to pay provincial tax are now getting an increase from the federal government that's being clawed back by this provincial NDP government. Years, never had to pay. I'm talking to accountants this year, first time seniors are having that money and having to pay at the Province. That's what bracket creep is. It's silent. You don't hear it. It's not an announcement, but the NDP's doing it.

When families have more money in their pockets, they spend it in their communities. They support local

businesses, the mom-and-pop shops on the corner. That's where that money goes. They support restaurants. Lot of people, if they have a little bit of extra money at the end of the month, they like to take the family out and enjoy a meal.

And guess what? That's where the entry-level positions are for our workforce. A lot of our kids, our grandkids, they start working at restaurants. That's where they get their first—often they get their first taste of employment.

So this method supports jobs. Economic activity grows. Government revenues grow through growth of the communities, not through punishing taxpayers. But this government refuses to listen, and that's why we're still here at almost 7 o'clock in the morning.

They refuse to listen, but they might listen to you. Send an email to the Premier (Mr. Kinew). Send an email to the Finance Minister. Maybe they'll listen to you. Not listening to us. Instead, they continue pursuing politics that made Manitoba less competitive and less affordable.

Honourable deputy Speaker, even the City of Winnipeg is now effectively sounding the alarm over the impact of rising education property taxes. It's not just the city of Winnipeg; coming to a tax bill near you in rural Manitoba as well. This isn't just a city of Winnipeg issue; it's coming—mark my words. This year's property tax notices in the city of Winnipeg, they do tell a clear story though. So much so that the City had to put in a pamphlet to explain how much money the NDP has raised your educational property taxes.

And school divisions across Winnipeg, they've increased their taxes dramatically. Pembina Trails, 11.6 per cent; Louis Riel, up 11.7 per cent; Winnipeg School Division, up 9.5 per cent; Interlake, up more than 10 per cent; Seine River mill rates are increasing to nearly 11 per cent. Families are seeing massive increases on their education property tax bills—just that portion. Other ones are going up modestly, but the huge jumps are due to education property taxes.

Now, what's the government promising to fix that? Maybe we'll give you 100 bucks. Maybe next year. Yes, maybe not.

And now the City itself, as I mentioned, has included the insert to explain how education property taxes are driving the increase in your total bill in the city of Winnipeg. And they're frustrated. They're demanding answers. But what did they get from this NDP government? Silence, that's what they get.

So Manitobans are frustrated. We are as well, by the way. They know that this government is not being honest about affordability. This government keeps pretending that a modest rebate increase a year from now—maybe, maybe not—somehow offsets the huge increase Manitobans are paying today. Give you money sometime in the future, but no, we're going to take your money today; that's gone. And next year, it'll be up more; watch.

Manitobans don't buy what the NDP government is selling. This government's own numbers show that they're raking in—raking in—record amounts of education property tax revenue. It's climbing from roughly \$667 million last budget. Guess what it is? That's in the 2023 budget. Guess what it is now?

An Honourable Member: What?

Mr. Johnson: What, you ask? Yes, nearly \$1.1 billion; that's billion with a B—\$667 million in 2023, up to \$1.1 billion this year.

That's in black and white. Open their budget document. They'll tell you a different story, but it's in black and white in the budget document. Open it up, have a look.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So, that's almost \$400 million more annually. Where's that coming from? Manitobans. There's only one taxpayer here in Manitoba. That comes from you. That money comes from homeowners, comes from seniors that are trying to remain independent in their home, making choices between buying food or paying rent. Now it's between buying food or paying the property taxes. It comes from families already struggling with the cost of living. There's families out there struggling, as I mentioned earlier.

Government's expecting thousands of people to soon be out of employment, or why did they bring a program forward? And then government offers a tiny rebate—tiny little rebate, pennies, and they expect you to be grateful for this.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Manitobans are not naive. They understand basic arithmetic, unlike this NDP government. They know that saving few dollars at the grocery store does not make up for the hundreds or thousands they're getting out of you in taxes and fees elsewhere.

* (07:00)

This is why this bill deserves to be delayed. They need to go back to Manitobans. They need to face the

actions, the consequences that they're bringing forward in this BITSA bill. They need to talk to you. You want to talk to them, email the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the Finance Minister.

This government needs the time to understand that Manitobans are demanding real affordability measures, not symbolic gestures. Honourable Speaker—honourable Deputy Speaker, the failures of this budget extend far beyond affordability alone. This failing government continues to run massive deficits while providing little evidence to Manitobans that are receiving better service or stronger economic growth in return.

And it's not just that they are running a massive budget—predicting a massive deficit. They predict a massive deficit, then they overshoot it—way, way over. They had to come back to Treasury Board last year for hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars additional that they blew right through their predicted overspending to overspend even more.

So the Finance Minister forecasts a 'defidit'—deficit of nearly \$500 million this year. What's it going to be at the end of the year? Every single year, that target has been missed in a negative way. By negative, I mean bad. But Manitobans, they've heard these projections before. The government consistently misses its own fiscal targets—not by a little; by enormous amounts. Last year's projected deficit nearly doubled—doubled. The year before that, the actual deficit was vastly worse than the forecast. This government has no credibility when it comes to fiscal management. They never will.

Since taking office, the NDP has added approximately \$5 billion to Manitoba's debt in less than three years—\$5 billion. That's with a B, again. And what do Manitobans have to show for it? Are emergency wait room times down? No, they're doubled, quadrupled in some areas. Are hydro rates frozen? No, no, they're not. Are families finding life more affordable under this government? Absolutely not.

Instead, Manitobans are seeing higher taxes, higher costs and more debt. And every dollar added to the debt becomes a burden on future generations—your kids, your grandkids. They're going to be responsible for their out-of-control spending. Your kids and grandkids are going to have to pay for what they're spending today.

Now, the debt servicing costs are now consuming enormous amounts of the provincial budget. It is—well, I play a game. When the kids come in—schools

tour of the Legislature and they have all these questions that they ask and, you know, they hear their parents complaining about the NDP taxes that they keep taking, and they wonder what it's going towards. So, you know, health care, a huge portion of the budget. When you think we all come to deserve and expect the health care that we are getting, I actually think we deserve better with—than what the NDP is putting out.

Then, of course, education. That's our next generation that's coming along, and it's only proper to make sure they have a proper education. That's the second line in the budget.

And now, guess what the third line is? Debt. Interest. Paying interest on the NDP credit card, but you're paying the interest. Not them; they're running it up. But guess who gets to pay that interest. That's you, the Manitoban.

So this budget itself acknowledges that debt servicing now exceeds \$2.3 billion every year. So debt servicing is another term for interest. So just the interest on the credit card that this NDP government has racked up is \$2.3 billion a year. Now that's a large number, so I break it down when I'm talking to my school kids at tour. And that goes down to \$6.3 million every single day that is being paid on interest on the NDP credit card that they've racked up for the average Manitoban.

What could that \$6.3 million do every single day? Well, \$6.3 million that cannot go towards health care. Maybe that's why emergency room wait times are skyrocketing under this NDP government. That's \$6.3 million that cannot go towards infrastructure. Maybe that's why the roads are crumbling under this NDP government. That's \$6.3 million that cannot go towards education. Think of all the schools that could build. They're not doing it. But if they do decide to build one, they're going to put it through Manitoba jobs agreement and siphon some of that money off into the NDP coffers. That's \$6.3 million that cannot go towards affordability relief.

And that's what we're talking about here today, about why BITSA needs to be looked at and held back for five months, is because of you, the average ratepayer. We know you need affordability relief. This NDP government is not going to give it to you. That's why we're here at—oh, now it's 10 after 7 the next morning; we've been sitting since yesterday. It's 10 after 7. They're not listening; not a single NDP member has stood up to defend their BITSA bill. Not one.

Where are the major incentives for this mining? Where is—we went from sixth in the world down to 26th under this NDP government. They're not only failing with your affordability, they're failing with representing Canada and the minerals in the ground, and that is part of what could be—what could be part of our economy.

They say—went and turned sod on a gold mine in Lynn Lake. Who opened that gold mine? Yes, the sod turning might have been under this Premier (Mr. Kinew); it was the former PC government that made all of that happen. And sure, he got a nice shiny ribbon to cut, a chrome shovel to stick in the ground, turned some sod over, but we all know they're failing. They're failing in affordability; they're failing in health care; they're failing in infrastructure; they're failing in education; they're failing you, the average Manitoban.

Just the \$6.3 million a day, that can go a long way for affordability. Instead, they're sprinkling pennies around—shiny pennies though; they're making a big deal out of it. Shiny pennies. And then they're reaching around your back pocket and they're pulling twenties, hundreds and more out of your back pocket while they're holding up these pennies at grocery stores.

So with that, honourable Deputy Speaker, I want to conclude my remarks. I had a lot more remarks to go through, but the time goes very fast in this building and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to put the words on the record and you know who to email—

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

Mr. King: Good morning, honourable Deputy Speaker; and good morning, Manitoba. We've been here all night working hard for you Manitobans, to protect you from this affordability crisis that you're living through right now. A lot of passion on this side of the House to try and fight for that protection for you. Not hearing anything from the other side of the House, not much passion coming out of that whatsoever.

But it may feel like afternoon to us, but we're ready to work here as long as it takes to stand up for you and make life more affordable for you in this province.

* (07:10)

So I rise today in support of the heist amendment—oh, sorry, hoist amendment. It's more like a heist bill. Bill 53 is a heist because this government has taken

all that money out of your back pocket when they're putting pennies in your front pocket. So my mistake, the hoist amendment; I rise to speak on that today.

This motion that be amended by deleting all the words after the word that and substituting the following: The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day five months hence.

So I want to be very clear about what this amendment means and why it matters to all you Manitobans. We'll explain this amendment. It's not about preventing any debate here. It's not about refusing to deal with affordability. It's about recognizing that this legislation in its current form does not adequately respond to the economic reality facing Manitobans today.

A hoist amendment is one of the few tools available to the opposition when government refuses to listen to reasonable concerns and refuses to improve that legislation when we're hearing from Manitobans, and it's our job as opposition to stand here and fight for Manitobans in these types of situations.

So in this case, Manitobans deserve better than what is contained in the heist Bill 53. It just doesn't meet the moment, honourable Deputy Speaker. We're living through a genuine affordability crisis. Families are struggling with rising grocery bills, housing costs, school taxes, hydro increases, fuel costs, insurance costs and growing debt burdens. Businesses are facing higher payroll costs, weaker consumer spending, inflationary pressures, borrowing challenges and uncertainty, of course, around investment.

Municipalities are warning about infrastructure deficits, rising construction costs, waste water limitations and the inability to sustain growth without any support. And yet this legislation responds with limited, delayed and symbolic affordability measures. That's why this bill should not proceed in its current form.

Government needs to go back and improve the bill, honourable Deputy Speaker. This hoist amendment sends a message to government: Go back, improve the legislation, bring forward meaningful affordability measures like the ones that we've proposed from this side. There's still time for government to restore indexation, to meaningfully increase the basic personal amount, reduce the burden on working families and improve competitiveness. Those are all practical ideas. They're achievable ideas.

They're common sense ideas. And those ideas that would provide relief—real relief—instead of the political headlines that we're getting.

The government has framed this debate as though any criticism of BITSA is somehow opposition to affordability. Nothing could be further from the truth, honourable Deputy Speaker. We on this side of the House support affordability, and that's what we've been up all night fighting for for Manitobans. What we oppose is ineffective affordability policy.

Manitobans deserve more than pennies. The government wants Manitobans focused on tiny savings at the grocery store, but we know Manitobans are more intelligent than that. They understand the bigger picture. They know that saving a few cents on prepared food does not offset hundreds more in school taxes, bracket creep, higher utility costs, higher borrowing costs and rising housing expenses. Families are not asking for these gimmicks that the NDP government's bringing forward. They're asking for breathing room, and this bill does not provide near enough breathing room.

This amendment is about accountability. The government often talks about listening to Manitobans; well, this amendment gives them the opportunity to prove that. Stakeholders across Manitoba have already raised concerns. Restaurants, municipalities, business organizations, taxpayer groups, economists and, most of all, who we hear from is Manitoba families. Many are saying the same thing: this budget does not go far enough on affordability.

This amendment gives government an opportunity to pause, reconsider and improve the legislation. That's not obstruction by any means from this side. That's called responsible opposition, honourable Deputy Speaker. Good governments will accept compromise. Strong governments are not afraid of criticism. Strong governments are willing to compromise when legislation can be improved. And during affordability crisis right here in—Manitobans will expect all parties to work together in the public interest.

As I said earlier, we often see this at the municipal level. Municipal leaders debate passionately, but ultimately they understand they must find workable compromises for taxpayers.

You know, I spent 12 years in municipal government, and I heard the colleague this morning from Fort Garry mention he was in municipal as well, and it's totally different from what we see in here. People

worked together. They debated. They compromised. They came up with ideas and solutions that were in the best interests of the taxpayer to make life better for them. There was often debate, there was often disagreements, but there was nothing partisan. They worked together to make life better.

And no party has a monopoly on good ideas, honourable Deputy Speaker. If there are ways to improve this legislation to provide more meaningful affordability relief, government should welcome that discussion rather than resist it.

Now, after reviewing this legislation carefully, one thing becomes very clear, and—that it is not an affordability bill for Manitoba families. At a time when Manitobans are struggling with, as I mentioned earlier, rising grocery prices, higher housing costs, increased utility bills, fuel prices, school taxes, growing financial anxiety—and these are all things my colleagues and I have been talking about all night, and we'll continue to repeat that because that's what we're hearing from Manitobans—this government has responded with tiny measures that simply do not meet the moment.

Families need meaningful relief. Instead, they get symbolic gestures. The government wants Manitobans to celebrate pennies saved at the checkout counter while quietly collecting hundreds more through bracket creep, rising education property taxes, hydro increases, fuel taxes and other cost increases.

And we'll continue to repeat this. That's fundamental; that's the fundamental problem with this bill. The government gives with one hand very slowly and takes far more with the other hand immediately.

This legislation does not seriously reduce the cost of living. Again, we could go back to calling it Bill 53, the heist bill.

An Honourable Member: Hoist.

Mr. King: No, hoist amendment; heist bill. Does not restore competitiveness, it does not reward work for Manitobans, and it does not reflect the financial reality facing Manitoba households.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Manitobans are under pressure. We need to ground this debate in reality. Across Manitoba, families are feeling squeezed. We know that. I don't think anybody in this House could disagree on that. We hear it daily from Manitobans that they're \$200–50 per cent of Manitobans are \$200 from insolvency. People are not imagining this. They see it every month. They see it every day at the

grocery store, at the gas pumps, in paying their rent or their mortgages, when opening their hydro bills. And when school tax bills arrive in the mail, which we're seeing and hearing more about in the recent weeks, where they're on the rise.

And just in the defence of municipalities, when—I remember when I was on council, school property tax bills may have been 35, 40 per cent of your municipal tax bill. What we're seeing now is well over 50 per cent of a municipal tax bill now is education taxes. And we have to rely on our municipal councils to collect that. But it's caused by this NDP government when we see it on the rise.

Many Manitobans are living paycheque to paycheque. We know from affordability reports that many households are within a few hundred dollars of not being able to meet monthly obligations. I think that's a serious problem. And in that environment, government should be laser-focused on putting meaningful money back into people's pockets.

* (07:20)

Instead, this government is focused on headlines. Premier (Mr. Kinew) wants photo ops about losing PST from a handful of prepared grocery items, but Manitobans know the difference between a real affordability plan and political marketing. Saving a few cents on snack foods or prepared grocery items does not offset higher income taxes from bracket creep, rising education property taxes, higher hydro rates, higher MPI costs and increased borrowing costs. Families needed relief they could actually feel. This bill, again, does not provide that.

Now one of the most troubling parts of this government's affordability narrative is that they continue pretending taxes are not increasing. But Manitobans know better. We hear it every day. This government cancelled indexation of income tax brackets and the basic personal amount. It means Manitobans now pay more taxes every year, simply because inflation pushes wages upward nominally. And that is bracket creep, which we hear—we've been hearing about all night.

Bracket creep is a hidden tax increase. Workers are not actually becoming wealthier. Their purchasing power is often stagnant or falling. The government takes a larger share in it. That hurts. It hurts low-income workers, middle-income workers, seniors on fixed incomes. The seniors that helped build this province and young families trying to save and put away to buy

a car or a house. We see that. We hear from them, it's almost impossible nowadays.

I got four sons of my own and three of them are trades workers already. I still have one in high school. But they all still come home to eat. You know, they make great wages, a couple of them own their own homes, one has a daughter and yes, they feel the pinch, they feel the struggle every day to make ends meet. So when they come home and mom makes them supper, we don't have a problem with that. It happens quite often, but you know what, it's okay, it's okay. We're glad to have them.

What makes this worse than that government campaign on affordability is what they promised. They promised middle-class tax relief, index tax brackets and affordability support. Then they did the opposite, honourable Deputy Speaker. They cancelled indexation and increased the tax burden quietly. Now they want credit for tiny affordability measures while refusing to reverse the larger tax increases that they have already imposed.

It's not affordability policy. It's a political spin. If the government were serious about affordability, they would restore indexation immediately and, beyond that, they would significantly increase the basic personal amount so Manitobans could earn more income tax free. That would be real affordability relief.

The biggest weakness of this bill is what it does not do. It does not significantly increase the basic personal amount; that is the amount Manitobans can earn before paying provincial income tax. A meaningful increase here would help every working Manitoban, would support low- and middle-income earners, would improve competitiveness and stimulate the economy organically.

Instead, this government chose tiny targeted measures with limited impact. Significant basic personal amount increase would mean up to \$1,500 back for individuals and over \$3,000 annually for two-income families. That is meaningful affordability measures. That's grocery money. It's rent money. It's money for child care, transportation, utilities. Money to help pay the credit card payments, that we're hearing in the news that delinquency is on the rise. People can't make their credit card payments and the interest that they're paying on their credit cards is outrageous.

And unlike boutique tax changes, broad-based tax relief rewards will work. It encourages labour-force participation and improves Manitoba's competitiveness. Our province already struggles to compete with

Saskatchewan and Alberta. Those provinces offer significantly higher tax-free earning thresholds. Young professionals compare these jurisdictions. Skilled workers compare these jurisdictions. Entrepreneurs compare these jurisdictions. This government is making Manitoba less competitive at exactly the wrong time. And instead of addressing that problem, this BITSA bill, or heist bill as they call it, ignores it.

Now we've talked over and over again here through the night about the property taxes. So government wants Manitobans focused on pennies saved at the grocery store once again, but education property tax revenue has exploded. Talking about revenues rising from roughly a—colleague from Interlake-Gimli mentioned early—from \$667 million forecast in 2023 to nearly \$1.1 billion in 2026. It's an enormous increase. Costs come directly out of family budgets, out of seniors' savings and household finances.

And what's this government offering in return? A modest increase to the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, which is delayed to 2028. We need that relief now. It's phased in and, in some cases, it's clawed back. Families are paying substantially more now, but the relief is delayed until years later. That's not affordability, honourable Deputy Speaker; that's deferred political messaging. Now this government is phasing out affordability credits entirely for homes assessed between \$1 million and \$1.5 million. Again, another clawback, another competitiveness issue, another only-in-Manitoba tax policy.

A time when Manitoba is already struggling to retain professionals and investment, this government continues layering on policies that reduce competitiveness. The PST changes are more political than they are practical. The government's centrepiece affordability measure is the PST change in certain grocery-related items. But let's be honest about what this actually means. Most groceries were already PST exempt, and we know that. This bill mainly changes treatment on prepared foods and certain beverages. The average savings for many families will be extremely small. Meanwhile, groceries overall remain expensive, inflation remains high and other household costs continue rising.

Even stakeholders have criticized this approach. Restaurants Canada pointed out that identical prepared food products will now receive different tax treatment depending on where they are purchased. That creates market distortions, honourable Deputy Speaker. It disadvantages restaurants and restaurant workers.

And it creates winners and losers instead of broad affordability. If the government truly wanted affordability relief, there would be better options: restore the indexation, reduce income taxes, raise the basic personal amount or provide direct, broad-based relief.

Instead, this government chose a highly marketable but economically limited policy. This bill cannot be separated from the broader fiscal context. This government continues running large deficits while asking Manitobans to believe affordability is improving—excuse me. The problem is deficits are growing, debt-servicing costs are growing, and interest costs are growing. Debt servicing now consumes billions of dollars. That's money that's available for health care, infrastructure, education or tax relief—debt servicing.

Let's go back to the delinquency on credit cards. Well, here's our government leading that example to people. We're servicing our debt. We just keep digging a bigger hole and paying more interest. So we're not showing Manitobans a very good pattern here.

The government's forecasting record has not inspired any confidence. Projected deficits have repeatedly missed their targets. Deficit has grown dramatically since this government took office. Meanwhile, Manitobans are asking, what are we getting for all this debt? Because many people still see affordability pressures, longer ER waits, infrastructure needs, housing shortages and economic stagnation. If government borrowing explodes without meaningful improvements in affordability or services, Manitobans are right to ask serious questions.

* (07:30)

True affordability strategy also requires economic growth. You can't sustainably improve affordability without investment, productivity, job creation and competitiveness. Yet this budget offers very little for entrepreneurs, small businesses, farmers or private-sector investment. Business groups themselves said they expected more. There is very little in this bill to attract investment, support employers, reduce regulatory burden or to improve competitiveness.

Manitoba desperately needs economic growth. Without growth, tax burdens increase, deficits worsen and affordability deteriorates further. This government seems to believe affordability can be solved through small, targeted announcements, instead of structural economic reform. That approach will not work.

Another concern is transparency. Previous BITSA bills became massive omnibus bills with limited scrutiny. This year's bill is shorter, yes, but Manitobans still deserve proper public review and accountability. Budget implementation legislation affects taxpayers, businesses, municipalities, workers and, most importantly, our Manitoba families. There should be robust committee review and stakeholder consultation. That is not obstruction; again, honourable Deputy Speaker, that's democracy. Good legislation can withstand scrutiny.

If the government truly believes this bill helps Manitobans, then they should welcome public input. At its core, affordability means helping Manitobans keep more of the money they earn. This bill does not do that in a meaningful way. Instead, taxes quietly rise through bracket creep, education property taxes continue climbing, utility costs increase, debt grows. Manitobans are offered symbolic relief measures that fail to offset the broader financial pressures that they face.

Families need broad-based tax relief, competitiveness and meaningful affordability action. Instead, they got political marketing. A government serious about affordability would restore that indexation, significantly increase the BPA, reduce the tax burden on working families and create conditions for economic growth. That would put real money into family budgets. That would help Manitoba compete. And that would reflect the reality Manitobans are living every single day. This bill does not meet that standard, and for those reasons, I cannot support Bill 53 in its current form.

Now, I also want to speak briefly in the short time that I've got left here, honourable Deputy Speaker, about something larger than this bill itself. At a time like this, during a real affordability crisis, Manitobans expect elected officials to work together in the public interest. People are tired of partisan games. They're tired of political theatre. And they are tired of watching governments and oppositions dig into the trenches while families struggle to afford basic necessities. Because this affordability crisis is touching every corner of Manitoba society: it is affecting families; it's affecting seniors, workers, small businesses, municipalities, farmers and investors deciding whether Manitoba is a place worth investing in.

Manitobans are looking to this Legislature for practical solutions. Families are struggling. There are parents right now deciding whether to fill the gas tank

completely, whether to delay replacing worn out winter boots for their kids, whether they can afford summer activities or whether groceries need to go on a credit card again this month. Young families trying to buy their first home are watching mortgage rates rise, insurance costs rise, hydro costs rise and education property taxes continue to rise. Seniors on fixed incomes are increasingly worried that the homes they worked decades to pay off are becoming harder to afford to keep because taxes and utility costs keep rising faster than their income.

Small businesses are struggling too. Restaurants are operating on razor-thin margins while food costs increase, labour costs increase, energy costs increase and consumer spending weakens. Many local business owners are not asking government for special treatment. They are simply asking government not to make things harder.

Retailers are worried about declining discretionary spending. Farmers are facing uncertainty around the fuel costs, fertilizer prices, transportation costs, tariffs and borrowing costs. Construction companies and home builders are seeing higher financing costs to make projects more difficult to complete. Investors and employers are also watching Manitoba closely.

When governments create uncertainty, when taxes rise quietly through bracket creep, when debt grows rapidly and when competitiveness weakens compared to neighbouring provinces, investment decisions change. Businesses begin asking, why Manitoba? Why invest here instead of Saskatchewan or Alberta? Why expand here instead of somewhere more competitive? And that matters because private investment creates jobs, economic growth, tax revenue and opportunities for Manitoba families.

Municipalities are also sounding the alarm. Cities and towns are struggling with infrastructure deficits, rising construction costs, waste water and water system pressures, policing costs and housing demands. Many municipalities are saying clearly, they want growth but they cannot support growth without infrastructure investment and affordability improvements.

And all of these pressures are connected. That's why Manitobans expect governments to work together during moments like this. People do not wake up every morning asking whether an idea came from government benches or the opposition benches. They ask, will this help my family? Will this lower costs? Will this improve economic opportunity? Will this

make Manitoba more affordable and competitive? That should be our focus as legislators.

And, frankly, there are lessons we can learn from municipal government. Municipal councils across Manitoba operate in a far less partisan environment. Councillors may disagree strongly at times, but, ultimately, they are expected to debate openly, negotiate honestly, compromise when necessary and work towards practical solutions for taxpayers. Municipal government—if someone brings forward a good idea, the immediate response is not always which party benefits politically. The response, very often, is, will this help our taxpayers and residents.

That spirit is something this Legislature could use more of, because affordability should not be a partisan issue. Helping Manitobans keep more of their own money should not be controversial. Supporting working families should not become political trench warfare. And improving legislation through compromise should not be viewed as weakness. In fact, compromise in the public interest is often a sign of very strong leadership.

If government members truly believe affordability is their priority, then they should be willing to listen to constructive proposals, regardless of where those ideas originate. And opposition members also have a responsibility, not simply to criticize, but to bring forward practical alternatives, like we have done.

That is what healthy democracy should look like, honourable Deputy Speaker, not endless partisan division, not slogans, not talking past one another, but serious people coming together during difficult economic times to improve legislation and help citizens. Because Manitobans are not interested in political victories right now. They're interested in paying their bills, keeping their businesses open, affording groceries, attracting investment, growing their communities and creating a stable future for their children.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, that requires co-operation. It requires maturity. It requires governments willing to accept that no single party has a—

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

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Everything about this BITSA bill highlights the weaknesses of this government and explains why, despite the overheated rhetoric, it's not bringing results for Manitobans.

And we're talking about the politics of brinkmanship. I've been in this Legislative Chamber now for seven legislative seasons, and each and every one of those seasons, the premier of the day has threatened to extend the sitting. And that's never happened. Talking to the Clerk, in the 25 years the Clerk's been here, the premier of the day has threatened to extend the sitting 25 years in a row. But I am told the stat is that it's actually only happened in four occasions.

* (07:40)

But here we are again. It's that season where we have to make threats. I think the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his hapless House leader cannot move their own legislative agenda forward. And this isn't the first time. There's a pattern here. They're missing their own bill deadlines. Now, you have the entire government of Manitoba behind you, an army of lawyers and staff, and you can't meet your deadlines. I mean, that's basic governance 101. That's basic, you know, competent—basic competence.

The rules of the House are so weighted in favour of the government, especially with a supermajority, that they can easily get their agenda passed as long as they're simply organized and follow the rules. But this government can't do that. That's just so basic. This government isn't organized. It's chaotic, it's reactionary and it's performative.

And this has thrown the government's agenda off. And to get it back on track, Premier now is trying to bully this Chamber yet again and trying to bully the opposition to make up for his own government's lack of competence and ability to organize their own agenda. Manitobans are watching, and this isn't what they call good governance; this isn't how they want their government to play out.

So let's talk about why we're here, and this is the government's signature Budget 2026 policy, removing the PST off of junk food. Now this is the Premier's, it seems, sole answer to the cost-of-living crisis. We have an explosion of food bank use in Manitoba, at record levels. We have the highest grocery store inflation prices in the country. Year over year, it's a 4.9 per cent increase. Very few Manitobans got a 4.9 per cent increase in their salary this last year. That means everybody is falling further behind.

But we have a Premier who is a very talented hype man. I think he has, you know, a career in pro wrestling after this. But maybe not so well suited for governance. I think that's his true calling. But very much like Trump, he engages in delusional, over-the-top, soaring, grandiose rhetoric. He said that the

greatest accomplishment ever of a Manitoba government was his—of course; very Trump-like—suspending the gas tax for a year and borrowing \$340 million to do it.

At that time, gas was about 1.28 cents per litre. Now, anywhere you go in Manitoba, it's about 1.80 to 1.90 per litre. But there's no talk now about suspending the gas tax. And if that was the greatest thing the Premier has ever done or any premier has ever done, why wouldn't he do it again when gas is 60 cents higher per litre?

Of course, he then threatened not to bring back the US liquor sales in Manitoba until Trump releases the Epstein files. I like that one. I'm sure Trump is worried about that and is about to, you know, sign that executive order. I'm sure Donald Trump's right now crying himself to sleep. That's delusional, honourable Speaker. And it's silly and it's performative and Manitobans deserve better. That's not the actions of a serious premier.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I'd invite the member to bring his comments back to the hoist amendment and BITSA.

Mr. Wasyliv: All right. So what I'm trying to get at here is that the BITSA bill is more performative than real. And it's a pattern of behaviour for this government, where Manitobans are calling out for real action and they get this. They get a Premier who's more interested in chasing headlines and jumping to the federal Liberal Party than he is actually solving problems in Manitoba. He is literally just visiting.

And I wish him well. I actually think that he's a talented politician. I think that he actually has a real shot at becoming Prime Minister of this country, and I wish him all the best. I think he can do it. I think he can do it. I just wish he'd go tomorrow—[interjection]—so, yes.

Now, so food bank has doubled in four years in Manitoba, and we know food inflation is up year over year, and we know that it's happening faster than wages. We also know that, at the same time, the Premier's only raised the minimum wage by 40 cents. So this year it'll be, in October, \$16.40. And that's the other part of the equation here. The only response is cutting taxes. Well, if you cut taxes, who benefits? People that have money. And the more you cut taxes, the more wealthy people benefit from it.

But what happens if you don't have money? What happens if you're struggling? Well, cutting taxes

doesn't actually help you because you don't have anything to cut. So that comes—the other, opposite side of a cost-of-living crisis is wages, and wages have been stagnant in Manitoba. And this government has been unconcerned about raising wages. And that—and I'll come back to the minimum wage going up 40 cents in October to \$16.40.

If you work 40 hours a week in Manitoba every week for a year, no holidays, that's an \$832 raise. We know that just food inflation alone, the average price of cost for food for families is going to raise over \$1,000 this year and it's more likely about \$1,500 per family a year. Living wage in Winnipeg is at \$19.77. That's well below the minimum wage and Manitoba is, with the 40-cent raise, will have one of the lowest minimum wages in Canada.

And one in four Manitobans don't earn a living wage—overwhelmingly, women-led households, overwhelmingly with young children. We are the child-poverty capital of Canada. If we want to move the needle on that, one of the ways to do it is simply go to a living wage. You would pull tens of thousands of female-led families out of poverty by doing that. But this Premier (Mr. Kinew) won't. It's a real solution. It's in his power; he could do it today. He could do it in BITSA but won't

Put some contrast on that. MLAs received a cost-of-living increase April 1. They received a 2.7 per cent cost-of-living increase. For the Premier's salary, that's \$5,000 extra dollars a year—\$5,000. That's much higher than what this government's prepared to give Manitobans. You compare the \$5,000 to the \$830 for the minimum wage. In what world is that right? In what world is that fair?

Absolutely, Manitobans deserve to have the same cost-of-living increase that their Premier gets. And I have called and will continue to call on this government to peg the minimum-wage increase to the cost-of-living increase that we give our politicians. It is absolutely immoral that we allow politicians' salary to jump at 2.7 per cent a year when we're only raising the cost of living for Manitobans at 1.1 percent.

People are hurting, and obviously the Premier can read a headline. His signature policy is to cut the PST on junk food because, as we know, we already don't pay PST on healthy food and that's the only thing left that's being taxed. And, of course, we do that for a reason: junk food is a luxury; it's not something that can sustain a family. It's processed foods mostly made in the US or multinational companies with very little money going to Manitoba agricultural producers.

That money isn't staying here. It leaves the province, doesn't create jobs here. It creates jobs elsewhere.

* (07:50)

And unlike fresh food, where our producers benefit from it, taking the PST off of processed or junk food is subsidizing big multinational corporations, not local farmers and producers who are being left out yet again.

And, of course, we know that we are the child obesity and diabetes capital of Canada. And the government has actually brought in an action plan, and one of its pillars is prevention. Then, without any sort of hint of irony, brings in a junk food tax holiday, making it cheaper and easier for people to buy food that's killing them and costing the Manitoba health system tens of millions of dollars a year, completely undermining its own Diabetes Action Plan.

It's a contradictory policy that absolutely makes no sense, that doesn't support working families, certainly doesn't support taxpayers. This is borrowed money. We're borrowing money to do this. Somebody's going to have to pay it back. It's going to be our children and our grandchildren, with interest. And we're going to have to pay higher health-care costs because of the health aspects of promoting processed and junk food. It makes absolutely no sense. Nobody in the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) office thought this through.

So taking the PST off of junk food initially was supposed to be only for big-box, multinational stores like Walmart, and it initially specifically excluded mom-and-pop and ethnic grocery stores or inner-city grocery stores and, you know, oftentimes those small grocery stores are in food deserts—I have a number of them in Fort Garry. And it certainly seemed out of touch, not understanding that many Manitoba families go to these ethnic grocery stores for their food, go to the corner store in the inner city because there's nothing else around. They can't drive to Walmart.

And so, initially, the plan was basically going to have the effect of making smaller ethnic grocery stores and inner-city stores less competitive. It was going to raise costs for them and it was going to have the effect of Walmart having an easier time of driving them out of business. And, again, for this government that says that they want to lower prices by creating competition, this was going to do the exact opposite. It was going to actually remove competition in the grocery store world and was going to elevate the big

US chains or the big Canadian chains versus the small, you know, Persian or mom-and-pop grocery stores.

So, obviously, there was a pushback. And the government did listen, to their credit. But then what appears to have happened is it threw BITSA off; they had to rewrite it. And this is what happens when you don't talk to people, when you don't consult Manitobans, when you do policy on the fly and you're constantly in chaos and crisis and having to clean it up afterwards. It throws off your legislative agenda, and that's exactly what happened here. They obviously had to pull BITSA and rewrite it because they had made a huge, huge mistake.

If they had spoken to Manitobans, if they had talked to them, they would have learned, first of all, that Manitobans didn't want this; that they don't view this as real cost-of-living help; and, third, it's a disaster of policy that preferences large companies over small businesses. So this blows up in their face, there's pushback, and then, now, we're back to the brinkmanship, all because this government can't manage its own legislative agenda.

You know, we saw last year, the Premier, again, it's—you can put this in your calendar—the brinkmanship, we're going to sit, you know, all summer and we got to pass this Buy Manitoba act or else the sky is going to fall. We passed the Manitoba act by then, and then he doesn't proclaim it into law a year later. I mean, the world was falling apart last year and we're all, you know, on the road to hell if we didn't pass this legislation. It gets passed and then they don't make it a law a year later.

That's not a serious government. That's not how you seriously run a government or have a legislative agenda. Again, it's all empty. It's all performative. It's not serious.

So imagine a premier who didn't have to bully people, was organized, was strategic, could work with the opposition. And that's the point here, is the opposition is actually willing to work with the Premier. The opposition has been listening to Manitobans who've told them that this isn't good enough. And what they're asking the government to do is be better. And if the government is better, they will support them and, with quick passage, get this through and get their junk food tax through, even though they don't agree with it.

But they're prepared to compromise as long as Manitobans see real relief. But the Premier can't or won't do that. He doesn't want to give them the win. It becomes this toxic partisanship in this House where,

who are the losers? It's Manitobans. We're talking about helping Manitobans, and one side of the Chamber says you've got to do more, and the other side is fighting to do less.

Think about that for a moment. They want to give Manitobans less support, and they're willing to threaten and bully to do it. What kind of never-never land have we entered into, where a government acts that way, where the opposition is prepared to hand-extend the hand of co-operation and say, yes, we're going to work with you, but you got to work with us. And things have gotten so toxic and dysfunctional here that the Premier will not work with the opposition to fast-track extra financial help for Manitobans in their time of need.

So here we are again. The government has missed the guaranteed bill passage dates. It needs the opposition's support but won't talk to them, won't compromise, won't work with them. And they've created an artificial deadline. They claim that they can't bring in a PST cut until July 1, unless this bill passed. That's curious, because there is actually no law that says that, none on the books that actually says that they can't do that.

Also, there is no precedent at all saying they can't do that. In fact, the opposite is true, and in constitutional law this is a convention, a precedent, meaning that if other governments have done it in the past, you are allowed to do it in the future. Well, Brian Pallister, in 2019, cut the PST prior to passing BITSA. This Premier, at the time, said that was legal and proper for him to do that.

So what changed in seven years? Mark Carney, Prime Minister of this country, took off the federal gas tax this year before the federal government's excise tax, which is equivalent to their BITSA, had passed. The federal government is doing this.

It is pretty clear from conventions both in this jurisdiction and across Canada that the Premier is in a legal position to make this change without the passage of BITSA. But the Premier is attempting to create an artificial deadline, an artificial red line where he's standing up for junk food eaters everywhere and the opposition is blocking a few pennies being reduced from their Slurpees this month. Oh, how awful; what bad people.

To support this tortured position, they got the chief of staff to call up Leg. Counsel and get them to write an opinion. And within hours of that call, he produces it. I've had a chance to view that legal opinion, and it's concerning. It cites no legal authority.

It cites no legal precedent at all to back up its opinion. Basically, Leg. Counsel concedes that there hasn't been a law in Manitoba that says that this can't have been done, but comes to the conclusion that, in his view, the law is changing. Based on what? He doesn't say.

* (08:00)

Mrs. Rachelle Schott, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

There's no precedent. There's no convention. There's nothing indicating that the law is changing other than the chief of staff calling him up. And with due respect to the chief of staff for the Manitoba NDP, that's not a legal high authority.

So the conclusion in that opinion letter is not supported by anything—no black letter law, no precedent, no convention. And I tell you, as somebody who's been a lawyer for 26 years, I was actually shocked to see that legal opinion. That's not something that would be produced in a professional law firm. It would not be—that would get you fired, actually. If you brought that to your senior partner and—yes, your client should fire you, quite frankly.

I was concerned about seeing that and I was concerned that the chief of staff would politicize Leg. Counsel, put them in the middle that way and use them as a political prop. They have to be neutral. They have to stay above the fray of politics. They write legislation for all of us and they can't seem—be seen to, sort of, weigh in on one partisan debate over another and to use them in that fashion.

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

I would just ask the member to tie his remarks back to the matter at hand.

Mr. Wasyliw: Yes. So what I was attempting to do—because the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) claim that we need to have BITSA pass before July 1 is based on this legal opinion. So I'm discussing my concerns I have with this legal opinion and how it doesn't actually support the government's position that BITSA needs to pass by July 1.

So what does this tell us about the Premier's leadership style? Well, it shows that Premier has been incapable of working with other people. He neither listens nor consults the views of Manitobans. He reacts after the fact when he receives negative media coverage—and in this case it was universal negative media coverage—and then he abruptly reverses course, which throws his government into chaos and disorder.

They attempt to get things back on track by bullying and attempting to dominate those in their way, top-down authoritarian-style leadership that's, quite frankly, shambolic, ineffective and ultimately leads to poor policy outcomes for Manitobans. This is a Premier that needs to bully, to dominate all other political actors to submit to his will, and that is a troubling sign.

This whole episode becomes this performative power play, showing everyone everywhere that he's the strong man, and it's certainly undemocratic and toxic and has not done the people of Manitoba and our politics any favour. And, quite frankly, it's weak leadership. If you have to project strength by bullying, by dominating, by belittling your opponents, you're not strong; you're anything but that.

The opposition has reached out and is willing to help the government pass the bill. Be the grown up, extend the hand, sit down, have real negotiations, because at the end of the day, Manitobans are the ones that are going to win from that.

So that brings me, sort of, what's wrong with this bill. The initial estimates is that it will be \$24 million that—in reduced taxes, and with the expansion to corner stores and 7-Eleven, that number will be even higher. That roughly \$30 million could go a long way to really assist Manitobans. This is a government that has cut EIA rates three years in a row. Again, 4.9 per cent inflation year over year, food inflation.

Our most vulnerable Manitobans are having their supports cut by nearly 5 per cent year over year by this government. Our most vulnerable Manitobans, this government is punching down on and making life harder for them. If you took that same \$30 million and put that just in EIA recipients, you would pull a lot of families out of poverty, and it would make a real difference in their lives.

But this government had a choice to make, and that wasn't it. When they thought about cost of living, they weren't thinking about Manitobans—most vulnerable. They were thinking about a headline and how they could attract, you know, the most support for something that, really, would have the least impact.

And that \$30 million that they're borrowing for this each year is money that's not going to hospitals, it's not going to schools that are terribly underfunded, it's not going to our crumbling infrastructure, certainly not going to eliminate poverty or make real progress on housing or on the drug and public safety crisis—money that's desperately needed elsewhere.

Who's going to benefit most from this? Well, it's going to be bond traders in Toronto; London, England; New York. Because they're going to make money off of the bonds that we have to borrow in order to pay for this gimmick and this political stunt.

It will also mean higher taxes down the road for Manitobans because, at some point, the cheque gets due and some Manitoba is going to have to pay this back with interest. And if you had put this to Manitobans straight and you asked them, do you want your children and grandchildren to pay this money back or do you want a few cents off your Slurpee, it's a no-brainer. They'd tell you not to do this. It makes absolutely no sense.

By the government's own projections, this tax cut will mean a meagre \$100 savings, and that's if you're—buy a lot of junk food. And you can only buy a lot of junk food is if you have a lot of money, and so it means that wealthy people and poor people will be treated very differently by this tax cut, that wealthy people will be able to save \$100 a year but working families will not. And they will not even notice, you know, a savings where the government's best projections are \$8 a month.

So there's an unfairness to this. And under the Kinew government, the tax system itself has been skewed where the biggest tax breaks have gone to the wealthiest people and tax burdens have been shifting onto middle-class and working families. And we saw that with de-indexing the tax brackets. If you're at a highest income tax bracket, you're not indexed to begin with, so your taxes don't get affected. It's the people in the middle that actually get hurt the most and will see their income taxes go up the most.

So there's a pattern with this government: high-income earners are saving while middle-income and working families pay more. In fact, you know, on CBC, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) came out, specifically said he was opposed to raising taxes on wealthy Manitobans. He's clearly not opposed to raising taxes on working- and middle-class Manitobans, and that's been what he's done since he's taken office.

So my message to the Premier is to put aside petty, mean-spirited partisanship. Put Manitobans first. Work with the opposition. Let's find real solutions with real consequences for Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable deputy Speaker.

Mr. Piwniuk: It's an honour to—actually, when I was the Deputy Speaker, to sit in that chair. I don't think I stayed as—spent this late in a day into—in that chair,

so—but there were some late nights, and I remember being in that chair many—for many of those debates.

But I have the opportunity here—probably one of the earliest morning debates that I ever did; usually we'd start at 10. But I just have to say, you know, I want to thank my colleague who's sitting beside me, the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk), for bringing this hoist amendment to—hoist, not heist. Anyway, I want to thank him for bringing that.

* (08:10)

Because the fact is, you know what? Manitobans—we need to really defend Manitobans here. It was basically just like my—our colleague in Fort Garry had indicated, that this BITSA, the savings of junk food is basically, that's all basically a person's going to receive. And at the same time, wherever there is action, there's also consequences. And the consequences when it comes to reducing, back in the day, governments, federal governments, provincial governments put—being that the diets that Canadians and Manitobans had was eating too much junk food.

Back in the '70s, ParticipACTION came forward here to talk about how healthy people should be eating and how unhealthy Canadians weren't back in the 1970s. And with that movement of ParticipACTION, I recall, the importance of making sure that we live healthy lives—healthy diets, making that—sure that we live longer, healthier lives, but at the same time, we're not a strain on our health-care system.

And with this health-care system right now in shambles, but this government who came into power and during the election basically said that we're going to fix health care, but when they start putting—taking taxes off junk food, health-care food, instead of making more affordability here, honourable deputy—assistant deputy Speaker, this is really kind of backwards thinking.

The fact is, our health-care system is—we have an aging population. The population of baby boomers are—at one time, that used to be providers of health care are now starting to become consumers of health care. I'm—my wife just retired from being a—basically working with ERS, with Shared Health. She was clinical manager and the fact is, she says there's going to be more, more—a lot more retirees out there, especially in health care. No matter how much more we—health-care workers we put out there, there's a lot of retirees that are happening.

And right now, the baby—some of the baby boomers are still in the workforce, soon will be retiring.

And then now, the Generation X is starting to retire. But the Generation X, at the beginning of that generation were—the birth rate was higher and there's more of us in that higher cohort than there is in the Generation X going closer to the millennials. And that birth rate dropped in 1960s—mid '60s because the birth control pill came out and families—better family planning allowed women to be in the workforce, be able to plan when it comes to their careers. And—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

We've provided a little bit of lenience here, but if the member could please tie his remarks back to the matter at hand, the amendment related to BITSA, so.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, it's just basically, what I'm trying to get at here is that this bill here as—it's taking tax dollars off of junk food, which, again, the reason why I went into the health-care system is because the fact is, there's going to be an impact. There's going to be—if people are going to get unhealthier because that's the only thing that they can afford is junk food, that is really concerning when it comes to affordability in this province.

And my concern right now is that our youth—and I look—again, I just want to go back to the text exchange that we have as a family text exchange, where my son got his property taxes for the first time. And he had a budget. He had a budget to buy a condo in Brandon.

And at this age, as a Generation Z—zee, they basically are having a harder time than what I—what we had when I was going out into the workforce. He wants to get in the same career, which, again, I'm honoured that he actually wants to be a financial planner. He's taking all the appropriate courses. He's connected to a good firm in Brandon. He wants to start his life there.

But when he's trying to budget—try to even buy a condo in this day and age—it was very hard. Probably a little bit of help from his parents, his grandmother, he was able to buy this condo. But there's a lot of family members—there's a lot of people out there, lower incomes, that they say that they are trying to help.

Young people are in student debt. They need this affordability. With—now with the rate—rising of—when it comes to gas prices, the tariffs, the uncertainty, we are actually seeing a lot of young people having the highest unemployment rate that I haven't seen since the 1980s, when I was trying to get into the workforce.

And you know what, I just talked with my son. My son actually came with us. I was—I actually—I want to reflect of the opportunity when I was trying to get into the workforce or trying to get into a career in financial planning, to buy my own first agency at age 26. I had my person that I approached to buy the business—he actually passed away this past January, and he was early 90s.

But he give me the opportunity; give my wife and I the opportunity, affordability. When it comes again, I'm going to compare this story, because it really reflects of the young people, like my son had—trying to find ways to getting some help out here, especially when it comes for taxation and especially with that property tax, I want to tell the story here. I was able to—I was honoured to be asked by my former business partner's wife, who also was a business partner, to say a few words at this celebration of life that happened this past weekend.

And I just had to reflect of all the things that—all the good things that happened at that point. I was connected to this insurance agency in Virden from some—my wife's family friends who basically knew this other couple who were both in the insurance industry, Reg and Donna Wyatt. They were neighbours of my wife. And Reg actually was a councillor, a city councillor. They also had the Wyatt Nu Trend Insurance Agency in Transcona, and he was the one that basically said, I have a couple in—places in Manitoba that I have friends who are in the insurance industry that want to retire. They want young people to come in. And, again, I'm talking about the reflection that my son had to deal with when he's trying to get into this work—career.

I had the opportunity to buy an agency in Virden. I was 26 years old. My wife and I weren't even married at the time. We're just—we're engaged to get married that same year. We bought our first house that year, and I bought a business before I bought our house. And I just think today, with this young people that are being faced with such high inflation, high taxes, especially when it comes to property taxes, they're trying to find a house, and meanwhile they get slapped with a 60 per cent educational tax increase on their property taxes.

He's devastated that the fact is now he has to find out some—bring—earn some more money to pay for those property taxes that this government has basically trickled down to young people who are trying to make a go of their careers and their lives. As much as my son is, like, one of the fortunate ones to

be age 26, 25 when he bought his first property, there's a lot of 30-year-olds that generation that are still living in their parents' basement. And it's very concerning.

And we'll look at, right now, is that, you know, we—there's these immigration policies are being in place here now, that there's less immigrate—immigrants coming into Canada, especially in the United States. And that's—the impact here is where young people can't even start families or even have children because it's not affordable. And our birth rate in Canada has now gone down from 1.5 kids to 1.25 kids, because majority of the Canadians in this, right now—especially young people, live in major centres, major cities that are getting less and less affordable.

And Winnipeg is starting to become one of those cities. And the fact is a lot of times they have to worry about student debt, they have to worry about when it comes to, you know, trying to find a house that's affordable. I remember my son trying to find a—buy a house in Brandon. And every time he went to put a bid on a house, there'd be eight other bids out there. And then that house would go up, would actually be more, would be actually—whatever the listing price was, that house would go up by \$30,000 more in some cases. And the thing is that house wasn't worth that price.

So this is why I feel that these young people, especially the youth in our society—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order. Yes, order.

So we've provided quite a bit of lenience here. We appreciate all your stories and contributions, but we need to make sure that we're not straying too far from the hoist amendment to Bill 53, please.

* (08:20)

Mr. Piwniuk: Again, I was going back to the hoist amendment here when it came to—the fact is that we have to really look deeper for this government to actually give some leeway, especially get some opportunities for our youth when it comes to affordability.

You know, our—this generation of youth are really looking—are health sensitive. They make sure that their—you know, they're—they do—they work out. But the fact is, for a lot of them, this tax—taxes on all food is not really—isn't going to have any impact on our youth that are trying to have—be able to start careers, especially when they even—don't have an opportunity

even to start a career because the fact is the unemployment is so high.

When it comes to—there should have been a PST taken off of—when it comes to dining out. That was something that our side has indicated that it would help a lot of small businesses, especially when it comes to, you know, especially when it comes to restaurants. They really need that opportunity to be able to have more customers come in. And right now, I think a lot of young people that do dine out a lot—that used to dine out a lot, are not able to actually go out now with the rising cost of gas—gasoline to fill their cars. And this is where it's going to be really impacting the—this youth and our young people.

And so I see my colleague from Borderland, you know, he's—he has a family. I believe he has five kids now. And you don't see that a lot now, honourable deputy Speaker. The fact is, a lot of his generation are still living in their basements. And these are the—this is the generation that really, really could use some help when it comes to tax policy, especially with this BITSA bill that we're—been debating for hours here now, that we want to make sure that we are looking after our youth, we are looking after the—our future.

And the fact is, this—the NDP government continues put us—ourselves into huge deficits. And we saw all the road of good intentions is paved to hell, basically, when it comes to the NDP—the Selinger government. You know, even with the Doer government, when he came into power. You know, these—I know the Filmon government put laws in place to balance budgets.

And then Gary Doer comes in in early 2000—1999, 2000, and continues to try to balance the budgets. But then the cost of Manitoba Hydro—the profits of Manitoba Hydro that—which was—we handed to them back in '99—was in very healthy condition as a Crown corporation.

But then this—the Doer government started balancing their budgets based on Manitoba Hydro profits, basically robbing Peter to pay Paul. And then when it comes to, you know, the deficits, that—when I first started back in 2014, for many executive—consecutive years, the Selinger government had basically created a huge deficit over the years. And they would always come out with a budget that they were going to only have \$300-million deficit, when it ends up being 700. It always seems to be higher than what they projected—the actuals.

In our case, it's always the opposite. We always—back in, I remember, 2020, before really COVID hit, we actually had—we were estimating a \$200-million deficit, but ended up we had actually a surplus that year. But then, of course, COVID came, and that was another thing that we had to challenge ourselves. But then, again in 2023—2022, 2023—no, in 2021 and 2022, we had another surplus that we actually gave to this current government right now.

And the fact is, you know, when it comes to helping especially consumers by giving them a break with this BITSA bill, providing more, like what our exemption was, of 300—\$3,000, which would put about \$3,000 in the pockets of Manitobans, this would actually—will stimulate the economy. We saw that in the United States when they did tax cuts. The economy actually grew because people with—again, 65 per cent of people really pushed the economy. They—65 per cent of the economy is basically consumer spending, and when consumers have money they have confidence, they go out and spend it.

So that is why we want to put some help for Manitobans right now, especially with our youth, especially that they don't look at other jurisdictions to go to because they are more competitive when it comes to taxation, and that's what we saw back—like, history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme. We saw that with the Selinger days, where a lot of our young people moved to Alberta, to Saskatchewan.

And we have a province like Saskatchewan, who is actually—have become a have province and the affordability there, and we're seeing right now in Manitoba, in western Manitoba, with the higher taxes for nurses, the cost of living for—in Manitoba, and with the, basically, incentives that they get in Saskatchewan. A lot of our health-care workers are going—even though they might live in Manitoba, now they're going to Saskatchewan to work. And some of them actually are moving there, too, because the fact is there are better tax treatments there.

You know, they are basically increasing the tax brackets with—every year, based on inflation. We did that when we came into government because we wanted to compete with Saskatchewan and Alberta. But now, again, this budget that the NDP put out here did not actually allow us to index with the tax brackets. And that's putting a lot of people—and just like the member from Fort Garry just before me had said, that it's going to hurt the middle class. The taxes are going to be more on the middle class because the fact is even unionized employees, when it comes to

workers that are working in factories that are unionized, or teachers or nurses, as soon as you don't increase the tax—the bracket—tax brackets, they tend to pay more and more in income taxes.

And that's kind of a sneaky way of actually increasing taxes because the fact is people don't—aren't aware of it. I think my colleague from Steinbach had really explained that: that, again, the people are not aware of that. And this is why, with debating that we're doing right now, we want to show the public that we're fighting for them, that this is why we're spending many, many hours to have some relief for our constituents, for the people of Manitoba when it comes to this BITSA bill.

And the fact is there's been no change. People are aware of it, that, you know, maybe a rotisserie chicken. They always say that rotisserie chicken in Costco, are a loss leader for Costco, because it gets people in there, just like their hot dogs. They'll probably never increase that, but how much taxes do you save on a rotisserie chicken?

And so the fact is, you know what, honourable deputy Speaker, we want to make sure that Manitobans—we're fighting for Manitobans when it comes to affordability. I thought that side would be the ones that would fight for affordability because that's what—how they basically went on their elections to say about affordability. But all they did was really help their unionized friends.

You know, the teachers right now are one of the highest paid teachers in Canada. Back in the day of the Selinger government, the teachers were the second highest paid, but we had the worst results, honourable deputy Speaker. Manitoba was dead last when it came to the education, and I think this is no different. I think Manitoba, right now, teachers are one of the highest paid—half the caucus is teachers—and they want to make sure that their friends were taken care of.

And so, honourable Speaker, you know what? Not everybody can be a teacher. Not everybody can be a health-care worker, but there's a lot of people out there that are employed by private businesses, and those are the people that are being hurt the most. And when my son wants to go out and buy a business—insurance business—investment business—the thing is, he's impacted because the fact is now he has a mortgage. He has higher taxes that he has to pay. It's harder and harder for him to get financing to buy an existing business.

* (08:30)

In this day and age, right now, there's not a lot of hope for young people when it comes to this NDP government. You know, we basically are now here for our youth right now. And our population, again, is aging, and we want to make sure that this BITSA bill that we're debating right now, and the hoist amendment that has been brought forward by my colleague from Swan River—we want to make sure that we're the voice for all Manitobans.

Our seniors, who really need a lot of health care, home care, providing for them is going to get harder and harder. Because if young people are trying to make ends meet, they have to either move or they have to go change careers.

This is a fact right now, honourable deputy Speaker, that you can raise taxes; you can keep the tax bracket the way it is and not increase it by inflation. More and more people are paying taxes. And when it comes to the property taxes, right now there should be some relief. When we came in, we wanted to remove education taxes on property. We were doing it. We went up to 25 per cent the first—one year. The next year on our budget we went to 20–50 per cent. If we were in government we would have went to 75, and eventually by now there would have been no education taxes.

Again, education should be financed just like the way that health care has been financed, that there's no extra costs on except for potato chips and drinks. That was one of the reasons why those items were taxed. They were taxed because the fact is that was causing health care, much like cigarettes. Governments realized that health care was really impacted by poor diets, by smoking and excessive drinking, and that's why taxes were put on those items. It was to make sure that our health-care system was financed through bad—when it comes to bad habits of the population.

And how much alcohol really is impacted to an individual who is abusing of alcohol, and the fact is it does. I know so many number of people that have to have excessive health-care treatments and needs because of excessive drinking. And that is why there has been more taxes put on those items. And now this government is taking taxes off of junk food, potato chips, soft drinks, and this is why this is going to be an impact to our health-care system in the long run.

And at the same time, I want to say that, you know, my constituents in Turtle Mountain—you know, I've been there for—since 2019, but for many of them, I was there since 2014 because our boundary commission changes. I still have half of the population

when I started. You know, they talk to me about the needs for health care in their constituency. And the fact is, it's young people. And it's young people that we need, especially in the town of Melita.

I remember when I was a minister. I remember going to a health-care town hall meeting, because the fact is it wasn't because we weren't financing health care. The money was there. The CEO of Prairie Mountain Health at the time was there to talk. And it was about young people not in the workforce any more. When you have an aging population and you don't have tax treatment, especially this BITSA, to help young people to want to stay, and stay in small communities, but when you have Saskatchewan just on the other side, a lot of those young people who see the benefit of being in Saskatchewan, the taxation and the health care, like the opportunities in health care. They're paying a lot more because they're more able to actually pay more for health-care workers, and that's what we're always competing against.

And right now, a place like Melita is going to be really impacted, especially if we find that history doesn't repeat itself. We're scared that next thing that's going to be—that we have to debate here all night again is probably PST, because I'm sure that when this government, much like the Selinger government, got into financial troubles, they started putting taxes on house insurance, commercial insurance.

And I was from that industry. I was a broker at the time. When that came in, I just thought, oh, this government is out of control when it comes to their spending. And that's what's probably going to happen again, honourable deputy Speaker, because I remember it always says, history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

And the way that this NDP government is going, we're going to be seeing the same impact that we saw in the Selinger government. When it comes to increase in taxes, especially the PST, we'll probably be here—I can foresee the next term, we could be here debating for—into the night again on the PST because I can see that happening again. The trajectory of their finances, that they have good intentions, but, like—my mother-in-law used to always have a good saying: The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

And the intentions of this government and not helping young people—I saw that what happened back in the 1990s, like I said yesterday, that we saw a lot of young people—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

While stories from the past and speculations about the future could be useful at one point in time, could the member please tie his comments back to the hoist amendment to Bill 53, please.

Mr. Piwniuk: But, yes, like I said, you know, I've—I would like to give my other colleagues some opportunity to put some words on the record here, honourable deputy Speaker, on this hoist amendment. And I would say that this is why we're here tonight—today and into the night—that we want to make sure that Manitobans are going to be looked at very closely when it comes to tax policy from this BITSA bill that really did not put any opportunity for relief, especially in this day and age when there's uncertainty out there when it comes to tariffs, the high cost in gasoline.

And the fact is, you know what, honourable deputy Speaker? There is a lot of money that actually gets generated by this province when it comes to oil prices. I don't think anybody really knows in this Chamber here how much oil actually gets produced in Manitoba in the southwest corner. It's usually forgotten because the fact is we do—for 70 years, produced a lot of revenue in this province. A lot of times we got forgotten in that east—western region.

But there is increase in oil production, especially now when there's—shipment of oil is being blocked by Iran. And that 30 per cent of the oil comes from that area. It is now being that we see some relief when it comes to jobs in our—my area, because oil prices are higher, there's more production, there's more revenue.

And a lot of times—a lot of those oil rights—the Province of Manitoba has the rights to those oil rights. This could be an opportunity, and I think that's why Carney, the Prime Minister, actually put gas prices down for Canadians, because the fact is we—he knows that there's extra revenue when it comes to oil production in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

We're on the home stretch here. I don't enjoy interjecting on your remarks, but we just really need the member to tie his remarks back to the hoist amendment to Bill 53.

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, the thing is, what—honourable deputy Speaker, I'm saying this is why I think there should be some more relief. I'm explaining why there should be relief when it comes to this BITSA bill. We are seeing revenues come up in the oil prices, which is really impacting our—the people of Manitoba when

it comes to paying higher prices at the pump. There should be—there is a relief here.

This is what I'm getting that. I'm using the example of Canada, that there is revenues out there that could offset this affordability situation that we are faced in with higher oil prices, higher gasoline. We are as a province getting more oil revenues, and I would say that this is an opportunity to really put the—have this BITSA bill be able to accommodate some of the tax relief that Manitobans deserve. And that is why I was going that route.

So thank you, honourable deputy Speaker, for the time.

Mr. Guenter: I appreciate the opportunity to rise this morning once again and put a few more words on the record with regard to BITSA, Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

* (08:40)

And it's been interesting listening to the debate, and certainly proud of my colleagues on the PC side of the House for bringing forward the concerns of Manitobans as they struggle with the rising cost of living in this NDP economy, and as we continue to advocate and fight for real tax relief for Manitobans, for Manitoba taxpayers, Manitoba families. And it's just interesting.

Once again, you know, you've got the entire NDP government and no—sitting there, and no one's standing up to say anything. And we've been here since yesterday afternoon, and we've been debating this round the clock. There's been plenty of opportunities for them to get up and to speak and no one's had really anything to say thus far.

But, you know, I want to acknowledge my colleague, the MLA for Steinbach, for going on almost four hours, and he did so in a very informative and insightful way. And I know several years ago—I mean, Canadians consume a lot of American news and the American political system is a bit of a mess. But, you know, when you have US senators there reading Green Eggs and Ham or declaring themselves to be Spartacus in their hour-long or many—multi-hour-long talks, you know, that's pretty thin gruel and it doesn't seem like serious debate.

So, you know, I credit my colleague, the MLA for Steinbach, for really putting some really informative and really interesting insights on the record, which I think are very insightful. And I think I would actually encourage this NDP government to go back

and read those comments and read the comments of the opposition, because it seems like they've had their fingers jammed in their ears and they certainly aren't listening to the concerns of Manitobans, and we see that reflected in this budget.

And, you know, as my colleague, the MLA for Steinbach, was saying in his remarks that—and other colleagues have said, as well—that, you know, this budget was really hyped. And I felt that way too, reading comments about, you know, the government's going to have something for—to help with mortgages, is going to have something for renters, for affordability for renters, going to have something across the spectrum to help Manitobans with affordability. And I'm thinking, okay, this is going to be interesting. Let's see what they do. This could be big.

And, you know, to sit there and listen to the budget speech and to go through this whole budget process and realize there is literally nothing in this budget for Manitoba taxpayers, for Manitoba families. It is just bewildering and it's just—it's incredible and it's amazing that a document this thin got that much hype and that much attention. I think it was, frankly, a political miscalculation by the government.

But I think what they were trying to do is to make it look—be able to talk about cutting taxes without actually cutting taxes. And that's in keeping with a pattern of behaviour that we're seeing from this government, in particular, this NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew), where they'll say, as the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) said and others have pointed out as well, that it's all about chasing those headlines and grabbing that spotlight. That is what it is all about. Nothing else really matters. It's not even governing. It's about staying in the spotlight, about hogging that limelight.

And so what happens is this NDP Premier will go out and, like he did in the last election, in the leaders debate when he's asked, what's the first thing you do in your first 100 days in office: Bail reform. Well, he's—you know, like, that's a federal issue, and—but he wants to grab the spotlight, so he inserts himself into that debate and commits to Manitobans that he's going to deliver bail reform in the—in his first 100 days. That never happened, but he got the sound bite. And we're almost three years on now and haven't seen anything on that front.

You know, when it comes to comments about enforcing a proposed social media ban with billion-dollar fines, I mean—and then no details to back that up. That's another example of chasing

headlines. Saying things like no US alcohol on shelves in Manitoba until President Trump in America releases the Epstein files. I mean, that's ridiculous. But what the—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

Could we please have the member tie his comments back to the hoist amendment to Bill 53.

Mr. Guenter: Yes, absolutely. And I certainly will be doing that, and I thank you for your indulgence.

So what I was saying though, is that we have an NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) who I think really—says these things in the instance of saying that there's going to be no US alcohol on shelves in Manitoba until President Trump releases the Epstein files. What he's really trying to do is he wants to be named.

He wants to grab the attention of President Trump, who also knows how to drive headlines, and he wants to be named in one of his tweets. That's really what that is all about. There is no serious policy, no serious government there or governance; it's just—or leadership—it is just purely trying to chase headlines and trying to feed this social media beast, you know, and it's really a dangerous thing, because he is the Premier of a province of—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order. Order.

Yes, the member was already asked to redirect to comments back to the hoist amendment to Bill 53, and we haven't heard any wording to such effect since the last redirection. So I'd kindly ask you to do so.

Mr. Guenter: Yes, so I would have probably already done that had you not interjected there.

But my point is just that there's no serious leadership at a time when Manitoba needs leadership. And I think one of the most significant ways in which you demonstrate that as a premier of a province of one and a half million people is as it regards the annual budget, which we are debating today.

In particular, the hoist amendment to the budget, which has been brought forward by the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk), which reads that that the motion be amended by deleting the words after the word that and substituting the following: Bill 53, the budget implementation and stacks—tax statutes amendment act, 2026, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day, five months hence.

So I think this is a really important amendment to this budget because, as I was saying, we've had a

government entirely obsessed, and an NDP Premier entirely obsessed with chasing headlines at a very serious time in our provincial history, at a time when Manitoba families are struggling to make ends meet. And, you know, this is really concerning, because they should have paid more thought to the priorities of Manitobans. They should have paid more thought to some good policy when they were developing their budget bill, which, as I said, is the most significant document that the government passes every single year.

And they didn't do that because of this obsession with trying to chase headlines. And it's really unserious leadership that we have here in this province. And I think it's important for this—you know, I just want to remind this NDP government, I mean, and the NDP Premier, I mean—one and a half million people in this province.

We're a relatively small province, but we've got a lot of people here in Manitoba with a lot of potential, let's be clear. But at the same time, there's also a lot of people in our province who are struggling to make ends meet. And a lot of these people work incredibly hard. They contribute to their families. They contribute to their communities. You know, they're a credit to our society. They're—they—and this is a difficult time for them, because of the policies that have been imposed: the anti-growth, anti-opportunity policies of this NDP government.

So, again, happy to be here and to continue to take opportunities to speak to this bill and hopeful that the—you know, the NDP government is listening. But as I said, if past behaviour is any indication, I don't think that's what's actually going on here. I think is in the same way that they had their fingers jammed in their ears when they developed the budget, they've got that same kind of intransigent nature right now in this debate.

* (08:50)

And it's just unfortunate, because here's an opportunity to deliver real income tax relief for Manitobans. And that's—let's be very clear, that's exactly why we are here. I mean, that's exactly why we have been debating BITSA and now, in particular, the hoist amendment to BITSA and asking, through this hoist amendment, that BITSA be delayed for another five months is because we are advocating on this side of the House as a PC team for real affordability, for real tax relief for Manitobans. That's exactly what this is all about.

And you've got an NDP government on the other side that is doing absolutely everything it can to avoid delivering on that. And so what we are saying through this hoist amendment is, no, this isn't good enough; send this back, you know, put it on the shelf and go and consult with Manitobans. Go out and do the actual work of governing. Go out and actually listen to Manitobans and implement real—develop and then implement real policies that deliver real relief and real results for Manitobans.

And, you know, they've got plenty of opportunity to improve. There are many areas in which they could improve. I mean, health-care wait times have doubled in their short time in office. In the three years that they've been in office, they've doubled. Across the seven years that the previous PC government was in power, ER wait times averaged 2.3 hours. And now we are seeing new records in our ERs across Manitoba. You know, 14-, 15-hour waits now seem like a regular thing within our ERs. And, sadly, we've had four Manitobans in the last number of months pass away waiting in an ER. And those are just the ones that we know about.

You know, I—and our hearts go out to the loved ones and all of those impacted. And that's something that should never happen. And I know that every Manitoban wants to see improvement in our health-care system. And, you know, that's an area that this NDP government could focus on and actually deliver some real results.

And, unfortunately, since they've been elected, we've gone backwards. You know, wait-lists have gotten longer. They took away the opportunity for people to seek treatment and diagnosis and surgical care elsewhere across the country, wherever there was capacity to do that. They took that ability away.

So I had constituents then saying, well, hey, I was scheduled to have a hip or knee surgery done outside of Manitoba somewhere, you know, under the previous PC government through the program that they made available at the time, and now thanks to this NDP government closing that down, cutting that program, eliminating that program, there's now no ability for me to do that. I go back and languish on a wait-list somewhere.

So despite the fact that through this budget, the NDP is now—since they've come into office, they're spending \$2.4 billion more on health care, the results are abject. They are terrible. We're actually going backwards despite them spending more. And that's, again, consistent with a pattern of behaviour that

we see any time NDP governments take office in Manitoba. Manitobans end up spending far more and getting far less in results. We saw that in the 17 previous years that they were in power, those long, dark 17 years.

And they left our PC government at that time with two concurrent runaway trains, basically. And one was a runaway fiscal train escalating an out-of-control deficit and a spiralling fiscal picture. And then the health situation was really bad at that time as well.

And, again, look, this is an NDP government, as they were then, that isn't dealing with a major—a global pandemic, right, like the PC government grappled with. They don't have those challenges, and yet things are still getting worse, despite them throwing piles of money at the system.

So it again speaks to the fact that they aren't doing their jobs; they should focus perhaps a little less on chasing those headlines and on saying those outrageous things, and on trying to grab the limelight and a little more on doing their jobs. A little more on consultation, you know, and just doing the work of government. They didn't get elected to be activists. They didn't get elected to change everybody's mind on every issue. They got elected to run—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order. Just—*[interjection]* Order.

I would just ask the member to please tie his remarks back to the hoist amendment to Bill 53 and also caution the member that you had previously reflected on the Chair, which we should not be doing, and you know that.

So, the honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter).

Mr. Guenter: Yes. So as I was saying and as I've been talking about the budget through my remarks, that—and in particular, the hoist amendment is that this government should really take their cue from this hoist amendment and take this opportunity to set BITSA back on the shelf for about five months and go and do some consultation, go do the real work of government. And I think that's pretty important.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

In the meantime, what we are seeing in the data is pretty concerning. Manitoba's Bureau of Statistics confirmed last week's dire inflation numbers from Statistics Canada and the worsening trend that Manitobans are experiencing under the NDP. The new data shows that Manitoba families are facing

an intensifying affordability crisis as inflation accelerates across every major household expense category.

The all-items consumer price index, CPI as we call it, which is one way that we try to measure inflation or the rising cost of living: that measure rose 4.3 per cent in April, 2026—so this last April—compared to April 2025, marking a sharp increase of 1.3 percentage points from March—from the previous month—and signalling renewed financial strain for households already stretched by rising costs.

The latest figures reveal that all eight major CPI categories experienced year-over-year price increases, underscoring the broad-based nature of inflationary pressures in the province. Even more concerning, six of the eight categories saw faster growth compared to the previous month. So the trend is actually accelerating, heading in the wrong direction and highlighting that cost increases are not only persistent but they are actually speeding up in several critical areas.

As Manitoba moves further into 2026, the latest CPI figures suggest that the affordability crisis is not easing but instead entering a more acute phase. The combination of accelerating inflation in key categories and persistently high costs for necessities is deepening Manitoba's affordability crisis, and Manitoba families have nowhere left to cut their budgets.

Transportation costs emerged as the most significant driver of rising inflation, with year-over-year growth jumping to 8.3 per cent, a dramatic increase of 5.3 percentage points from March. This surge is particularly impactful for Manitobans who rely heavily on personal vehicles and long-distance travel, compounding the cost of commuting and essential mobility.

And it's interesting that this is the case while we have an NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) in Manitoba who brags that the most—who says, again, in an outlandish statement, that the most significant thing ever done by a Manitoba government is to eliminate the gas tax. And, well, Manitobans are paying that gas tax today. And boy, our gas prices, have they gone up. And that's, once again, a driver of inflation in Manitoba. And Manitoba leads the pack across the country, a clear leader. Manitoba is a clear leader in rising—in the rising cost to living, in inflation.

Food prices remain a persistent concern, and this—remaining at a 4.9 per cent year-over-year increase,

unchanged from March. But this level of inflation continues to erode purchasing power and disproportionately affects lower and middle-income households.

At the same time, recreation costs, while still rising year over year at 2.4 per cent, saw the largest monthly slowdown, suggesting some moderation in discretionary spending categories. Clothing costs and household needs also saw inflation increases.

* (09:00)

And, you know, it's interesting that while we've been debating BITSA and the various motions, and now we're debating the hoist amendment and the rationale for delaying the implementation of BITSA by five months, is that the Winnipeg Free Press, just yesterday, just while we've been in debate, published an article entitled, Manitoba delinquency rate rises amid cost of living strain. And this is according to Equifax. And these are people that should know something about the cost of living and how Manitobans are coping or not coping in this NDP environment.

And the article actually goes on to say that Manitobans are increasingly missing credit card payments as the cost of living rises. It goes on to say that non-mortgage debt in Manitoba jumped 1.84 per cent when comparing January through March to the same time last year. Manitobans' average non-mortgage debt hung around \$18,568. Meanwhile, the measure tracking when Manitobans pass payment deadlines by at least 90 days, called a delinquency rate, hiked 2.32 per cent year over year, according to new data from credit reporting agency Equifax Canada.

Equifax clocked lessening delinquency rates in most provinces last quarter, so most provinces across Canada the delinquency rates went down. But Manitoba's year-over-year increase went up. That's concerning.

An Honourable Member: That's not good.

Mr. Guenter: No. That's not a—you don't want to be an outlier in that regard, and yet that's where the NDP government has us. The keystone province's 90-plus day delinquency rate, or 1.8 per cent, was slightly higher than the national average of 1.77 per cent. And Rebecca Oakes, the Equifax vice-president of advanced analytics, actually said that there's something on the affordability side or cost of living that's really impacting the province.

Hmm, interesting quote: There's something on the affordability side or cost-of-living side that's really impacting the province. And you know what

I think it is? And I think what Manitobans are beginning to realize in light of this NDP government's income tax increases, their—this greedy, money-hungry NDP government's tax increases when it comes to not only income taxes but also education property taxes—is that, you know what? The reason why things are getting more difficult is because you have an NDP government that is good enough at politics that they will bring in a junk food tax reduction so that they can say the words tax cut or cutting taxes or affordability. They can at least say that, when really, it's a measure that, I mean, if you consume soda and chips and junk food, that'll save you maybe eight bucks a month, so less than \$100 a year.

But while they're doing that, what they're actually doing is hammering Manitoba households, taking more money out of your pocket and spending that. And so as a result, the cost of living is rising and it's getting to be more difficult to manage in this environment, thanks to a government that is, you know, that's actually taking more money away from low- and middle-income families at a time when they really need help.

So what, on this side of the House, are we proposing? And I mean, we have proposed—and I see my time is running short, but, you know, we have proposed over—for many months now, but particularly this session, on the PC side of the House, several measures. I mean, we had a measure a couple weeks ago to eliminate—calling on the government to eliminate the home buyers' land transfer tax, to eliminate the land transfer tax for first-time home buyers. And they talked it out. They prevented it—they failed to support it. They were quite vocal about the fact that they did not support that measure.

We have had other measures such as—I think a really good one—there's—now that I'm talking about this, there's a number of them that actually come to mind. So my colleague, the member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth), had a really good proposal: a single-desk permitting, economic—a single-desk economic office. So, basically, Saskatchewan's got something like that. I mean, we have 900,000 regulations on the books. And, apparently, so my colleague, the MLA for La Vérendrye, is actually educating me on this now and says that even BC, with a socialist NDP government right now, has a single-desk economic office.

And, you know, so as I was saying, so Manitoba's got 900,000—thereabouts, in the neighbourhood—of regulations on the books. So if you're trying to invest in Manitoba—I mean, if you're actually willing to

navigate our red tape and put up with the fact that Manitoba has higher taxes than all of our western peers, we have incredibly—uncompetitive tax environment here that severely puts us at—our business communities here—business community at a severe disadvantage relative to our western neighbours and, frankly, most other provinces.

If you're willing to put up with all that, you know, you've got to swim through a sea of red tape and permits and pure bureaucracy and this and that and talk to—and think about what that does to your project. I mean, it holds it up in limbo for years as you're waiting for permits and it costs piles of money.

And, you know, really, what the trickle-down effect is that that means less opportunities for Manitoba workers. That means fewer jobs. That means we're not taking advantage of the potential that is inherent in our province.

So why not set up a single-desk economic office where if a business person, either inside Manitoba or outside, wants to—has a business idea and wants to set up shop, they can go there and be assisted through the entire process in a very streamlined way and in—and get their permit approvals in an expedited fashion. Again, the NDP government opposed that proposal.

The—and I've talked about this before, but the allowing of small- and medium-sized enterprises to keep their Workers Compensation Board, WCB, surplus premiums, but that also wasn't supported by this NDP government.

I mean, these are all things that help to kind of, you know, help Manitobans make their way through this cost of—this challenge with the rising cost of living, and none of these measures, none of these ideas that we've put forward in even recent weeks have been supported.

So what are we saying today and what have we been saying for quite some time now is, why not increase the basic personal exemption, the amount that you begin to pay tax, from \$15,000 for Manitoba taxpayers to \$30,000? I think it's a brilliant idea. I think most Manitobans support this idea. Overwhelmingly, you know, half—and it's actually hard to believe, but it's important for this NDP government to know that half of Manitoba taxpayers—fully half of Manitoba taxpayers—earn \$40,000 or less each year.

So raising the basic personal exemption to \$30,000 would net significant savings. And it benefits everyone; it benefits all Manitobans. And I think that's the right approach, as opposed to the

typical, you know, your treatment—how-we-treat-you—depends-on-what-group-you-belong-to approach of this NDP government. But, again, they're not supporting this proposal, and it's a proposal that would help Manitobans who are struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living.

So it's just disappointing to see the intransigence of the—this NDP government and just their—not only their failure to really listen to Manitobans, but then, in this House, to, you know, negotiate and work together for the betterment of Manitobans, and to pass into law and deliver real affordability, real income tax relief for Manitobans.

So until that happens, we're going to keep on advocating. Manitobans know what side we, as a PC team, stand on. We stand on the side of hard-working Manitobans, and we will always fight, always advocate for Manitoba families.

Thank you.

* (09:10)

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Good morning, colleagues. Good morning, Manitobans. It is a pleasure, again, and a privilege to rise this morning to talk about Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, and, of course, it's commonly referred to as BITSA.

But before we get into that, I just wanted to, again, thank the member, my colleague from Swan River, for bringing this hoist amendment forward this morning. And I'll just quickly, for the record, again, read in this motion and this voiced amendment, that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word that and submitting the following: Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time day—this day, five months hence.

And, again, I thank my colleague for bringing this hoist amendment forward, and just for the benefit of more so the government bench, I just wanted to, again, kind of put on the record what really is and what the definition of a hoist motion is.

So a hoist motion is essentially an amendment dating back to the 18th century British Parliament that postpones a bill's second reading for, in this case, it was three to six months, according to parliamentary procedure. And, again, back to the hoist amendment presented by my colleague from Swan River, which reads, the second time this day, five months hence. So what we're basically seeing here is allowing time to,

again, do some deeper diving into what Bill 53 really is doing or not doing for Manitobans. So hoist motions are rare, but sometimes very necessary, and in this case, extremely necessary for supporting Manitobans.

But before 1920, most came from the government, which used the procedure to dispose of large numbers of private members' bills during a time when parliamentary sessions were shorter. Well, since then, honourable deputy Speaker, it has been a tool almost exclusively used by opposition parties and the record shows only four motions have passed.

So, again, today—and, again, I thank the member from Swan River—let's set a new record and let's pass this hoist motion today and, again, move it forward so that—to allow Manitobans time and to allow this NDP government time to go back and essentially revisit this bill, Bill 53, and come back with real affordability measures for Manitobans.

So I hope and I know that that information is probably helpful for, particularly, the members from the NDP, the government side of the bench, and it's something that they can take back during our continued deliberation today on the Bill 53 and the hoist motion, again, presented by my colleague, the member from Swan River.

What I do want to talk about again, with respect to Bill 53 is, again, there's a very simple observation going on here. Again, I would like to thank my colleagues for rising during the course of the last 15 to 17 hours and talking about Bill 53 and talking about why this bill needs to be revisited, and, again, back to the hoist motion, provide the government time to go back and get this bill right.

The observation that we're hearing and seeing and talking to Manitobans about, getting emails about, and I know the government benches are getting emails, too, I'm sure. Manitobans are searching for relief that is tangible, immediate and genuinely meaningful.

So, again, if you take those three words into account and you kind of expand on them a little bit, well, tangible is something that they can actually affect, like something that they can feel. They can say, hey, I've got some extra money in my pocket this month because, oh, we—the government raised a personal basic exemption. Well, that certainly is real, tangible savings for Manitoba families and seniors, quite frankly.

Immediate: it can happen immediately. The government can make the decision to go back. They have the majority government; they can go back and say,

you know what? We agree. We erred in this bill and we need to make—get it right for Manitobans, Manitoba families and seniors, particularly. It also affects businesses, and I'll get into that a little bit later during my speech.

But, again, immediate and genuinely meaningful support. So, again, meaningful support, not pennies, not \$100 a year, which, again, is basically for chips and pretzels and Cheezies and pop. Well, we know that Manitobans need meaningful support during unprecedented times when it comes to affordability. And, again, tangible, immediate and genuinely meaningful support is what they need. They're certainly not searching for another NDP government media declaring success, because there is no success.

Manitoba is worse off today than it was two and a half, three years ago; we know that. We know that Manitobans are suffering, whether it be with property taxes, whether it be with grocery prices, whether it be with fuel prices. We know that every time Manitobans step out their door, this NDP government is costing them substantially. And, certainly, Manitobans are slipping further behind with each passing month. We see it; we hear it. And I know that the NDP bench is hearing it as well.

This bill is being promoted by the government as an affordability package. Well, quite frankly, simply, we know it's not. But going back to the hoist amendment, if the government was to go back and reconsider Bill 53—or BITSAs, as it's commonly known of—they can make a real difference in affordability. And we know that that will make a difference.

Essentially, this legislation really is limited. And it really is not helping families where it hits them most, and that's in day-to-day life. Like I said, going to the grocery store, doing the things that Manitobans have taken for granted but, quite frankly, are now being taxed by this NDP government to point—levels and unprecedented. So the hoist amendment will help with that.

They're again increasing taxes, higher assessments, higher utility bills. We know that the cost of utilities has gone up under this NDP government. I know for myself, I talk to my girls. They both are homeowners and they have families and kids and—my grandkids, of course. And I know that—Dad, our hydro bill is through the roof. We're going to have to consider doing something here, maybe making an investment somewhere else to help heat and offset the hydro costs that are going up.

And I said, well, honey, you know, the bottom line is that the NDP are a hope and a prayer that we're going to get some rain this summer and your utility bills will come down. Well, we know that utility bills are not based on hopes and prayers. They're based on reality.

And we know that we're—we've been in a very dry season—session, actually—probably three to five years now. We know we've had—suffered—Manitobans have suffered in wildfires. Very unfortunate that two Manitobans succumbed to fire last year, and our thoughts and prayers, again, continue to be with them. And we hope that we go through this summer with nothing even close to what happened last summer when it came to wildfires. But the temperatures this week are going to be in the mid-30s, folks, and things are not getting any wetter around here, and hydro costs are definitely going to continue to skyrocket. We know that.

Just regular household costs and daily living are going up. Legislation of this magnitude deserves careful review, hence the hoist motion. And, again, I thank the colleague from Swan River for bringing this forward. Legislation affects, again, taxpayers, homeowners, renters, municipalities. Municipalities—oh my gosh, you know, there's so much we can do for our municipalities—more than what this government is doing. We know Bill 53 is not going to be able to be debated by Manitobans, particularly Manitobans that are stakeholders and RMs and municipalities at AMM. We know that they would likely want to ensure that their voices are heard for their constituents.

It's really interesting because there's different levels, right? You have your municipal grassroots politicians, mayors, reeves, councillors throughout Manitoba—137 municipalities. I'm sure the member from Brandon East is aware of that. And they all have voices, and they're hearing from their constituents as well on affordability.

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And, certainly, something like the hoist amendment—hoist amendment can help them if the government takes away this bill—Bill 53, BITSAs—and reassesses it and goes back and say, yes, okay, we've got more for Manitoba families. We're going to be able to help municipalities out. And, basically, the general public would be far better off with, you know, their input to this bill.

We know Manitobans deserve the opportunity to come to the Legislature. We know that we are one of

the only jurisdictions that still allow Manitobans to participate in democracy, which is really cool. You know, being on the government bench for seven and a half years and having the opportunity to actually get to committee with important legislation and be there and listen to Manitobans, listen to their concerns.

We actually—I know for case in point, we actually—we had friendly amendments, even from the NDP back then, that, you know what, maybe we can do better collectively. Because bottom line is, all 57 members in this wonderful establishment—the legislation, the Chamber, and the Legislative Building—have the opportunity to make a difference. And if we all work together with the same outcome—and that's ensuring that Manitobans are supported to the best possible way—then we know that Manitoba is going to be a leader. We're going to lead the country with better taxation, more opportunity, more economic growth, the areas—better health care, because we'll have more money to invest in health care and education and the social services that Manitobans rely on and count on from government every day.

And that's why in being on the opposition bench, we're extending that, I guess, the olive branch to government to say, hey, you know what, with this hoist amendment, the government will have the opportunity to go back and spend three to five months—five months, probably, and—as the hoist amendment alludes to—and get it right and ensure that folks are being listened to. Let's get those meetings going with folks. Let's get stakeholders to the table and give them the opportunity.

We know under BITSA, Bill 53, that that isn't an opportunity. It's not a choice for Manitobans or stakeholders. Even Manitoba Chambers of Commerce or the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, they will have zero input into Bill 53 for the simple fact that they can't get to committee because the NDP, the Kinew government, has decided that we're going to move forward with this bill, and we're going to give you pennies, and that's all we're going to do.

And it's interesting, I was listening to the member from Fort Garry talk today too, as well. And, you know, he really nailed his speech on a couple of areas—good takeaways for the government, I'm sure, and in particular where Manitobans are stuck. They're looking for support from government. They're looking for leadership from the Kinew government. And with the PC opposition, we're giving the opportunity to work out. We're extending that olive branch to work together so that we can get this right and ensure that

Manitobans will have their say when it comes to Bill 53.

And the hoist amendment does exactly that. It gives Manitobans the opportunity to get engaged. And quite frankly, again, we are fortunate—one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that actually supports democracy in the way that we can get there. Manitobans can make—register, they can make an appointment to either do a written submission to government or a verbal submission during committee stage.

And, unfortunately, this bill will not make it to the committee stage. But with the hoist amendment, it will allow the government to revisit and make the right decision, because I know that members on the NDP bench are listening intently to the discussions we've had for the last several hours, through the evening, and the importance of getting this bill right. We're here today because of that, and that's why we're spending the time to work together, putting partisanship at the side and moving together to ensure that we can do the things that are right for Manitoba families, stakeholders and seniors—you name it—right across Manitoba—and, of course, our great North as well, which is a wonderful part of our province that we need to make sure their voices are heard during those stages of committee. And the hoist amendment will help serve that well.

We know seniors are living on fixed incomes. You know, they're watching costs increase faster every single day. As a matter of fact, remember, they're on fixed incomes. So their savings are eroding, and under this NDP Kinew government, their savings are eroding faster now than ever before. And it's one of the main drivers, and we talked about it; my colleagues have talked about it too, as well. As a matter of fact, I put on the record earlier, when I had the opportunity to speak, about education property tax.

We know that the education property tax has gone through the roof. And the NDP have basically put up a wall in the Minister of Education's department saying, no, nothing to see here. Here's what we're giving you. But tell you what, you go out and you tax Manitobans, you tax Manitoba seniors, you tax young families. They're fighting to pay a mortgage payment every day. You go ahead and you get what you need. Don't worry about Manitobans. Don't worry about their affordability. They'll be fine, because we're going to give them \$1,600 back.

Well—and guess what—then they say, well, wait a minute, maybe that's not enough; let's make it \$1,700, let's move it up in 2028. So another year or two years from now, 2027, they're going to say, and we're going to give you another \$100. Wonderful, while that senior living on Lipton Street in the West End that's owned their house for 50 years is sitting there looking at her tax bill, or his tax bill, and they're saying, oh my word, what is happening? The City of Winnipeg actually put a leaflet in my tax bill to explain that it wasn't the City of Winnipeg assessment that made my tax bill go up. It was actually the education portion of my tax bill that has made this bill almost double.

In one case, I spoke to a woman on—well, I'll say in the West End, and she said: My bill, Jeff, went up \$650 on education alone. Almost double. And that's just something that is going to affect this senior, and I would venture to say many seniors that have worked for 40, 50 years, even longer, to pay off their homes and have—and simply have a quality of life and not sit there and look at their bank account get eroded under this Kinew government.

Not only seniors, honourable deputy Speaker, we're also talking about young Manitobans. And, again, young Manitobans, particularly—and I think the member from Turtle Mountain had mentioned this as well, and he nailed it. In and around the 28 to 35 range, where young folks are looking now at maybe moving forward with their careers and perhaps getting married and buying a home, and—but what we're hearing from that generation is they can't afford it. They simply are afraid to take the dive into home ownership because of the inability to essentially pay their bills.

And what's happening under the Kinew government is the hydro has gone up, as I mentioned earlier; the education property tax on their home has gone up. And guess what? Assessments are going up in Manitoba, particularly in Winnipeg, where I know that young buyers have been facing bidding wars for years on homes.

And what that does, as we know, is drives up the cost of home ownership, and particularly for those first-time home buyers that are just starting out, getting married, wanting to start a family, you know, building their careers. This is the most important and challenging time of their lives, when they are in their early 30s and they're just getting started. They're probably paying off student loans. They're already taxed to the nines by the Kinew government, and now they're getting taxed even more.

And what does the Kinew government have for those young folks and those young families? Pennies. Yes, that's right, honourable deputy Speaker, pennies. We know that pennies are not going to help support Manitoba families, particularly young families that are just looking to buy a home and get started and really be an active part of the economy. And where that will help is, again, during the hoist amendment, giving the government time to look at the basic personal exemption.

* (09:30)

So you have this young family that's starting out. They're starting out with, again, high debt already because, again, they're paying off their education and a few other things I'm sure, and probably have a car payment as well, because cars are—you know, a starting car is 40 to 60 thousand dollars now. It's not like you're buying a \$20,000 car anymore because even used cars are probably 20 grand. So they definitely would have a loan there too, as well.

But the basic personal exemption would essentially be a tool for them to say, oh, look, we've got an extra \$5,000, you know, an extra \$15,000, an extra \$30,000. Now we can start to budget. We'll sit down at the kitchen table and budget out what we know we're going to get back from support from this government, the NDP Kinew government, and we know that they're going to be there; they've got our back.

And the only way that's going to happen, honourable deputy Speaker, is if they pass this hoist motion today, set a new record, make it the fifth motion or amendment that's ever been passed under the hoist amendment, and move forward to the point where Manitoba's—Manitoba families and seniors will be able to recognize more each and every month, each and every year, to help support them during these unprecedented economic times. We know that for a fact.

There's so much to talk about, and I see I'm—geez, I've only got about eight minutes left, but I've got so much more I want to say and get on the record. So I'll continue on.

You know, I guess when it comes to the government, essentially, this budget, the BITSA budget bill, was announced, basically, it was a signature affordability announcement that the Kinew government is riding on on this bill, and we know even just with the opportunity I've had to put some facts on the record, and, again, talking about the hoist amendment,

we know that that's simply not the case because pennies on junk food is not going to support the young families I talk about, the seniors, the senior living in the West End that I spoke to. And I've spoke to a number of them, and they tell me the same thing, you know, that this is just not going to work out.

And, quite frankly, they—lot of them go to the local store, local little corner store or whatnot too, as well, and—because they don't have transportation because they can't afford a car and they certainly can't afford insurance under the Kinew government because MPI rates are going up along with hydro rates. So what do they do? They just avoid shopping, and then they make personal decisions, and it hurts them and hurts their health, and, again, it's a challenging time for them.

So it definitely—the opportunity and the olive branch that we've provided the government is something that I think—and I know—the members opposite are really considering, particularly after this debate that's been going on for quite some time now, hours.

We also know that the pennies back to Manitobans is also going to affect industry; we know that, particularly in Manitoba where we are just one of the leaders in the country when it comes to restaurateurs. Per capita, I believe we have some of the most restaurants, and diverse restaurants, in Canada, and certainly we'd all like the opportunity to support them. And I—you know, I don't see that here in the Kinew government's BITSA bill, and the hoist amendment would allow them to go back and consider—reconsider what they're doing as far as picking winners and losers when it comes to Bill 53, the BITSA bill. Because restaurants, under this bill, will have to continue to collect the PST on prepared meals.

So I know when we were in government and I was the minister, I spoke to the restaurant association, Canadian restaurant association, the Manitoba Restaurant Association as well, presidents, stakeholders, actual restaurateurs, and they were needing support, and COVID was very difficult on that industry. Stores were shuttered for months on end and—but the tax bills kept coming in and, you know, the lights had to remain on, the heat had to remain on. As you know, we live in a very diverse climate as well, so you can't just shut off the utilities and walk away. You need to continue to pay the bills.

But the restaurateurs are left out in the cold, essentially, because the NDP Kinew government has decided that they have to continue to charge the

PST on prepared foods and they—what they do, restaurateurs, these private businesses, ma-and-pas that are in Manitoba, they actually make lunches, breakfasts, even dinners, meals.

People, working people downtown, particularly in the core area, too, that work down in the towers, down in Winnipeg, I know that they're ordering lunches, prepared sandwiches, those kind of things directly from these restaurateurs. They're supporting them, honourable deputy Speaker. They're doing their part and they're getting a heck of a good meal as well from these folks.

And the Kinew government says, oh, well, no; you're going to have to buy that sandwich or that bag of chips from, you know, one of the large chain stores in the city or across the province or any other of our capital regions. You have no need to support restaurateurs. Boy oh boy, is that the wrong move. We know what restaurateurs do for Winnipeggers and for Manitobans. We know what they do for the economy.

Restaurants are shuttering every day. They need support from this Kinew government. That's why they have to—this government, particularly the First Minister, needs to take away this hoist amendment, get around the Cabinet table, have a discussion with his colleagues and say, you know what, folks? I'm actually thinking that we probably can do more. And that's exactly what this First Minister needs to do. He needs to do more. He needs to do much more to ensure that Manitobans are recognizing real affordability measures.

So, you know, Manitobans here—this government claim that they're delivering these messages or these reliefs, and they're not. We simply know that, and we know that because it's showing up in the media. The local media is writing about it now, too. Like, man, this junk tax is just not going to cut it for Manitobans. They need more from this government, and that's why the hoist amendment is so important.

You know, and again, I can't say enough about the member from Swan River bringing this forward. What a great—what a great amendment because really, when you're getting a decision like this out and you want to make—do the right thing, you want to make sure you get it right. And we know and we're hearing on social media, we're hearing—we're getting emails, we're getting phone calls from Manitobans saying, this isn't right; the government needs to listen and they need to do better. And that's something that we're not hearing from this government.

I see my time is running short again, honourable deputy Speaker, but I just wanted to continue on quickly here. I didn't even get into the heart of what I wanted to talk about. I know, again, I'd like to thank my colleague from Steinbach for spending over four hours talking about the importance of getting this bill right, Bill 53, the BITSA bill. You know, this is something that is going to make a difference for Manitobans. This could be precedent setting for Manitobans as far as affordability.

And if we don't get it right, if the Kinew government doesn't get it right and doesn't even consider the hoist amendment and moving forward and taking the time to get this legislation right, we know that Manitobans are going to have to make a decision and they're going to understand that during—probably coming up in the next election—they're going to make the right decision and put a government in place, the PC government in place, that understands and recognizes what real affordability measures are for all Manitobans. And we know that that is coming and that's just around the corner. So we are looking forward to that.

You know, I'll close. I've got six seconds left. Thank you, honourable deputy Speaker, for the opportunity, and I really hope that the government gets this right.

Thank you.

* (09:40)

Mr. Schuler: Well, first of all, I'd like to wish all my Progressive Conservative colleagues a good morning. For all of us, this has been a very tough and arduous yesterday, last night, this morning. We voted sometime at about 3 o'clock this morning and there were a lot of bleary-eyed people voting on the resolution that was in front of us. Now we are debating, and, by the way, that yesterday seems like such a long time ago, it seems like—almost like years, and that was just the member for Steinbach's (Mr. Goertzen) speech.

I do want to address the entire hoist motion. In my time, I've lived through a few of them, and it's a parliamentary tool to encourage a government, in this case, to delay something for a certain amount of time—in this case, it's five months. And it's to give pause into what the government is doing. And we are now in an era of everything has to be fast. It has to be instant. It's got to be quick. And what the hoist motion does, it says slow it down a little bit.

And I want to deal with two points today. Yesterday, I was given the opportunity to go through the summary revenue, in which I pointed out that the

numbers in the BITSA bill were very ambitious. And I choose my words carefully, having been on Treasury Board. In fact, I had the honour of being vice-chair. And so we don't want to use inflammatory words, we want to just be very careful. The income projections are incredibly ambitious. And if you go and look at a year over year, they are possible; they're probably not probable.

So I had the opportunity to put that all on the record in my speech yesterday. And, today, I want to deal with two different things. And the first one—and these are both covered by BITSA. And I would make the argument that these two are a very strong case for hoisting BITSA for five months, that the government would come back with either more information, which is what I had recommended with the summary revenue; that if they were going to proceed with these incredibly ambitious revenue numbers, they should have some kind of an argument why those would come to pass.

Like, the hydro recovery numbers were incredibly ambitious. They must have some kind of a narrative. Well, the same thing goes with the tax narrative that the provincial NDP has come out with. And we can only imagine that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) one day stormed into his office, called up his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, and must have said to him, listen, grocery prices are spiralling out of control. It ends up being—we are now the highest food inflation jurisdiction in the country.

Let me lay that out again. Manitoba has not just the highest inflation in Canada, Manitoba also has the dubious distinction of the highest food inflation.

So the Premier would have known this is coming, called in his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, and said, we got to come up with something; we have to do something. And they put their heads together and they talked about, well, meat is spiralling out of control—the price of meat; fresh vegetables, fruit, milk, getting very expensive, cheese, the kinds of things that Manitobans want and should want to be feeding their families.

And somewhere in that Premier's office between the Premier and his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, a light bulb went on. And they came up with the Hostess Twinkie tax reduction. When it's too expensive to buy meat, vegetables, fruit, milk and cheese, let them eat Hostess Twinkies. And that's basically what this tax is all about.

So you're going to take a few pennies off of junk food. Truly, some of the worst creations in the history of humankind are now available to us. If you go and look at the nutritional value of the fast food that now this NDP Premier and his chief of staff and the Cabinet have come up with, absolutely the worst things you can put into your body. Absolutely the worst.

There's a new nutrition guide—came out in the United States—and you can google it. So if anybody wants to know where the quote is coming from, it's coming from a public document, and the document says to make America healthy again. Because, in North America—not just in North America, but around the world, we are seeing that people are becoming increasingly unhealthy with their food choices.

We must return to the basics, this says. American households must prioritize diets built on whole, nutrient-dense foods: protein, dairy, vegetables, fruits, healthy fats. When you look at the tax policy of this NDP Premier and his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, nowhere are those things identified.

There's a statistic in this report, and it says the United States is amid a health emergency. And this would actually apply to Canada as well. This is a study that would, you could almost say, could be mirrored in Canada. And it goes on to say nearly 90 per cent of health-care spending goes to treating people who have chronic diseases; not genetic destiny, but are predictable results of the standard American diet, a diet which, over time, has become reliant on highly processed foods, coupled with sedentary lifestyle. Right in there, it warns governments about processed foods.

And they put out a new chart. I don't know if anybody has seen it. They call it the inverted pyramid, where they're even moving breads to the bottom. It's still part of the healthy food. It's part of a healthy diet. But, basically, it's protein, dairy and healthy fats, vegetables and fruit. And the top line has red meat, chicken, cheese, milk, vegetables like peas, carrots, tomatoes and so on and so forth. Nowhere—nowhere—in this chart is there a can of Coke. Nowhere in here—and I've looked hard at it—nowhere in here is there a Cheezie or a Hostess Twinkie or any of the other junk food.

There is a story out, and I have no idea if it's true or not, that some chickens—these rotisserie chickens that you can buy are pumped up with some kind of a solution, more than likely water, to make them weigh more so that people will think they're getting

more chicken. It's not the rotisserie chicken that we should be necessarily encouraging. We should be encouraging people to buy chicken and cook it at home, barbecue it at home.

The entire premise of what this NDP government did—the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Kinew) and his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, who came up with the Hostess Twinkie tax reduction plan—flies in the face of everything that anybody is talking about, nutritionally, in North America.

And Manitoba has a particularly difficult challenge. For those of us who, over the years, have gone out and spoken with diabetes Manitoba, our government was the one that got the insulin pumps for 18 and under, and now there's a move to move that to others as well. We have a diabetes epidemic in Manitoba. Again, we have a problem with people struggling with diabetes.

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And the worst thing those people can do for themselves is look at the Premier of Manitoba and the chief of staff to the Premier, Mark Rosner, and their approach to helping middle-class families by saying to them, buy a bag of Cheezies, get yourself a Hostess Twinkie and buy yourself a can of Coke. I'm waiting for diabetes Manitoba and other health organizations to finally realize how wrong this is, how dangerous this is.

And that's why a hoist motion absolutely makes sense. This has to be rethought. If we're going to go through and pick foods that may still be taxed, then at least let's go through the healthy alternatives. And when the Premier of Manitoba and his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, were concocting up this amazing plan, according to them, the Hostess Twinkie tax reduction, did it never occur to them that there's probably a reason in the first place why there's no tax on these particular items? Did it never occur to them that there's probably a good rationale why we encourage people to buy fresh meat, cheese, milk, vegetables, fruit? There's no tax on those.

But there's tax on a Hostess Twinkie, a can of Coke and a bag of Cheezies. And that is by design. That was—that's been there for a reason. And what this Premier, this NDP Premier, wants to do, with his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, is let them eat Hostess Twinkies and have a can of Coke.

The question that should be in everybody's mind is, how is that going to help the diabetes epidemic we have in Manitoba? How does that message encourage people to eat healthy? We have a health-care system

right now that can't handle the demands on it. This NDP government has failed. The Minister of Health has been an absolute disaster, unmitigated disaster.

And then, adding to that, we have a provincial government that says, well, you know, not just is the health-care system failing, we're going to add extra strain, extra pressure onto the health-care system by having people eat Cheezies, drink a can of Coke, and then for dessert have a Hostess Twinkie. That will have an unbelievable impact on our health-care system down the road. This is so poorly thought out.

And we know that the—that this NDP Premier, he loves the limelight, he lives—loves the little quips, and then he disappears. When it comes to heavy lifting, he's not around. The only time he actually sticks around is when he sits in the Chamber and, instead of answering questions, barks like a dog at the Leader of the Opposition. That's the only time you actually get to see him around the place.

But he's not defending what this will do to Manitobans. The message it sends, that—from the Premier of Manitoba says if you—if you're hungry, you're feeling a little bit of hunger, go get yourself a bag of Cheezies, go get a can of Coke and have a Hostess Twinkie. That's the message that's being sent, and nowhere did anybody think about that when this little stupid pet tricks policy came out.

That's why we need the hoist motion, exactly for that reason. Go back and there—are there some foods—there might be some foods possibly that are still being taxed that would be on the dietary guidelines. And if anybody wishes, I can send it to them. It's called the inverted pyramid. It has nuts and grapes and bananas and potatoes. It has avocado on it. I've never heard the Premier ever talk about the value of avocado—ever. Never has he mentioned it. Or grabbing an apple or an orange. What about having, like, a carrot? What about having something that will actually help your body, that gives your body real nutrition?

But this Premier spent an awful lot of time talking about how Manitobans now should celebrate—should be ecstatic—that now they can go out and they can get a bag of Cheezies, a can of Coke and a Hostess Twinkie for a couple of cents cheaper. He has become the cheerleader for the worst foods ever developed in the history of humankind. He is the leader of the parade of the worst that you can buy in fast food. And he prides himself on it because he never thought this through.

And maybe his chief of staff, Mark Rosner, who's an incredibly—a bright guy, should actually pull the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and say, you know what, Premier? Maybe the Hostess Twinkie tax reduction wasn't the right way to go. Maybe we should be looking at that. Maybe we should consult with health care. Maybe we should be consulting with nutrition experts. We should be—dietitians. Every hospital has a dietitian.

When you come in—I remember there was a study once done and they found that patients in the hospitals found the food absolutely disgusting. And then they went and they researched and they found out those patients were all in the cardiac ward. And when you're in the cardiac ward, you're not allowed salt. So they didn't like the taste of the food because they were cut off the salt.

There are dietitians who would sit down with the government and say, for people who are struggling with heart issues, with clogged arteries, with all these diabetes issues, there are things that we should be promoting. And I can assure the Manitoba Legislature—I can assure them—that nowhere will any dietitian, nowhere will anybody who is involved with trying to get people onto a healthy diet, nowhere will you find a bag of Cheezies, a can of Coke or Hostess Twinkies. Nowhere.

Take this hoist motion, go back and do some consultation. I would suggest to members of the Legislature that time change has more space in the Premier's head than healthy food. He has been all over the place on the issue, talked about it all over, all sides of his mouth. He was against it, and he's for it, and he has time, he doesn't have time. And now it's in front of the public in Engage Manitoba. Well, why not put this in front of Engage Manitoba? Why don't we ask Manitobans if they think that—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

I request the member to please tie back his remarks to the hoist amendment, please.

Mr. Schuler: Well, without the hoist motion, we can't put this issue in front of Manitobans. The government needs time. The government needs time to go to Engage Manitoba and put in there: should Manitobans be eating a bag of Cheezies, a can of Coke and a Hostess Twinkie? Or should we be eating good food?

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We need the hoist motion to give the government time to come to its senses, because this was not thought out. I would say that this is something that I would suspect came out of a frat house. This is, like, the kind of thing to come out of a frat party and not out of a government that's facing a diabetes epidemic. Obesity is a real issue. We keep hearing about heart healthy. We have stroke prevention, which a diet has something to do with. We need the hoist motion to get all of these things in front of—and let's at least have the conversation with Manitobans. Let's have the conversation with dietitians. This is appalling.

* (10:00)

Yes, we need a hoist motion. Go back and rethink this one. And, you know what, maybe just pull this portion out of it and at least—at least this portion, have a conversation with Manitobans. Because this will have long-term consequences on people's health, whether they're facing diabetes, obesity, other health-related issues. This kind of approach that the Premier is the cheerleader for—a bag of Cheezies, a can of Coke and a Hostess Twinkie—is disgraceful. Go back, take the hoist motion and take this and go back and do some consultation.

In the last nine minutes that I have left, I do want to talk about the Port of Churchill. I have been up there multiple times. It is one of the more unique places that you could ever go to. And the Premier and the government have talked about the Port of Churchill.

My question is—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

We would invite the member to ensure that his remarks are relevant to the point at hand, which is the hoist amendment and BITSA.

Mr. Schuler: Well, you have to give me a minute or two.

Yes, we need a hoist motion to give the government time, because nowhere in the budget is it being budgeted for the development of the Port of Churchill. The Port of Churchill has to be more than a talking point. It has to be more than the Premier gets the opportunity to rah-rah the troops at a speech and then walk away from it. The development of the Port of Churchill is going to come at a heavy price. Where is that reflected in the budget?

And I would suggest that, for even just that reason alone, never mind the overambitious income revenue streams, the fact that we're encouraging people to eat themselves into worse diabetes and health issues but

the Port of Churchill is not mentioned in the budget, we need the hoist motion to give the government the opportunity to figure out what they're going to do with the Port of Churchill. It can't just be a talking point.

Like, I've been around for 27 years. We've talked about the Port of Churchill that entire time. And government after government in government talks about it, and there have been real challenges. We understand. The thing is, nowhere in the budget is there a substantive amount of money for the upgrade of the Hudson's Bay railway. To get it up to a grade that you could actually haul some of the commodities that need to go up there, we need the hoist motion.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) mentioned oil, grain, other commodities. The railway as it exists right now probably can't handle that kind of traffic. That railway really has to be upgraded to a standard that could handle all that commodity. It's not in the budget. That's why we need the hoist motion. There's a discussion about icebreakers to give more time up north for—in Churchill for ships to come and go. But there's no mention of that in the budget; that's why we need the hoist motion.

They need storage facilities. Where are you going to put all of this stuff that you're going to truck up there—or train up there, pardon me—and it's got to be stored while you wait for spring thaw? Nowhere is there any plan for that. It's not in the budget. That's why we need the hoist motion. We need the government to come back and say, well, this is a—and listen, we understand that it would be a 'fudget' anyway. These would be fudged numbers, but at least we'd be working on some kind of numbers.

There was a discussion that between the federal government and the Province it would be a \$500-million input just for infrastructure upgrade. Where is that in the budget? Where's the \$500 million accounted for? We need the hoist motion so that the budget—the Premier of Manitoba can go back and put that \$500 million somewhere. It's got to show somewhere, or the Port of Churchill is simply a talking point. And I would suggest, for this Premier, that's all the Port of Churchill is right now. Because nowhere in the budget are any of these things line-itemed.

And that's why we need the hoist. Give them some time. Maybe we can go from hot air talk to actual crunching numbers in a budget. Let's give them time with a hoist motion. That's what we need.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) is quoted—and this is online, you can google it; so NDP members need not ask for, was this a private document. It's public. Their boss said this. Here it is: You're talking about \$10 billion, \$20 billion, \$30 billion worth of investment.

Let's talk about Churchill. I ask the Chamber, where is the \$10 billion in this budget? It isn't there. We need the hoist motion. Where is the \$20 billion in this budget? Where is it even referenced? It isn't. That's why we need the hoist motion. Where is the \$30 billion? The Premier said it was going to be a \$10-billion, \$20-billion, \$30-billion project. It's nowhere to be—it's not even referenced that this might be a cost centre coming up. We need the hoist motion for that. Or is the Port of Churchill purely a talking point?

Gary Doer used to have—there was a lake in the Dakotas that he would—every time he got into trouble—it was called Devil's Lake. And every time he got into political trouble, he'd load up his airplanes and fly down to the United States and rail against this water coming down the Red River. You get the sense that the Port of Churchill is that for this Premier.

But rather than being a talking point, let's give it the hoist motion and get the government to at least acknowledge somewhere in the budget documents that we could be, by the Premier's own words—and it sounds more like a car auction than anything else. You know, give me five, five, five, ten, ten, 10 billion, 20 billion, 30 billion. He sounds like an auctioneer here. I'm not even sure which number he landed on, but he just gets himself so caught up. I would suggest to him the difference between \$30 billion and \$20 billion is a substantial amount of money, even for an NDP premier. That's a lot of money. Is this just a talking point? Because we need the numbers in the budget. We need the hoist motion.

I would also say the time change has more space in the Premier's head than the Port of Churchill. He talks about time change more—way more than how he's going to fund the car-auction—10 billion, 20 billion, 30 billion—Port of Churchill. It should be in the budget. That's why we need the hoist motion.

There is so much missing out of this budget. And, you know, some of us who have been around for a while—I see the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen); good morning, member from Steinbach—and we know that sometimes the budgets come up and they don't say that much. Because after the budget is produced, it's presented, then come the announcements. There have been no announcements. There are no announcements

about money being invested in the railway, ice-breakers, storage facilities and so on and so forth.

And, back to the Premier's auction sale that he was running at one of his speeches, there is no mention of the \$10 billion, \$20 billion, \$30 billion. It's not in the budget. That's why we need this hoist motion. We have to give the government time, whether it is the unbelievably optimistic income numbers on the budget which I spoke to—about yesterday, whether it's on the nutrition that this government now become a cheerleader for: Cheezies, a can of Coke and Hostess Twinkies.

And, for the Port of Churchill, nowhere are these things properly discussed. We need that hoist motion. It is important that the government go back. These things are a problem for Manitoba. And it is very unfortunate that we have a Premier who loves to go out and talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. In fact, he loves to sit in the Chamber and bark, bark, bark, bark, bark. But that doesn't get us anywhere. We need real action. We need this hoist motion.

* (10:10)

Mrs. Cook: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to rise again today, this time to speak to the hoist motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

And I just want to mention the intent of the hoist motion, the motion that reads that BITSA be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day, five months hence.

There's some good reasons for this motion and many good reasons why I am speaking in support of this motion. I think there's a lot of evidence in Bill 53, BITSA, that the NDP government didn't give this bill enough thought. I think with a little bit more time, about five months more time, they may come to realize that.

An additional five months to consider this bill would enable the public to better scrutinize this legislation and really provide the NDP government with feedback. Because this bill has been rushed, honourable Deputy Speaker. We know that BITSA wasn't introduced before the backstop date. The NDP waited until the last minute to introduce it and expected to ram it through the Legislature in a matter of days, and that's simply not enough time for all of our constituents, Manitobans, to understand and provide their feedback on what it is the NDP are trying to do here. And that's why this hoist motion is so appropriate.

Another reason that we need to take this back to the drawing board and consider it in five months is that it looks pretty half-baked, honourable Deputy Speaker. And I'll provide some examples. Take, for example, the only so-called affordability measure in the bill. When Bill 53 was introduced, that provision, turns out, only applied to big-box grocery stores: your Costco, your Loblaws, your Safeway, your Sobeys. Those were the only places where Manitobans could access that so-called affordability measure. Somehow, the NDP forgot to include small businesses. They forgot to include smaller stores where you can buy the exact same products that they are proposing to exempt from tax.

So they only wanted to do it at the big-box stores. There was an outcry—rightfully so—because they didn't think through the legislation. So they had to backtrack on that and then make sure that it included smaller grocery stores as well. But now we're hearing from restaurants who have been excluded from this provision of BITSA. The only so-called affordability measure in the bill excludes one of the biggest economic drivers in our province.

And if you think about how Manitobans feed their families, this doesn't make any sense. You know, restaurants, in many cases, are an affordable alternative for families who are rushed. As a parent myself, often rushing to soccer or to dance or to gymnastics or what have you, I can certainly attest to the fact that sometimes it's tough to get dinner on the table. And sometimes it's easier and much more cost effective to simply get pizza from one of the many great local pizza restaurants in Charleswood.

But, under BITSA, the NDP's bill, you know, families like mine could only access tax savings if I purchased that pizza from Costco, not from the local pizza restaurant that is locally owned and supports local jobs and invests in my community in Charleswood.

That doesn't make any sense, honourable Deputy Speaker, and it's one of the reasons that we need this hoist motion, to take this back to—you know, the government needs to take this back and really look at this bill and examine whether what they're doing makes sense to Manitobans and whether it's really in the best interests of Manitobans, because excluding restaurants from this, the only so-called affordability measure in BITSA, has led restaurants to speak out and talk about the impact that that will have on Manitoba's economy.

They've warned that, because this NDP government is picking winners and losers in this way, it could lead to layoffs. They noted that they actually met with the Finance Minister about this and that the government was unyielding and wouldn't change its position on this. And in making their case, they pointed out that they're a significant economic driver in Manitoba, that restaurants employ at least 42,000 people and 40 per cent of those are youth. And not only that, they generate about \$3.5 billion in sales annually in Manitoba.

So it boggles my mind why the NDP would choose to leave them out of the only affordability measure they could muster, meagre as it is. So—and these types of oversights are why this hoist motion is so necessary. I think it's important that the NDP hit pause on BITSA and stop and go back and try to get it right.

And, in speaking about affordability, I know that it's the No. 1 issue that I hear about when I'm speaking to my constituents. I think it's the No. 1 issue for most Manitobans right now. And you would think that that would be reflected in BITSA. You would think that this budget would be a budget about improving affordability for Manitobans, but it's not. And that's another reason why we need the hoist motion, because we need the government to go back to the drawing board and create a BITSA bill that is actually about improving affordability for Manitobans.

We know that Manitoba currently leads the country in inflation. And the reason for that is because of property tax hikes and food inflation. I'll talk about food inflation a little bit because that's a significant affordability challenge for many Manitobans. We see the evidence of that in the number of Manitobans who have had to resort to using food banks. And that's a really unfortunate indicator of how bad things have gotten for many Manitoba families and how severe the affordability crisis really is.

But the other thing that's driving up inflation in Manitoba is property taxes. And I just can't emphasize enough how the fact that the NDP has created the conditions where school divisions have had to jack up education property taxes by such significant amounts is—I can't overstate how that is adding to Manitobans' affordability concerns.

I was just speaking with constituents a couple of days ago who told me that June is a hard month because, in the city of Winnipeg at least, that's when those property tax bills come due. And so they're facing a significant cost hit this month because of this

NDP government's failure to prioritize affordability in BITSA. And that's why we need the hoist motion. Take it back; do better. That's what the hoist motion will allow the NDP government to do. It'll give them time to get it—to create a better bill.

You know, in speaking about food inflation, I was actually just reading a CBC News story this morning about the fact that the price of lamb has gone up so significantly that local Muslim families in Manitoba are having to forgo the lamb that is traditional for them for—and I apologize if I mispronounce this; I have been working on it—Eid al-Adha. And if I mispronounced that, I apologize to my Muslim colleagues. But I understand that lamb is a traditional part of that celebration and that it's actually doubled in cost in recent years. And that's making it difficult for Muslim families in Manitoba to have that as part of their traditions.

And it's not just food that's gone up. And I think every Manitoba family will tell you that the cost of everyday items, clothing, basics like Internet access, your kids' activities, streaming services. All of those things are going up, and BITSA fails to meet that challenge. The Bill 53 that the NDP have put forward fails to provide any meaningful affordability relief for those very real challenges for families.

* (10:20)

And it actually also fails to address the challenges that are of the government's own making. For example, the de-indexing of income tax brackets, which has pushed many middle-income Manitobans into higher tax brackets, reduced the purchasing power of every dollar that they make and exacerbated the affordability crisis in this province. And, you know, what BITSA should have done is reintroduced indexation, and it didn't do that. And that's another reason we need the hoist motion, so that the government can go back and fix that error that they've made with BITSA.

I talked a little bit about property taxes already. That's another error of the NDP government's own making that's had a significant impact on affordability for Manitobans. And, again, Bill 53 fails to address that in any meaningful way. You know, when I talk to constituents in Roblin about the fact that education property taxes in the Pembina Trails School Division have gone up by over 37 per cent since the NDP took office, I don't know how the NDP can look at those numbers and still claim to be making life more affordable for Manitobans. They're simply not.

I guess, you know, what we've seen is that the NDP will hide behind school trustees or hide behind municipalities and just sort of pass the buck and make it their problem. But education is a core provincial responsibility, so it's at the feet of this NDP government. That's the reason that property taxes—education property taxes have gone up so significantly for homeowners in the Pembina Trails School Division.

And I think with an extra five months to consider BITSA, you know, maybe the NDP would see that. And that's why I'm in support of this hoist motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

And, you know, affordability challenges and cost increases continue to pile up for Manitobans. Hydro rates are going up. Pharmacare deductibles are going up—fuel costs, gas, just every line item in any family's budget is going up. And BITSA fails to address that very serious challenge for a lot of Manitoba families.

And it's not just individuals that are suffering as a result of the affordability crisis. It's also businesses. And again, BITSA—Bill 53—fails to address the many serious affordability issues that are impacting businesses in Manitoba. And, again, that's something that I would hope an additional five months before giving second reading to BITSA would allow the government to actually consult with small businesses and talk with them about the things that they're asking for, the things that they need to help them grow and to thrive in Manitoba. But, instead, we seem to have a government that's actively working against them.

I look at BITSA and I don't see any incentives for Manitoba businesses to invest here in Manitoba to grow and create more jobs. And when we know that business optimism is at an all-time low in Manitoba, that should be sounding alarm bells for the NDP government. They should be looking for ways to reverse that trend. Instead, they're actively driving businesses out of Manitoba.

And that's evidenced by the fact that, for six consecutive quarters, business exits have outpaced new business starts in Manitoba. That's another red flag, but it doesn't seem to be generating any concern or urgency on the NDP bench. They don't seem to share Manitobans' concerns about the fate of small businesses in this province, which is really unfortunate, but also very troubling when you consider that small businesses make up 90 per cent of all employers in Manitoba. And failing to prioritize them and to acknowledge the

very real affordability concerns that they are experiencing, that spells trouble for Manitoba.

Rising costs are the biggest barrier to businesses' growth. And those costs are in a couple of different buckets. There's rising input costs—the same affordability challenges that are impacting everyday Manitobans are also impacting businesses. Their inputs, their supplies, all of those costs are going up, some more significantly than others, depending on the type of business you're looking at. You know, certainly, tariffs have had a terrible impact on a lot of small business in Manitoba.

But then there's the costs that the government is directly responsible for piling on small businesses that this bill, Bill 53, fails to acknowledge or address or correct. I've talked about the impact of the NDP's property tax hikes on individuals. There's a different but equally troubling impact for small businesses because the NDP chose to do away with any property tax rebates on commercial properties, meaning that small businesses who own their property are now on the hook for every dollar of these property tax hikes that Manitobans are seeing. They're not getting any relief at all.

You know, we've got a government that's gutted regulatory accountability legislation and allowed red tape to grow unchecked. And I think it's because the NDP doesn't understand that red tape comes with a financial cost to businesses. So by allowing it to grow with no restrictions on that in Manitoba anymore, because they repealed the regulatory accountability legislation, that's creating an added cost for small businesses; it's another reason that businesses are leaving Manitoba.

We have a government that, as I mentioned previously, left small businesses out of its only paltry affordability measure. They weren't even considered until there was a public outcry about that. And they're still leaving a significant number of small businesses, namely restaurants, out of that measure. So it really—you know, I don't blame small businesses at all when they're looking at BITSA, at Bill 53, and thinking, how does this help my business? How does this help me continue to employ Manitobans and reinvest dollars in Manitoba and contribute to Manitoba's economy? I don't think they feel that BITSA is doing any of those things. I think that they would agree that an additional five months to look at this bill and consider how it could be improved to better benefit all Manitobans would be a good thing. And that's why we're in support of this hoist motion today.

So I've outlined some of the affordability challenges that ordinary Manitobans are facing. And I've outlined some of the affordability challenges that businesses are facing. And so, I guess, you know, the next question one might ask oneself is, how does Bill 53 address these issues, which are some of the most pressing issues facing all Manitobans? That's evident in anecdotal conversations all of us are having with our constituents. It's evident in the polling. So how does how does BITSA address these issues? Well, the short answer is it doesn't.

Does it take action to lower inflation in Manitoba? No. Does it deal with the fact that the cost of staple food items, which are already tax exempt, are increasing so significantly in Manitoba? No, it doesn't. It proposes to take the tax off prepared foods, saving Manitobans pennies per grocery trip. I don't think that's the kind of affordability relief that Manitobans need right now. It doesn't do anything to address the fact that the core items that, you know, parents are buying to feed their kids—that's not being addressed. Those items are already tax-free, but the cost continues to rise and grocery bills continue to rise. The NDP government's BITSA bill has not met that challenge in any significant way.

Does BITSA deal with property tax hikes? No, it doesn't. It does nothing to address the fact that school divisions will continue to have to hike education property taxes in the double digits every year in order to make up for the NDP government's refusal or inability to fund education properly.

* (10:30)

Does BITSA deal with the NDP's decision to de-index income tax brackets? No. No, it doesn't do that—again, pushing more Manitobans into higher income tax brackets and adding to Manitobans' affordability woes. Does BITSA take action to freeze or lower Pharmacare deductibles? No, it doesn't do that. Does it do anything to make clothing less expensive? No. Does it lower the cost of children's activities? No. Does it make it less costly to try and operate and grow a business here in Manitoba? No. No, it doesn't do any of those things. It doesn't do anything to address the most pressing concerns of Manitobans.

But you know what would? And this is where members on our side of the House have put forward a really effective option and really urged the NDP government to consider this: allowing Manitobans to keep more of their own hard-earned money, to spend it on the things that they need.

Whether that's more money for the grocery store, whether that's more money for your children's activities, more money to replace the clothes that your kids are rapidly outgrowing, Manitobans know best how to spend their own money.

So, rather than offering them pennies on prepared foods at some food establishments, the government could choose to raise the basic personal exemption. Raising the basic personal exemption to \$30,000 would save Manitobans thousands of dollars every year, and that would make a real impact on the affordability crisis that so many Manitobans are dealing with today. This BITSA bill doesn't do that, and that's why we're so supportive of the member for Swan River's (Mr. Wowchuk) hoist motion to take this back to the drawing board for an additional five months to really consider whether the measures put forward by the NDP government are what's really going to help Manitobans. Because I think, upon further reflection and study and consultation with Manitobans, the government will realize, no, we could do better. We could raise the basic personal exemption and allow people to keep more of their own money.

So the other things—you know, there's the things that BITSA fails to address, but then there's the things that it does to actually make the problem worse. So BITSA is the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act. It's legislation that's required to implement the government's budget. And one of the measures that the government wants to implement as part of its budget is the Manitoba jobs agreement. And we know that that's going to add to Manitobans' affordability woes by driving up the cost of projects. And who pays for publicly tendered projects? The public, the taxpayer. That's going to further add to Manitobans' affordability concerns by making everything the government builds more expensive.

And that's why our team has remained steadfastly opposed to that and continues to advocate for a solution that serves all workers in Manitoba, not just unionized workers, and that will make all the public infrastructure projects that Manitobans need more affordable for Manitobans, who are ultimately the ones paying for it.

But, you know, going back to the hoist motion and why we need some additional time to look at BITSA and Bill 53, to take it to our constituents, to allow Manitobans to have time for feedback and to, ideally, have the government reconsider the way they've drafted this bill, we need only look at the way Manitoba's economy is performing. Because the

affordability crisis that Manitobans are currently facing is directly connected to the economic performance of the province.

And we know that Manitoba is not keeping pace with its peers, particularly in western Canada, and its economic performance falls behind the national average. Real GDP growth in Manitoba is below the national average and significantly behind Saskatchewan and Alberta. This places Manitoba in the lower tier of provincial growth. Business investment in Manitoba is significantly below both the national rate and that of neighboring provinces.

We know that investment follows opportunity, certainty and return on investment, and Manitoba under the current NDP government is not providing those conditions. And BITSA does nothing to address that. And, again, the hoist motion would give the government time to really look at that and reconsider how they're failing to generate economic growth in Manitoba.

The results of this decreased investment in Manitoba is reduced capital inflows, which limits future growth potential. Net job growth in Manitoba has come from the public sector, while private-sector employment has declined. Again, as I mentioned, for six consecutive quarters, the number of new business starts has been outpaced significantly by the number of exits for Manitoba, businesses that have closed or left Manitoba because the current government is not providing the kind of environment where they can thrive. Across the rest of Canada, employment growth has been led by the private sector, which drives productivity and long-term wage growth. Manitoba stands apart in relying primarily on public-sector expansion.

And the reason I'm mentioning all of this is because affordability and economic growth are fundamentally linked. Without growth, rising costs translate directly into lower real incomes for Manitobans. The problem is that, with BITSA, with Bill 53, this government has treated affordability as a separate issue from economic growth. You know, Manitoba recorded the highest inflation rate in Canada in 2025 and on a monthly basis is consistently the highest or among the highest in Canadian provinces in terms of inflation. And that's a huge concern for Manitobans.

The short-term affordability measures—and I would use that word in quotations, affordability measures—proposed by this government don't address

any of these issues. A more effective approach would be to put resources back into the hands of individuals and businesses where it will be reinvested in Manitoba. When individuals and businesses are free to spend and invest, the economy grows. That's just a fact. Under the current NDP government's approach, under BITSA, under Bill 53, that's not what we're going to be seeing here in Manitoba.

So the NDP government wants us to pass BITSA, and BITSA's purpose is to implement their budget. As I've mentioned, it's right in the title. But this budget is not good for Manitobans, and it's missing so many things. There's so many things that should be implemented through BITSA that aren't being implemented, that are a very good reason to put it on hold for five months.

Consult with Manitobans. Let's take it back to our constituents and invite Manitobans' feedback. back. I mean, we already tried an amendment to BITSA to take it to committee. The government refused to do that. So if they don't want to take it to committee, let's just hit pause for five months, like this hoist motion is asking us to, so that Manitobans really have time to consider what it is the government is trying to do with this bill.

One of the other issues that I hear about a lot from my constituents—and I know that my colleagues will agree—is health care. And BITSA and this budget is not effectively addressing the issues that I'm hearing about from my constituents. An issue that I have raised a couple of times in question period that remains unaddressed is the fact that ER wait times in the city of Winnipeg have doubled under the current government. And there's nothing in this budget or this BITSA, this implementation act, that's going to effectively address that. Because whatever the current government says it's doing, it's not working. The evidence is in the fact that median wait times have doubled under this government's watch.

So I think, again, with more time to consider the budget bill, the government could look at, hey, you know, ER wait times are a really pressing issue, and consider how they could better address that. They could look at the issue of nurse practitioners who are ready to be a significant part of the solution here in Manitoba. And BITSA and the budget bill doesn't contain any measures to address the fact that, according to a federal interpretation—

* (10:40)

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

Before I move on to the next—*[interjection]*

Order. Order.

When the Speaker is standing, he should be heard in silence.

I would like to inform the House that we've been informed that, in accordance with rule 44(2), that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) has designated his unlimited time on the hoist amendment to the second reading motion for Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, to the honourable member for La Vérendrye.

Mr. Narth: I thank you for the opportunity to rise today to speak to the hoist motion brought forward by the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk). This is a very important amendment to what we consider the BITSA bill, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

But, before I proceed, I'd also like to thank our leader, the Leader of the Official Opposition of Manitoba, for extending so generously his unlimited speaking time, his debate allocation of time to me, that he's entrusted me with unlimited time. Honourable Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Narth: —to have unlimited time to debate the hoist amendment, and I intend to use all of it, honourable Speaker.

An Honourable Member: All of it?

Mr. Narth: Honourable Speaker, that's right. That's right. Just to clarify for the members opposite, I intend to use all of the time granted to me. The unlimited speaking time, I intend to use all of it.

Honourable Speaker, the hoist amendment that's been brought forward by the member for Swan River is of great importance. I'll reiterate what this amendment exactly states. And it states that the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, the—what we consider BITSA bill, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day five months hence. And why this hoist amendment is important is because we have been working to express the concerns—the affordability, the economy concerns—as a focal point for this this budget, expressing the concerns of Manitobans.

Honourable Speaker, this is a part of the large—larger budget of this year for the government, and it, unfortunately, misses the mark. And we've been hearing from Manitobans. Manitobans are voicing their concerns directly to us as representatives of the great majority of Manitoba, and we've been bringing those concerns to debate each and every day in this Chamber.

Honourable Speaker, we also know that the concerns expressed by Manitobans across the entire province, including, as I say, the majority of the province that we represent, but also those of the areas represented by government representatives, and those concerns have gone unanswered. The concern is that the ministers responsible, together with the Premier (Mr. Kinew), have unanswered the concerns of Manitobans. That's the purpose of this debate. It's the purpose of BITSA bill debate together with the larger, broader budget debate.

Honourable Speaker, what we've seen is a BITSA bill that tries to portray—you know, it delivers theatrics that we've seen from the Premier delivering a fabricated message of affordability, and then the affordability message is portrayed to Manitobans as making a real difference on both their everyday affordability as well as the economic growth when, in fact, we can clearly see that it doesn't. Manitobans are clearly seeing that it doesn't.

So, honourable Speaker, why this hoist amendment is important is because it provides additional time for the government to actually consult with Manitobans, to hear what is of importance to them, because if the Premier is trying to bring forward a budget that needs to be passed without being brought forward before the backstop date, it's important that it actually represent those that it is intended to. And that is not what this bill does.

So, honourable Speaker, you know, we've—now we've seen that we've spoken through the entire night. We're trying to bring forward the message of Manitobans to this government with a complete unwillingness of theirs to even engage in debate on what we're hearing, the concerns from Manitobans. It's a complete unwillingness. And this unwillingness hasn't been over the last 24-hour period that we've been in this Chamber debating other legislation, but primarily the BITSA bill.

Honourable Speaker, this has gone on for weeks now. We had brought forward a resolution calling on the government to increase the basic personal exemption, making a real difference for Manitobans,

and there's been an outpour of support by everyday Manitobans saying that that makes a real difference.

The affordability measure or the misconception of an affordability measure in the BITSA bill is eliminating PST, you know, the percentage of the PST, the 7 per cent, on a small segment of goods that are purchased within a grocery store that have been taxed, and these are primarily snack foods: the chips; the pop; the things that, in the past, government hasn't encouraged consumption of.

Unusually, we are now seeing that this government is taking the tax off of the things that, you know, governments in the past have discouraged consumption, and now they've brought forward the encouragement of that consumption and are trying to portray it as real affordability measures. So it's somewhat bizarre, honourable Speaker, that this is the action that the government is taking to act on the affordability crisis that faces many Manitobans each and every day.

So, honourable Speaker, it's not just about the debate over the last 24 hours, as I've said. It's not about the debate over the last number of weeks. This goes much further. We have tried to reach the government in every way possible, in absolutely every way possible. We're willing to work with the government, we're willing to find a common ground, and our critic for Finance has brought forward recommendations and suggestions on how we could find a centre ground between what we view and know, you know, with economic support that would make a real difference for growing and supporting the economy as well as making real affordability changes.

* (10:50)

But what we've also done is we've also directly sent ministers letters because, obviously, you know, the 40 minutes that were granted for a question period as well as the time of debate in this Chamber hasn't been enough to even get the government to engage in debate. We've seen now, like I say, now we're nearing on 20 hours, I think, of a debate specifically focused on the amendments that we've brought forward to the BITSA bill and the BITSA bill itself, without any engagement from the government. Zero. None. Not a single member from the government has gotten up. Not a single one. Not a single one has brought forward any support for their own BITSA bill, has never brought forward any economic theory support to the claims that have been made both publicly and also within the piece of legislation; we've seen none of it.

We've seen the Finance Minister sit silent together with the other members of this government.

So, honourable Speaker, like I say, we've exhausted all measures at this point. And within that are letters, like I say, to ministers responsible for the budget. So one of those ministers is the minister responsible for economic development, the Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation (Mr. Moses). And I took it upon myself, as other colleagues of mine have to their government counterparts, to send letters expressing clearly and in an articulate manner the concerns that we're hearing from Manitobans.

Unfortunately, I didn't get to another important portfolio counterpart of mine, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn), but, you know, we haven't seen any action within the budget on agriculture whatsoever. We haven't seen any action on agriculture within this economy—

An Honourable Member: Relevance.

Mr. Narth: The relevance, for the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine), is that we're talking about the budget. Agriculture—I'll have the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) know the importance and the significance of agriculture within our economy. So definitely a significant portion—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would—*[interjection]*
Order.

I would encourage the member to bring his comments back to a point of relevance connected to the hoist amendment and BITSA.

Mr. Narth: Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker, for your guidance.

I'll reiterate what this hoist—the wording of the hoist amendment, brought forward by my colleague, the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk). So, honourable Deputy Speaker, again, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day five months hence. And the purpose for that amendment is so that there is more time to consult on the BITSA bill.

Honourable Speaker, a large part of the broader budget bill, as well as the supplementary BITSA bill, has significant tie to the agriculture sector. So, you know, if the Minister of Families is at all interested what actually drives the economy and the economic growth and prosperity of our province, I'll have her

know that significant portion of that is in fact agriculture.

Agriculture and the importance of agriculture not only feeds that minister as well as all members of this Chamber; along with feeding everybody, it, in fact, drives the economy and provides for the revenue, the tax revenue, that this government is able to enjoy in bringing forward the budget bill as they have. Without a significant contributor as agriculture is, we wouldn't have the tax revenue that this government is able to use within the BITSA bill as well as the broader budget bill, honourable Speaker. So it's of great importance.

But, getting back to all extant measures that we've brought forward to portray the importance of affordability of Manitobans to the government through the ministers responsible, I'll share with the House and you, honourable Deputy Speaker, a letter that I sent to the Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation (Mr. Moses). And we need response to correspondence like this, and that's why we're calling for this bill to not be read a second time until a day five months from now.

So, honourable Speaker, the letter to the Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation states: Manitoba families and businesses need an economy that is growing, competitive and creating opportunities. Unfortunately, the affordability measures currently contained within the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act do not go far enough to strengthen household finances or support long-term economic growth. That is why our caucus is urging your government to significantly increase Manitoba's basic personal exemption. Allowing Manitobans to keep more of what they earn would not only provide immediate relief for families but would also stimulate local economies, support small businesses and encourage economic activity across the province. We have been clear that, if your government is prepared to strengthen the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act through meaningful changes to the basic personal amount, our caucus is prepared to work constructively to ensure the legislation proceeds prior to June 1.

So, honourable Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I just have to clarify, was that document made public in any way?

Mr. Narth: Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker. Yes, it is a letter that has been made public as well as it's been handed—

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Narth: So, to finish, I state in this letter that this is an opportunity to work together to deliver real affordability relief while helping Manitoba's economy grow stronger. I encourage your government to take it. Sincerely, myself, the member for La Vérendrye.

So, honourable Speaker, the point of debate today is to portray the extent that we, the official opposition of Manitoba, have gone through to deliver the concerns of Manitobans. And that is the purpose of the opposition, is to hold this government to account. And they have a complete unwillingness to be held accountable to their actions. Manitobans each and every day have been calling out on this government's actions, and that is only growing. We're seeing the momentum of Manitobans that are seeing through the theatric rhetoric of this government and lack of action.

Honourable Speaker, I want to say it very clearly that this bill, the BITSA bill, does not meet the moment. It's clear that the government is offside on the bill as a whole. It's clear that this government is outside of their comfort zone, and Manitobans are seeing it. We see that Manitobans are struggling, families are paying more for all the things that they consume. That's the groceries, the gas, the hydro, the MPI rates to insure their vehicles, that's rent, that's the mortgages, and they're paying more for education property taxes.

* (11:00)

And what is this government offering them today? Nothing. Absolutely nothing, honourable Speaker. I—you know, I wouldn't even want to give the government the credit for saving them pennies. There may be pennies, but in many cases there aren't.

It wasn't too long ago that when we started the discussion and debate of the resolution as well as this BITSA bill that I brought forward some correspondence from a concerned constituent of mine. This was shortly after the announcement had been made public on the elimination of PST on junk food. Of course, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) at that time didn't portray it as the junk food tax elimination but portrayed it as an elimination of all tax on groceries. And that's the message that this Premier has tried to spin. It's a spin. That's all that it is. It's simply just a spin.

Honourable Speaker, this constituent of mine—and I had said it in debate before, I brought it forward in question period—this is not someone that's political. This isn't a long-standing political supporter of mine. This isn't even a member of the PC Party of Manitoba. This is someone that's really disconnected from day-to-day politics. This is somebody that owns a small business in southeast Manitoba, goes to work each and every day to provide for their family.

So, you know, this person was insulted. And they weren't at first insulted; they were somewhat struck, they were starstruck, as we saw during the honeymoon phase that is quickly being erased by—from this government, that many Manitobans were starstruck. We saw that in the last election and we saw it through the honeymoon phase of the first few months of this government. But, like I said, the people are seeing through that.

And this constituent of mine, they, in fact, saw through it quite quickly, and they were insulted. What they did is they heard the message on the radio, the interview of the Premier (Mr. Kinew) saying that there's going to be an elimination of all taxes on groceries brought forward by this NDP government. And this constituent of mine thought to themselves, well, you know, I wouldn't have thought—I know that the NDP ran on a health-care platform, which they're also failing on, but they never thought that affordability, tax saving, building the economy was anything that the NDP would ever be of any comfort within and ever be able to articulate any actual measurable change.

So he was actually taken aback and a little amazed. So he actually just left a grocery store, a grocery store in south Winnipeg, as he was doing some work there, and picked up groceries for the evening meal. You know, as many times this government has said, well, the savings on prepared food is to help busy Manitobans. So I don't think that you'll get any busier than this individual from southeast Manitoba that was working on a job in Winnipeg, picking up groceries to feed his family that evening, ran in, picked up \$100 worth of groceries. As we all know, \$100 doesn't stretch too far when it comes to shopping for groceries.

But, honourable Speaker, that constituent of mine had heard this message on the radio, pulled the receipt from the centre console of his pickup truck and thought, wow, what is this going to save me as a struggling, hard-working, independent-business owner that has a family of four waiting at home for this meal?

It's a good thing. And, just out of curiosity, let's look at how much this is saving us. Looked at the bottom of it—and I tabled it for the House; it's on record—that it had saved him—and this is a last-minute, rushed meal for supper—saved him 2 cents.

Immediately insulted by feeling that he was fooled by the Premier, fooled by—because he looked and he reflected and started thinking, oh, there isn't actually any tax on food. There was none before. So what does that mean? And where does the 2 cents come from? So, as you break down the receipt and the invoice, you quickly realize that he saved 2 cents on the reusable bag. Honourable Speaker, that's the savings that this government is portraying as real affordability measures for Manitobans. It's an insult to the hard-working Manitobans that realize what it takes to make a difference for affordability.

Mrs. Rachele Schott, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Honourable Speaker, you know, I'm feeling that the time is slipping away, and as I told the Speaker yesterday, it's amazing how much there is to say about the importance of making a real difference for Manitoba through improving affordability.

So, honourable Speaker, I'm happy to have been granted the unlimited speaking time by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), and I intend to use all of that. *[interjection]* Yes. Yes, I plan to use every last minute of my unlimited time.

So, honourable Speaker, we have seen that this government has really ignored what is of true importance to our Manitoba economy. And, you know, agriculture, as I stated before, I wish that the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), Minister responsible for Families, would have listened more intently on the importance of agriculture and that agriculture is one of the foundations of our economy.

As I stated, it feeds the families, it supports our rural communities as well as our urban communities, it creates jobs, it drives our exports, and it keeps this province moving along. But, under this NDP government, agriculture producers are seeing more regulation, more red tape, higher costs and very little support. And that is not at all unique to just the agriculture sector.

But, unfortunately, honourable Speaker, we are seeing complete neglect. And the really unfortunate part of it, and like I had stated in previous debate, is that business has options. We're seeing the results each and every day. Investors, people that are actually wanting to make a difference, not only on their own

lives—they have the entrepreneurial ability—but what's most important: making a difference on the lives of other Manitobans, building communities, building strong families that will support each and every one.

And, honourable Speaker, I've spoken at length over my three years in this Chamber to my background. And I alluded to some of it last night and yesterday. You know, I grew up in a family of business owners. My—as I said yesterday during the ministerial—not debate, but the ministerial statement and recognition of the Manitoba chambers, that when I was a child, I actually came into this exact Legislature, the Manitoba Legislature, together with our local chamber of commerce, because my grandparents were founders of our local chamber of commerce, and I attended meetings as a young child sitting on the table and later going with my parents. But businesses had the opportunity to come to the Legislature together with the chamber of commerce and express what is of importance to their communities, and I saw first-hand what a real difference that is able to make.

So, honourable Speaker, unfortunately, what I'm seeing is complete disregard for the importance of those that are actually moving our economy by this NDP government. We see that it is it is these people that build our communities together with the people that fulfill the roles within building products, producing food. And these businesses—they produce value not only to the families that they support—in turn, you know, the families that support them—but it reaches much further.

* (11:10)

So we see the passion. You see the passion when you see the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, all the other chambers that now make up the chamber community within Manitoba. We see the passion in who they are and who they represent.

But, honourable Speaker, those businesses, those entrepreneurs, those people that are creating the good, valuable lifestyle for their employees, these are people that don't just sit around, right? It takes a select few to create the industry that we have that contributes to all of our social system. It takes a unique person. And like I say, that person isn't going to wait around.

So, unfortunately, what we are now seeing is we're seeing them look to other places. Honourable Speaker, we're now seeing some very concerning statistics. We see the economic growth in our neighbouring provinces

and we're seeing the decline of our economic growth within Manitoba. So that points to the direction that investment is going.

So these businesses aren't sticking around. I gave another example, and I've got a lot of examples, honourable Speaker. I speak to constituents of mine each and every day as well as constituents across the province, including the city of Winnipeg, as again I say, you know, lifelong business owner and growing up in an independent business, I speak to people within the business community and those that represent those businesses each and every day.

So, yesterday, I gave an example of quite a significant now new agriculture processing business, NPI, out in Blumenort, Manitoba, rapidly growing. You know, we're really a stellar business model run by truly an exceptional business leader, somebody that's able to think outside of the box. Honourable Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

We've provided quite a bit of leniency, but we really need the member to bring his remarks back to the hoist amendment at hand and to Bill 53.

Mr. Narth: Thank you for your guidance, honourable assistant deputy Speaker. Thank you for that guidance.

But, honourable Speaker, I think this is very important. The hoist amendment, as I've stated, states that the BITSA bill be not read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day five months hence. And what that does, what we're asking for, and this has been articulated through the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk), and obviously some thought was put into the words selected for this amendment, is so the government has the opportunity to consult.

And so to wrap this all back into where I was going, we—I read out the letter that I had presented the minister responsible for economic development. We've debated this bill to extent, including now debating it as long as it takes for the government to finally take into consideration the concerns of those struggling Manitobans. And we have gotten nowhere. So I'm giving an example, or examples, honourable assistant deputy Speaker, of real-life Manitobans that are expressing their concerns about the lack of attention that this BITSA bill has given to actually growing the economy, to actually making an affordability change. And this BITSA bill is portrayed as an affordability measure bill.

Honourable Speaker, if this BITSA bill had, you know, significant consideration and significant attention to health care or something else in the public service sector, and it included the finances that go along with that, then we would be having that discussion. But the discussion that we're having is that this BITSA bill is portrayed as an affordability measure, but it does not include any affordability measures. So what we're asking for in the hoist amendment is more time for consultation with Manitobans. And my examples simply draw attention to that.

But, honourable Speaker, I'll save the examples and more so focus on the facts if that would be more appropriate, but I do think as a representative of, not only my constituents but of all Manitobans, it is very important that my voice in this Legislature is an effective representation of those that I have been selected by to represent their voice here in the Manitoba Legislature.

So I personally think that what is of most importance when I stand up to debate legislation in this House that I actually am able to portray the voice of Manitobans. I don't think that there is really any other purpose of my voice in debate within this Chamber so it is unfortunate that my ability to be the voice of my constituents is limited within this Chamber.

But, honourable Speaker, as I say, we must portray more of the facts that are included here. So, like I said, these businesses as NPI that are moving to other provinces or, you know, entertaining the move to other provinces because of the unwillingness of this government to address the concerns that are limiting their competition is showing results like a 27.7 per cent, more than a quarter of our exports in Manitoba, have declined—have decreased from the previous year.

Honourable Speaker, this isn't brought forward by any independent organization that's critical of the government or the minister's operation and conduct of this government. Those are facts brought forward by the Manitoba government themselves. That's directly sourced from Manitoba government records. So we see a 27.7 decrease in exports and at the same time, an article had come out just last week from Saskatchewan, our neighbouring province, and we're seeing that people are turning to the neighbouring provinces when they're looking to expand, and Saskatchewan building permits are up 29.9 per cent.

So we lost 27.7 per cent in exports as they gained 29.9 per cent in building permits.

So, honourable Speaker, this forces me to reflect on the conversation that I have with Ryan from NPI looking at moving a business that is specifically an agriculture process–processor that exports food-grade agriculture products, and they're looking at moving. So they're going to be building new production in Saskatchewan, which adds to the building permit statistics, as well as it, naturally, would decline the exports for Manitoba.

So, honourable Speaker, these are concerning statistics and these are things that Manitobans are deeply concerned about and they are the voices that we represent and why we bring forward this hoist motion is because the government needs to consult with the people that have these concerns. These aren't just the businesses. These are the everyday Manitobans that are struggling. These are the people that are struggling to pay their mortgage.

* (11:20)

Honourable Speaker, affordability is measured by things far greater than your ability to buy a Slurpee. Affordability can more easily be measured by a family's ability to pay their mortgage. The ability to fill the gas tank instead of put in a partial fill; that is how you measure real affordability. When you're able to choose a sporting activity for your child, when you're able to book a vacation, these are things that measure real affordability. And Manitoba has so much opportunity. Canada, you know, the land of opportunity. We're sitting on such extravagant, widespread wealth, and some of the smartest people, whether it be those from bioscience to science to entrepreneurial wisdom.

Honourable Speaker, some of the smartest people in the world are right here in Canada, are right here in Manitoba. You combine that with our vast resources and our vast space able to—sitting on some of the most fertile agriculture land, able to produce some of the highest production, best quality food in the world. And there is no reason why we need to be talking about holidays as a luxury. There's no reason why we need to be talking about filling your car as a luxury or the extravagance of the drapes on your wall. We have all the opportunity we could ever imagine right here in Manitoba. So, for a socialist NDP government to tell us that we need to be ashamed to enjoy the luxuries of life is really disappointing and I think is off base.

But further to support that, we've seen some concerning reports come out. You know, one most recently was brought forward by the Economic Development & Tourism association of Winnipeg. And what they had brought forward are—I'm looking for the exact stats. I think I remember them exactly off the top of my head but I wouldn't want to misquote. So the Winnipeg Economic Development & Tourism association just had a forum here, right here in our city, in Winnipeg, and—just last week, and they had highlighted international investment—and this also plays to our weak performance that I had highlighted before in exports, as well as business development.

CFIB reports are showing that we have an exodus of business. We have more businesses putting boards on their windows than we do grand opening signs, and that's concerning. Honourable Speaker, the same report had highlighted that this is the first time that we're seeing this in recent history. You know, we've been in a drastic growth phase post-Second World War in North America in general. And for this to be seen the first time in Manitoba is a signal. And it highlights a signal that may be of larger concern. But you know what we're not seeing? Those same statistics in our neighbouring provinces. So I think we need to reflect inwards upon ourselves.

So getting back to the comments and discussion that were made at that forum is international investment into Manitoba is behind the rest of the country, behind the entire rest of the country. And that's concerning. Again, it ties me back to the opportunity that we are not enjoying here in Manitoba. What we saw in the last year was six global investment projects in Manitoba. And many people would say, well, what do you benchmark that against? You know, what's the comparison? Is six good? Is six bad? What's six, right? But for contrast, Alberta and BC each saw 68. We saw six. They saw 68. Saskatchewan, who has more large-scale, more clearly defined—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Order.

So we're talking about Manitoba and the hoist amendment, so if the honourable member could please bring his remarks back to that and to Bill 53.

Mr. Narth: For sure. Thank you, honourable assistant deputy Speaker. For sure, we're obviously—we're representing Manitoba, but I think it's of great importance to look outwards as much as we look inwards. And it's important that we are competitive with our neighbouring provinces. So I think if we talk about the economic position of our province we should be benchmarking it against our neighbours.

So, honourable Speaker, Saskatchewan, as I say, they had seen 13 in the last year, opposed to our six; Ontario, 278; Quebec, 95; Nova Scotia, the second poorest performing. As we know, the Maritimes, the economy is just naturally much more limited. They had even seen 19. If that's not concerning, I don't know what is.

So, then, we look to efforts that again have been—have been expressed publicly without very little substantial action and that's the government's discussion on trade offices. We had seen—we had seen that the government had claimed that what would make things more affordable through the growth of the economy is a US trade office.

And, honourable Speaker, I can see the concern between yourself and the clerk representative on the relevance to the hoist motion. But it is very important that we talk about the broader form of the budget together with the BITSA bill and the underperformance of this government together with the lack of actual address to these concerns within the BITSA bill. And that's why we have brought forward the hoist amendment, to give this government more time; simply just another five months, we'll come back here hopefully. Seeing as though the government hasn't listened to us, they may directly listen to Manitobans, although we're hearing from Manitobans that they haven't.

Honourable Speaker, so this trade office—the answer, the be-all to end-all with our largest trade partner. Like, seriously, anybody with any economic insight knows that the US is still our largest trade partner. We don't—we don't have—we don't have a supply—or a demand issue in this province. We've got all the customers we could ever want. We have a competition issue.

But the saviour, the US trade office and the trade representative costing—we haven't been able to get a clear answer but we've been able to get a vague answer of \$500,000—half a million dollars. And when the minister was asked in Estimates what has been delivered upon for that \$500,000—half a million dollars—it was nothing. It was absolutely nothing. Not a single trade deal.

But the minister responsible for economic development had actually doubled down and stated that it is not the role of the trade representative or his role as the minister responsible for economic development to make trade deals. So, you know, I think that's somewhat concerning for this province that we have a representative. And if I had more time,

I would actually go through the mandate letter of the minister.

And, although I have unlimited time, I do want to remain respectful and also articulate. So, you know, I want to make sure that the Speaker is able to follow, to follow the direction of debate here today, honourable Speaker. So we see that as something of great concern.

* (11:30)

We also see the growing debt and the effects that that has in general on our province. Honourable Speaker, Manitoba debt is \$38.1 billion. That's a billion with a B. What that translates into is \$24,831 per person. And this BITSA bill doesn't address any of that, right?

So you may ask, well, what would be the effect of that? You know, debt is debt, and it's the government. We understand what our debt is. You got debt with your mortgage or your car payment; you know the obligations to that. But people don't feel the debt of a government. You don't—you aren't able to touch it in the same way as you're able to touch the products that you would have been able to purchase if it wasn't for your consumer debt. If you didn't need to make that credit card payment, you'd be able to actually touch something of substance. And, honourable Speaker, unfortunately, in—with government debt, you just can't do it the same way.

So I'll try to draw the comparison. You know, this debt is actually almost \$25,000 per person. So that's roughly every single person—and that's not just you and your wife; it's you, your wife, your children, your grandmother that's now in a personal-care home. They're all carrying an extra car payment, right? That's—that is an extra car that you, your five-year-old son or daughter, may be able to have—everybody would; every single person in your family would have an extra car. So I hope that draws relation to what it actually means, honourable Speaker.

You know, we could have 10 per cent more of everything if this government would act in more of a responsible way with their budget bill. They haven't been, and they've showcased that to Manitobans. Manitobans are speaking out against it.

Honourable Speaker, again, to tie that to something that people can actually put a connection to, I gave this some thought. I find that as debt has increased from the millions to billions for government, and you don't have that contact to what the debt actually means, people lose touch with, you know, \$550 million, as this government said that their deficit

may be—which, in reality, we know that they've never hit their target with debt. They far surpass that one, each and every time. We—we're missing the mark on performance of economic growth, but we sure are not missing the mark with debt growth.

But, honourable Speaker, if you look at the quantitative measure put into something relatable, a million seconds is 11 and a half days. One million seconds gives you 11 and a half days, right? So not quite two weeks' worth of time. A billion seconds is 31.7 years—thirty-seven point—or 31.7 years versus 11 days. So when you switch from a million to a billion, that's how much more it is.

And I talked to some friends the other weekend about that and they said, we never really thought about that. So when we talk about \$1 million, we all know that \$1 million is quite a bit of money. And then when we talk about \$1 billion, you know, this government throws around \$1 billion, like, oh well, we went from \$500 million to \$1.6 billion; it's only one and a bit, and, you know, it's creeping on two, but one and two aren't big numbers. What is that?

Honourable Speaker, that is the difference between affordability for Manitobans and being suffocated by debt commitment, and that is really unfortunate. And we haven't seen this government take any action whatsoever. We've seen a complete disaster in the past and now within their current mandate with Manitoba Hydro.

Manitoba Hydro holds a \$25.3 billion of debt. I don't know if all Manitobans even realize this. This is something that I found quite interesting. Manitoba Hydro, our Crown corporation, our Crown jewel, holds more debt—this is a corporation within this Manitoba government—holds more debt than half of the countries on the planet. Half the countries isn't half the companies; this is half of the countries of the world have less debt than our Crown corporation. And it's exploding. Manitoba Hydro debt is now projected in the next few years to go to \$34 billion. That is concerning. But that definitely makes a difference to the affordability of the province.

I want to portray that this government is getting it all wrong, and the purpose of our hoist amendment is so that Manitobans can be listened to by this government. Another report that had come out in the Winnipeg Free Press just today—yesterday is that the Manitoba delinquency rate rises amid cost of living strain and, honourable Speaker, that was brought forward by Equifax. And this government says that they are listening, they are listening to Manitobans.

So I look at social media because that's what seems to drive and direct this government, is social media posts. So we saw the Minister of Health make a social media post about the opposition trying to stall their great affordability bill. Honourable Speaker, I've printed it out for myself, just some of the top comments, and it is clear to see that this government is offside. And we would just hope that through the opportunity we have given this government through this hoist amendment, through our debate on—through our debate on the BITSA bill, that they would take the time, the suggested time, you know, another five months from now to consult with Manitobans: those that are concerned, those that are putting out reports like the Winnipeg Economic Development & Tourism association.

But, honourable Speaker, you don't need to go very far to see that Manitobans are concerned. I looked at this social media post and, again, I used the social media post because this is Manitobans expressing their concerns as directly as it could be. And it's in a comfortable new form, you know, it's quite new and modern to guiding government. But, clearly, this government is guided by that. We see significant TikTok, Instagram, Facebook presence by the government, and that seems to be how they get their message out and communicate with Manitobans. That's consulting with Manitobans.

So I think it's important to address comments that are made. I pulled the first 20 comments off this social media post, and I'll read out some of them. So the very first one, honourable Speaker, was: You have a majority government, pass the affordability measures and stop playing games. They see through it. Catio [*phonetic*], the second comment: What's the loophole? I don't understand. Please explain.

Manitobans don't understand why this government has such an issue governing the province with a significant majority government. Everyone's—anything that they learned in school would tell them that when you have a majority government, that you're able to enact the laws that you wish. So this government is clearly doing a poor job at explaining to Manitobans their role of government. Or maybe the government themselves, maybe this NDP government has spent too much time in—well, hopefully it's going to be longer, shortly—in opposition that they don't actually know how to govern yet. They're still—they're learning on their feet here and they're trying to get their feet under them.

* (11:40)

I see this NDP government with the BITSA bill that they brought forward and I compare it to being back on the farm, you know, when you see that young calf just being born and it just can't get its feet under it. It wants to run. It sees the other calves out on the pasture; it wants to run. But the legs just—they aren't under it yet, right? So it takes some time, and that calf, it looks to the other animals around it and it learns. It learns on that it needs to actually take some measured steps towards actually walking, honourable Speaker. Unfortunately, the comparison can be drawn to listening to Manitobans, and this government is not doing that. And that's why they just cannot get their feet beneath them.

Honourable Speaker, the next comment is by Larry—and this is in order; this isn't picking and choosing. The next comment is by Larry, expressing his concern about this BITSA bill. This is a post by the minister talking about exactly what we're doing here right now. This is about debate on the BITSA bill and expressing the concern of the opposition debating—you know, our rights as the official opposition to debate and express the voice of Manitobans. And it doesn't get any better than actually hearing the voices of Manitobans. So Larry says: Removing a sales tax on junk food is hardly making a dent in affordable groceries that already doesn't have any taxes.

The next comment, Brandi: Because dropping the PST on groceries—quote, groceries—will give back, what, \$25 a year, when lowering basic income tax would give back a heck of a lot more—and I'll alter the terminology there—that's NDP mathing.

Then, honourable Speaker, Robert: The Health Minister promoting taking the tax off junk food. The irony is real.

You know, I can go on and on and on. And this is in order. This is—like I said, this isn't cherry-picking comments. These are real Manitobans that—this is on an NDP post. So I'd only assume that these Manitobans, in fact, are followers of the NDP. You know, these are probably—each and every one of these are probably the people that helped to put the government in the government benches.

You know, I would bet you, honourable Speaker, that these people are having some real buyer's remorse right now. They are seeing the failures, and they are seeing that these failures are real. We see this—I'm not going to dwell on the facts that we see, but what is very concerning is when you see independent reports by Equifax, as I've stated. Headline, Free Press article: Manitoba delinquency rate rises amid the

cost of living strain. When Equifax, right—like these are the people, this is the organization that that signals to lenders whether or not somebody is viable to purchase, and they're calling out Manitoba as being unique.

Manitobans are increasingly missing credit card payments as the cost of living rises. Non-mortgage debt in Manitoba jumped 1.84 per cent when comparing January through March to the same time last year. Manitoba's average non-mortgage debt hung around \$18,568. Meanwhile, the measure tackling—tracking when Manitoba's pass payment deadline by at least 90 days, called a delinquency rate, hiked 2.32 per cent year over year, according to the new data. And, honourable Speaker, you know, this is of most recent data, and it goes to show you people struggling.

I tie that back to—you know, we can tie it to all segments of the economy. It's quite easy and clear to do, but it reminds me of the jobs numbers, right? Honourable Speaker, the—we had the minister together with his whole caucus clapping in question period saying that there was job creation within the last month. When you drive down into those numbers, we saw that some of the largest decrease in job market numbers were the months leading into the year, the January and February, and then we saw a slight rebound. So I drove into the numbers.

You know, honourable Speaker, I've stated in the past my background. I've got a commerce degree and an economics degree as well as a lifelong business manager. So it's—it comes natural to me to need to know the whole story.

So, when I drive down into these numbers, we see a strong percentage of those being seasonal workers and that's not concerning; that's a Manitoba thing, right? Like, we're in a cold climate; we have a construction season that is limited; a large number of our works—force needs to be mobilized for the summer months, and that same labour workforce is really restricted during the winter. So I—I'm not going to be blaming the NDP government for our seasonal cycles here in Manitoba. That's simply not fair and I'm reasonable enough to not try to state that.

But, when we look past that, we look at something else very concerning. Senior job enter has skyrocketed. So these are seniors that would have been outside of the job market, right? And unemployment doesn't account for—and I'm sure all Manitobans are well aware of this, but I'll state it for those that may not be, because it is quite easy to overlook, right?

Because, when you think of unemployment, you think of the people that don't have a job. And that, in fact, is not accurate.

Honourable Speaker, the unemployment rate only accounts for those that are unemployed for a segment of time. When they've stopped looking for a job, they are no longer included. So that's a little bit misleading. So, you know, anyone that would be long-term on any type of social assistance program or anything like that no longer is considered unemployed because they're not actively looking for a job. So they're excluded. Along with that would be senior citizens that have retired and are drawing on a retirement plan, an old age pension, Canadian pension plan, any of those, no longer considered as part of the statistic for unemployment.

A large portion of job entries that we're see—or, workforce entries that we're seeing are actually seniors. These are people that retired. They thought, I've worked my whole life; I've put money away; I now am going to enjoy life. I'm going to spend time with my family, my grandkids. I'm going—you know, I'm going to the local pool hall and enjoy my days. And then they realize that, under the economic climate of this province—and, again, I'm not going to be unfair; I'm not going to say that this isn't something that's more widespread across the country.

The unfortunate part is we're leading the country in these types of trends. And what that means is that we are not creating the affordability that people deserve. You know, I feel bad for someone that has contributed their entire life to our province and our country. This is somebody that, each and every day, they got up, they went to work, they contributed to build wealth for our nation. They paid their taxes, entrusted the government to responsibly use their money to provide services that are beneficial to them. And instead, now, they're being faced with seeing, you know, reckless misrepresentation of that.

They're seeing a government that is compounding the problem. They're seeing a government in this BITSA bill, together with the broader larger budget; they're seeing a government that's taking their hard-earned money and creating additional debt with it. So, in fact, that's compounding the problem. You're taking money from somebody else, taking debt, overspending, wasting the money, and then going back to those same people and saying, now you are on the hook to make the payment.

* (11:50)

You know, it's—when you think about it, it's bizarre. It's—you know, it's a neighbour buying a car; are you co-signing for them because you trust them, and then they trash it. They don't take care of it and then they can't make the payment themselves. They haven't figured out a way that they'd be able to pay for the damages as well as fulfill their obligation. And then they come back to you and say, in fact, you are the one responsible for the situation that we're in.

And the government, you know, for—in large part, has done exactly that to the seniors in this province. And we're seeing it with those jobs numbers. So, honourable Speaker, those jobs numbers are very concerning. Then, again, we compare it to our neighbours and we see, what are they doing? What are they doing different? And we've brought forward some of these recommendations.

That's why it is really disappointing that this government won't even engage in debate with an opposition that was a short while ago in government, that ran balanced budgets. And now we can't even have constructive debate.

Obviously we know, Manitobans know—as I pointed out in the social media comments—Manitobans understand how government functions. They realize that this government has a majority; they can do whatever they want in the grand scheme of things. But I don't understand why, you know, as the official opposition representing a significant portion of Manitobans that are contributing to the position of our province, we aren't being listened to. And in turn, the voices that we represent are not being listened to.

Honourable Speaker, so we've brought forward some recommendations that would make a real difference. That is raising the basic personal exemption to \$30,000 and that's because we know that that would make a difference. You know, I spoke about it earlier. How do you pay for it, the government says. There's economic theory that supports it. Like, this isn't—this doesn't need to be debate amongst politicians that may not have any background in economics.

You can open a textbook, you know, go down to the University of Manitoba, speak to an economics prof, get them to flip to the appropriate page and look at the Laffer curve, right: an economic theory that supports when government puts money back into the pockets of its citizens, how that expands the economy, as well as the multiplier effect.

And we see, like I said, I had done a paper on it in one of my economics classes during my undergrad.

And it's amazing to see when you track a dollar in a local community, what that transforms into by the time it exits your community.

So, honourable Speaker, we know that it's possible. We know that other jurisdictions are doing it. We know that other jurisdictions have done it. And we see that no prosperous nation has ever built wealth on a tax structure for the people that are there to grow and support their country. There is no example around the world that shows that more taxation, less trust in the citizens that create the wealth, that less trust in keeping more of the money that they earn is a way forward to build our economy.

So, honourable Speaker, we bring forward constructive suggestions. Basic personal exemption is something that we feel is critical to growing our economy and combatting the affordability crisis that we have before us. We've brought forward other ideas that would support the business community to support those that they employ. That's a single-desk business model, and what that does is it gives predictable avenues to access the approvals that are needed, the permits that are required to build, grow, invest and prosper. It's something that the government can just take as a recommendation to do something with it, but we're seeing a complete unwillingness.

Land transfer tax for first-time home buyers is another thing that we see. As we're facing an affordability crisis, the average wage of—or not average wage, the average age, I should say, of first-time homebuyers is rapidly increasing in Manitoba.

Another one—another statistic that we are leading the country in is the average age of first-time homebuyers. That's concerning, you know, in a province like Manitoba. We would think this would be something in downtown Toronto or downtown Vancouver where affordability of a home is out of reach, but now we are seeing Manitoba leading the way.

You know, another one that we brought forward before was the—eliminating the PST on building materials for new homes. When we talk about the lack of affordable living, the lack of homes to address these concerns that we have in Manitobans accessing housing, that is something that would make a difference.

And, honourable Speaker, when we talk about reducing tax and building the economy, that makes a difference. That is what this BITSA bill should set out to do. The BITSA bill together with the budget bill of this government should be listening to those concerns on the things that actually build our economy, support

Manitobans, make a difference so that we can enjoy those luxuries as I started out my remarks on.

And that's why we've brought forward the hoist amendment, honourable Speaker, because it simply gives the government more time to listen to Manitobans as well as those stakeholders that are willing to provide the guidance. These are the business organizations, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This is—these are organizations like the Winnipeg economic and tourism association. These are the guiding voices that know what it's going to take to make a better Manitoba. And we're willing to come to the table and work. Manitobans, clearly, as I stated in all those social media posts, they're willing too.

So, honourable Speaker, with that, I would like to give the opportunity to others to speak to this very important hoist amendment and discussion, and I know that I'll have the opportunity sometime in the future to finish my comments. So I thank you, honourable Speaker, for this opportunity.

Mr. Khan: Honourable assistant deputy Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, commonly referred to as BITSA.

Today, you've heard for the last few hours that we are moving a hoist motion. Now, before I explain what a hoist motion is and why it matters, I think it's important to note something for Manitobans watching this debate, because not everyone knows what a hoist motion is. But why are we having this discussion?

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The Progressive Conservative caucus has been speaking for over 55 hours in this Chamber to this NDP government. For 23 hours alone, in this single sitting, we have been speaking to this NDP government, and not one NDP MLA has stood up and put one word on the record. Not one NDP MLA or minister or Premier (Mr. Kinew) has spoken to why their budget is a good—what they think to be a good budget. Not one of them has defended their position. Not one of them has said what we're saying is wrong. They are just not working. They are not listening to you.

We have brought forward your concerns to this Chamber, to this NDP government. And what do they do instead? They play video games. They watch movies on their iPads. They put their feet on the chairs. They take their shoes off. They wrap themselves in blankets. They take naps on the couches. They do not want to work. If you think what I'm saying

is not true, you can simply go back and look at the footage, honourable assistant deputy Speaker.

This is not a serious government. This is not a listening government that they campaigned on. This is a government who is merely trying to make flashy announcements and pass by.

* (12:00)

Now, when I refer to why that's important, it's because it brings me directly to the hoist motion, which is what we are debating today. And that is brought forward, and I want to thank the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) for his diligence, for his hard work and for his commitment to bring this motion, this hoist amendment forward.

And that is, and I'll skip to the end of the hoist motion here where it says, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day, five months hence—five months hence. So we're saying in this hoist motion that this should be brought forward in five months. Why in five months? Because after 23 hours of straight sitting, they're not listening. After 55-plus hours of discussions in this Chamber, they are not listening. So we are hoping that after five more months with this hoist motion, they will finally listen, honourable assistant deputy Speaker.

If this NDP government isn't willing to put one word on the record to defend their own budget, how can they possibly ask Manitobans to vote for it? How can they in good conscience sit here in the Chamber, collect their salaries while they're watching movies and sleeping in the Chamber, while at our side of the House we put up speaker after speaker after speaker committed to bringing your issues forward, committed to representing your concerns, to having this NDP government, just for a second, listen. Listen to what Manitobans are saying.

And what they're saying is clear, that they are struggling. They are having a hard time paying their bills. That they can't put food on the table. They can't put gas in their car. They can't put their kids in sports. And they can't—God forbid they want to do this—take a trip with their family. Because life is not affordable in this province under this NDP government.

But what is happening here? This NDP government is playing games. They're playing games with your life. They're playing games by saying, we, on this side of the House, somehow magically are blocking the work they're doing.

Well, Manitobans have listened. And they've heard. Like my member from Brandon West, who speaks so eloquently when he says, there's a difference between listening and hearing. They might say they're listening but they're not hearing; it's not resonating with them. They're not acting on it. It's not getting into their soul.

When Manitobans now are saying, listen, hear what we're saying, what we're telling you is we're struggling, and this NDP government has the audacity to go forward and say we are going to make your life more affordable by saving you a few pennies off of junk food. That is their Crown jewel in this.

If you listen to anything this government has said, is that we are going to save you money on junk food. Manitobans are saying that's not enough. A hoist motion will give this government five months to just listen. And after five months, if they come back with the data and the reports and they say, hey, we listened for five months, here are all the people we talked to, honourable assistant deputy Speaker, these are all the people we've spoken to—and they say that saving money on junk food is what they want.

Well, then, great. Pass it. But I guarantee you, that's not what they're going to hear. That's why they don't have the courage. That's why they don't have the backbone. That's why they don't have that conviction to stand up in the House today and put one word on the record, because they know they are fundamentally wrong. They know that saving you 7 cents on a can of pop, 14 cents on a bag of chips, 2 cents on one litre of milk is not going to make the difference.

That's why we on this side of the House have been speaking for 23 hours straight and we're not done yet. We will continue to go forward. We will continue to message that for Manitobans because they have to listen. And that is exactly what a hoist motion does. *[interjection]*

The Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) wants to heckle once again when I speak. He has a habit of heckling when I speak, but he has a habit of also not putting words on the record. It's concerning that he is the Minister of Finance that came forward with this awful budget and now who doesn't want to listen to Manitobans when we give him the opportunity. This is your out, Minister.

An Honourable Member: You're not serious.

Mr. Khan: You have the ability to—now he says I'm not serious. He wants to heckle again.

You know what's not serious, honourable assistant deputy Speaker and Minister of Finance, when you tell someone that they can save money on junk food. When Manitobans are dying in hospitals, when Manitobans can't pay their bills, when Manitobans are waiting 20-plus hours, when Manitobans are begging to be heard, when our economy is dead last—they're begging to be heard.

A hoist motion allows that ability for Manitobans to be heard if the Minister of Finance would put his ego go aside. Put your pride aside. You are a servant for the people of Manitoba. Listen to what they're telling you. And, like my great, esteemed colleague from La Vérendrye said, when he quoted off, time and time again, of Manitobans bringing their concerns forward, where they—Manitobans talk about how this NDP—and this is Manitobans, this is public.

And this is actually on the NDP social media—NDP social media—where they said, quote: You have a majority government; pass affordability measures and stop playing games. Removing a sales tax on junk food is hardly making a dent in affordable groceries that already doesn't have any taxes. The Health Minister promoting taxing—taking the tax off junk food is—the irony is real. The PC plan results in a—way more money in your pocket. Your plan saves a handful of dollars a month.

It goes on and on and on. There's thousands of comments online, thousands. *[interjection]* The—again, you can hear them clear as day; they're mocking, they're laughing. When they have the opportunity to put words on the record, they don't want to do it. You know what that's called when you want to heckle someone, yell at someone when you actually don't have the opportunity to do it? It's called being a coward. It's called being cowardice. It's called being ashamed. It's called being embarrassed. It's called, you might be held accountable for the words you put on the record.

And they don't want to be accountable because they know this is a terrible budget. They know there's no affordability changes in this. And that is why, after they have voted against a reasoned amendment; that is why, after they have voted against 23 hours of debate just in this one day and we will continue to go, that they don't want to put words on the record. Today's hoist motion simply allows Manitobans to have more of a voice for five months, and they don't want to do that. They want to play games.

Families are struggling—struggling with groceries, mortgages, rents, taxes, fuel, the costs of everyday life.

An Honourable Member: Pass the bill.

Mr. Khan: The Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) says, well, pass the bill. Pass the bill. Okay.

What are you doing to make life more affordable, Minister? Put some words on the record.

An Honourable Member: Taking the PST off all groceries.

Mr. Khan: So he says here, he says here in the Chamber, take the PST off junk food. That's his answer right now. He says take the PST off junk food. It's embarrassing. It's comical. It's pathetic that this is what he actually says in the Chamber right now.

Honourable Speaker—deputy Speaker, Manitobans are struggling. *[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

Please keep it low.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, honourable deputy Speaker. I appreciate you calling the Minister of Finance to order there.

It continues to speak on a narrative of this NDP government: symbolism over action; big, flashy announcements over real affordability changes; getting the headlines instead of doing the work—continue time and time again. The hospital in Portage la Prairie: done, built, funded by the previous PC government. The seven RAAM clinics that are open in the province: done by the previous PC government. Fifteen schools built now: done by the previous PC government. Hundred million dollars in Arts, Culture and Sport in Community Fund: done by the previous PC government.

What do they do? They show up, they cut the ribbon and they say, oh, look at us.

But, in reality, they haven't done any of the work. Just like they are not doing the work today, just like they refuse to come forward and speak—23 hours they've had the opportunity. *[interjection]*

Now the minister of addictions and homelessness wants to put some words on the record. Oh, no, wait, they don't; they want to heckle, because they're cowards. They don't want to speak to their actual budgets. They don't want to be held accountable for their actions, and they don't want any transparency.

* (12:10)

Families are struggling, families—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please. Order, please.

I would request the member to tie it back to the hoist amendment, please.

Mr. Khan: I thank you for your guidance on that and I'll tie that back. And everything I've said is about allowing Manitobans an opportunity to come forward and speak, allow Manitobans five more months to have their voices heard. That is exactly what a hoist amendment does, is that it not to be read a second time this day five months hence. Five more months for Manitobans.

Now, the Minister of Finance wants to say we're delaying it. Last time I checked—and Manitobans, you can fact-check this—the NDP is the government. They are—the Premier (Mr. Kinew), NDP leader, they have more seats, they have more votes, they can implement what they want—*[interjection]*—and they're clapping, so they acknowledge this. They acknowledge that they have that power. They acknowledge they have the power, but they want to play political games.

They want to play political—they can implement the changes they want. They can implement the changes they want; they refuse not to. Greg Selinger did it when he increased the PST after he promised he wouldn't, Brian Pallister did it when he lowered the PST. Mark Carney did it without a vote when he removed the federal gas tax. This NDP government, what do they do? Nothing. Play games. Don't put any words on the record. Don't want to work to get it done. Don't want to listen to Manitobans. They want to make flashy announcements with none of the hard work.

Honourable Speaker—honourable assistant deputy Speaker, how did junk food become a priority for this government? At a time when our health care is crumbling, crime is out of control, addictions, homelessness is at record highs, our economy is dead last, education property taxes are three times higher than anywhere else in the country in Manitoba.

Inflation is the highest it is in the country, Manitoba. Food inflation is the highest, and this government prioritizes junk food. This government prioritizes talking about picking winners and losers. A meal prepared by a local restaurant owner will not be PST exempt, but a meal or a pizza prepared at Costco or Sobeys will. Help me make sense of that.

And when asked to do it and brought forward, it might have been an honest mistake. Hey, you made this mistake, you left this out; Manitobans are saying this. This is what the host motion will bring—more examples like this—forward for Manitobans.

You have opportunity to change it. They choose not to. Why? Because of their arrogance, because of their ability that they can do whatever they want and you have no say. We're simply proposing a hoist amendment to say, give it five more months, talk about it. If you want to implement things, you can implement them. You have the majority of votes. You can do it, honourable assistant deputy Speaker.

It's time to listen, consult. It's time to hear; it's time to let it resonate with you. It's time to make a real difference in the province of Manitoba. They have that opportunity. I have so much more to talk about. We got quotes from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, we have quotes from CFIB, we have quotes from Harvest Manitoba, Doctors Manitoba, Manitoba Nurses Union, Restaurants Canada.

Every one of them talks about more consultation, being shut out, not listening to what their sector needs, not listening to what Manitoba needs. Every one of them is wrong, but this Premier (Mr. Kinew) is right? That is the definition of arrogance. That is the definition of not listening to Manitobans, honourable assistant deputy Speaker.

We proposed a simple plan. A simple plan that would increase your basic personal exemption to \$30,000, meaning that a family would save up to \$3,000. This NDP government refuses to discuss it. They want to attack—personal attacks, they want to make jokes, they want to laugh, they want to bark, but they don't want to do the work of debating, having that conversation here in the Chamber.

Twenty three hours have gone by and they refuse to do it, honourable deputy—assistant deputy Speaker. When it comes to delivering results, this government has failed. When it comes to broken promises, this government has excelled. When it comes to delivering for Manitobans, no one believes them anymore. No one believes what they're going to say. No one believes Manitoba can become a have province under this government because they have misled them so many times. No one believes that they will listen. That is why we have made an effort to bring forward this hoist amendment.

Now, 23 hours in, not one NDP member stood up. Not one stood to defend their affordability plan. Not one stood to defend their junk food tax. Not one member on that side of the House put words on the record. But they love to heckle. They love to try to intimidate. They love to make jokes. But they don't want to do the work. That tells Manitobans everything they need to know.

But I would tell Manitobans, do not lose hope. There are brighter days ahead. This NDP government is being exposed for what they are. On this side of the House, we will listen. We will work hard for you. We will compete and we will grow Manitoba to a have province, honourable assistant deputy Speaker. We will build a province where families keep more of what they earn, where every opportunity returns to Manitobans, where Manitobans are listened to. And Manitoba will move from a have-not province to being a province of growth, opportunity, prosperity under this PC Party of Manitoba.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Are there any further speakers?

Seeing none, is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): The question before the House is the hoist motion to Bill 53, moved by the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

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

Voice Vote

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Honourable deputy Speaker, could we please check this in a recorded vote.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): A recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

* (13:10)

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

The one hour provided for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I am therefore directing that the division bells be turned off and the House proceed to the vote.

The question before the House is the hoist amendment for second reading of Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

Would the House like the hoist amendment read?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hoist amendment reads,

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT" and substituting the following:

Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2026 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a—be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day five months hence.

Division

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

Ayes

Balcaen, Bereza, Byram, Cook, Ewasko, Goertzen, Guenter, Johnson, Khan, King, Narth, Nesbitt, Perchotte, Pivniuk, Schuler, Stone, Wasyliw, Wharton, Wowchuk.

Nays

Asagwara, Brar, Bushie, Cable, Chen, Compton, Corbett, Cross, Dela Cruz, Devgan, Fontaine, Kennedy, Kinew, Kostyshyn, Loiselle, Maloway, Marcelino, Moroz, Moses, Moyes, Naylor, Oxenham, Pankratz, Redhead, Sala, Sandhu, Schmidt, Schott, Simard, Smith, Wiebe.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Ayes 19, Nays 31.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* (13:20)

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to debate on the main motion, I would like to direct all honourable members to the public gallery where we have joining us the pages for the upcoming fall and spring sessions.

So we welcome them here and welcome them in the fall to join us here working in the Chamber.

* * *

The Deputy Speaker: So we will now resume debate on the main resolution for a second reading of Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, and the floor is open for debate.

Mr. Balcaen: I hesitated for a bit to get up because I thought somebody from the NDP side would want to stand up and talk about this bill that they've introduced, BITSA.

But, unfortunately, they don't have the confidence in their own bill to stand up and talk about their bill and what it is not offering Manitobans for a tax relief and for any economic relief.

So I rise today to talk about Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act. And it gives me great pleasure to bring these words on behalf of my constituents in Brandon West, and I'm sure each and every one of us want to represent our constituents to the best of our ability. Each one of us has approximately 25,000 constituents, and we want their voices—to make sure is heard here in this Chamber.

And that's what we're here to do. They have spoken; they have talked to many of us about the issues that they're seeing regarding affordability here in Manitoba. And, unfortunately, it is getting more and more difficult for individuals to survive in this climate during this affordability crisis.

And I think before we get into the minutiae of this bill, we really have to recognize that there's much broader issues across Manitoba—actually across Canada—but here in Manitoba particularly. The fact that people are worried. People are worried every day.

They're waking up and wondering how they're going to pay those bills. They're wondering how they're going to put food on the table. They're wondering how they're going to keep their kids in sporting activities when affordability crisis continues throughout this province. They're having no ability to pay those bills. They're having to make decisions between paying

rent, maybe making their mortgage payment, buying drugs that will help them, prescription drugs that will help them throughout their life to help them in their health journey, or do they have to buy groceries, do they have to take their kids out of sporting activities? There's just so many decisions that families have to make and they're worried.

Workers are worried because they know that they could be getting much, much more out of their paycheques if they had the basic personal exemption raised to \$30,000. And that's something that this PC team has offered to work with this government, to work with the Kinew government and say, hey, let's move that marker forward. Let's help all of our constituents across this province and let's give them a reason to want to stay here, to work in our province and to make us prosper.

So the workers are worried. They know that if the basic personal exemption was raised to \$30,000, they would get an additional \$1,535 in their pockets. And to some people, that's not a lot of money. But for people that are struggling, for people that need those resources, that maybe have three, four, five, six children, that makes all the difference in the world. That will help them with a number of different areas, and I've went over some of them.

But, you know, food inflation in this province is the top in all of the country. And that \$1,535 could actually be used to put towards very healthy food for each of those children or each of those families. So that's why workers are concerned. And they know that if they're a family of two, and most families nowadays have to have two working couples to survive. And so that family, if we raise the basic personal exemption to \$30,000, would have over \$3,000 a year in their pocket, and now that's real money.

That's areas where that, they—I talked about this in one of my previous discussions, where they could take some of that money and invest it into college education or university education or trade school or some sort of post-secondary education—and we know they won't be able to do that at MITT because it's getting closed down—but many of the other post-secondary areas throughout the province would, you know, love to train these future workers and have them invest in our economy. These are the ones that are going to help build Manitoba. They're the ones that are going to be at the construction sites. They're going to be running the cable when it's time to put the 'electrishety' in. They're going to be doing the pipes

when it's time to do the plumbing, or the gas fitting or any of these areas.

Unfortunately, when I talk about the trades, this government has decided to go to a one-to-one ratio. And so we're losing those qualified tradespeople through our province. They're fleeing, they're scurrying to other provinces because it's more affordable there, but it's also the fact that they can get the training that they desperately need. They can get the training that is required for an apprentice. They can get that training in other provinces because here, this government has decided to cut that back to one-to-one ratio. In—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

* (13:30)

I'd remind the member to make his comments relevant to the motion—sorry, the piece of legislation in front of us.

Mr. Balcaen: Right, moving that forward, we're talking about the economy, growing the economy and making sure that there's affordability measures put into place here within Manitoba. And so making sure that we have the proper workforce here in Manitoba is very important, and I would say extremely relevant to why this debate is happening.

We're having many people within our constituencies come and talk to us about their ability to work or their inability to get those apprenticeship areas. And, with that, they can help spur our economy, help move it forward, increase our affordability here within the province and maybe support families, support a young family, a growing family that we want to see happen here in Manitoba. We want to grow our population so that they can eventually work within our province, pay the taxes and help support our overall system here in Manitoba, and that's important.

Young Manitobans are trying to build a future and they're worried. The reason they're worried is simple. Life has become significantly more expensive and many people no longer feel confident that they're getting ahead. They have to stretch every penny, and pennies is what they'll save under this junk food tax; 7 cents on a bottle of pop; that's what they will save, and so they need to stretch those pennies and we don't even have them anymore so they need to stretch those nickels. They need to make sure that they work for each family and that affordability is there for the families that are going through our systems here and unfortunately having to live through this affordability crisis.

In fact, pardon me, in fact many feel that they're falling behind despite doing everything right. They're upgrading their education; they're finding higher paying jobs. Some people, and I know in my family—I've seen this too, are working in other provinces or working outside of the city that they live in to get higher paying jobs and be able to bring that paycheque home to support their family. That's not healthy for families to have that separation of spouses or a parent or a guardian away and not supporting that family, because these are the young individuals, their children, that we want to see a bright future for here in Manitoba. And unfortunately, they're not seeing that.

They're budgeting extremely carefully. They have to nowadays. You go to the grocery store and a head of lettuce can be \$4.99 now. You get some cauliflower or broccoli, stuff that's healthy, and all of a sudden you're walking out with one bag with a few vegetables in it and you've spent almost \$100. And that's unfathomable.

My wife and I were talking about this just last week. When we first moved into our home about 30 years ago—the home that we're presently in—and we remembered going on a big shopping spree because we had just moved in and we wanted to, you know, stock the refrigerator and stock the cupboards because that's what you do when you move into a new home. You want to be ready to do your family meals, to sit down at the kitchen table.

We spent \$253 and we could barely see the kitchen floor for all of the bags of groceries that were on there and we stocked the refrigerator; we stocked the pantry. All of the drawers were filled with healthy snacks for our children and made sure that it was there for \$253.

And now I get two small bags of groceries for that. And if I'm adding meat to that, forget about it. There is no chance whatsoever. So families today, I don't know how that they're able to get by. I actually feel very, very sorry for them having to go through this and trying to raise their family and—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: I'm just going to interrupt because we have some guests that are going to be leaving in a couple of minutes.

So we have a group of students from Gray Academy, who are guests of the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton). So we have with us in the gallery Nath Goldenberg, Lev Chisick, RJ Silver, Zev Micflikier, Nevo Pais and Ben Singer-Abrams, alongside their coach, Dr. Micah Doerksen.

* * *

Mr. Balcaen: You know, I had the opportunity to see the guests in the hallways earlier, so on behalf of the PC caucus, we welcome them here today as well and we look forward to moving forward.

So as I continued on, people are working hard. They're doing everything that is humanly possible for them to make sure that they are setting a budget, that they're being able to support families. But what they're doing is they're also cutting back on spending. They're forced to cut back.

And that's unfair. That's unfortunate for a lot of these families that, you know, really just want—parents, we want to see our children do better than us. That is our goal is our parents do better—or our children do better than us, as our parents wanted to see us do better and I know my children want to see their children—my grandchildren—do better yet.

Unfortunately—*[interjection]*—right now in this province, it's difficult to do that. And I don't know why—unfortunately I didn't hear what the Premier (Mr. Kinew) yelled across there, but when I'm talking about family and the support to family, I find it incredibly difficult to hear people bark back and forth over here at us and, you know, make insults about family and about children when we're trying to talk about something very serious, when we're talking about affordability for the next generation of Manitobans.

We look at the rising costs that are happening here. Housing costs have increased unbelievably. For a house that we could buy at one time when I was younger for about twice of my wage, now the same houses in the same area are quadruple the wages that my son makes in the same profession that I did.

So, affordability is a real issue for families, for young families getting started. They often have to stay with their parents for many more years than what we did to try and save up a down payment to start a home on their own and start that family that so many people desire to have and to work towards having that community built amongst them, amongst their family.

Mortgage costs have increased, of course, because of the cost of the housing. Mortgage costs are going up.

And my parents talked to me about, at a time when they bought their home, and interest rates were at about 21 per cent.

Now, thankfully—and I'm very thankful that they don't have to experience that because I don't think anybody could afford the price of a home now plus pay 21 per cent interest. That's why affordability is so important, and that's why we're having this debate on BITSA is to make sure that, you know, affordability is a measure that each and every one of our children and our grandchildren and future family members can afford here in Manitoba.

* (13:40)

Rental prices have increased; food prices have increased; insurance costs have increased; utility bills have skyrocketed, especially the last several years when we look at our hydro rates and our utility rates. You know, unfortunately, we have a government that wants to bypass the PUB and just set rates on their own. And that, again, is a significant barrier to individuals because they know that this government will take every penny out of their pocket that they can when it comes to taxes and utility bills and anything that they can increase their coffers on, on the backs of Manitobans, and in many cases, wages simply have not kept pace.

There's an affordability crisis facing Manitoba families and it's not theoretical; it's not political; it is real. It's a real experience that each and every one of our constituents face day in and day out and I talked about it earlier; them having to make the critical decisions, life-altering decisions sometimes, of whether they want to pay for their medication or whether they want to feed their family, whether they want to pay the mortgage or whether they want to put gas in their car so that they can go to work. These are real tangible issues that Manitobans are facing during this affordability crisis.

The government's primary affordability measure in this bill is the removal of PST on certain prepared foods but just the foods that are sold in grocery stores and convenience stores. I think if this government took pause and actually listened to individuals that ran restaurants, they would have given it a second thought. And maybe, maybe had they thought about voting in favour of the hoist motion, they could have consulted with those restaurant owners and heard first-hand—and I know letters have been sent to members of our caucus.

I'm not privy to what letters have been sent to the NDP caucus or individual members from the

restaurants association, but I'm sure they have sent the same message saying, why are you picking winners and losers within Manitoba? You know what? Why does one place get all of the benefit? Why are we supporting some of these super-big department stores and not the individually run home-based businesses, businesses that have built Manitoba's economy? Why? Because this government does not support small business.

Our side of the House have always supported small business. As a matter of fact, I would think 75 per cent of the people on this side of the House have owned small businesses or work within small businesses to help increase our economy.

Now let us think honestly about what this means for Manitoba families because they don't have a chance to have that equity when it comes to grocery shopping versus a restaurant. A family might be able to save a few cents here and there on prepared food items. Meanwhile, they are paying hundreds more each month on housing, hundreds more on groceries, on utilities, on transportation and on interest payments.

And that's—brings me to the next point that I wanted to talk about is interest payments. In Manitoba, we're paying \$2.3 billion in debt servicing each and every year, and from my understanding, that's about the third largest department within the government is debt servicing, the department of debt servicing. And my friend and colleague from La Vérendrye did a great explanation earlier about the difference between million and billion because the word billion has been thrown around so much lately that it seems like people are getting almost immune to it.

But when we think about a billion-dollar debt, double that and then add another \$300 million on it, we have \$2.3 billion in debt servicing here in our province and that is a real issue on affordability. Manitobans are paying that millions of dollars a day for debt servicing that could go into supporting families, that could go into the health-care system.

We have an aging population. We know that we're going to have to invest in health care. But what's going to happen here is that instead of investing in health care, this government is going to continue to increase our debt exponentially; billions of dollars more since they've taken government, and that's millions and millions more in debt servicing.

It's unbelievable that that money could go to so many places within Manitoba; \$2.3 billion is approximately

46 brand new school builds here in Manitoba, at about \$50 million apiece.

Now, we know that under the Manitoba jobs agreement, the job killing agreement, that would probably only be about 35 schools now because all of that money that is extra that's going to go up and cost Manitobans and you know, feed the coffers of the NDP's union bosses. But we still have to know that we could build a number of schools to help educate our young children and move them forward throughout their educational journey and into the workforce which is something that we certainly want to do here.

It's unfortunate that individuals in Manitoba are forced to dip into their long-term savings. And we've seen that across all of our constituencies. I'm sure a number of you have heard from your constituents, a number of us have, that their—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I'll remind the member to direct all comments through the Chair.

Mr. Balcaen: Well, yes, I'm very sorry about that, honourable deputy chair.

I'm sure all of us have seen and spoken to individuals within our constituencies, even outside of our constituencies because I know for myself many people from Brandon East will come and talk to me because they can get the ear of an MLA if I'm there to talk to them.

And it's unfortunate that so many people are within \$200 of insolvency, of bankruptcy, of trying to make ends meet. And that's after, we've already discussed this earlier, stretching budgets to the limit, making sure that their dollars go as far as they can.

And I'm sure for many families, that means that, not by choice, but they're no longer eating meat products because it is so expensive. And so now they're going to have to find their protein in other areas like peanut butter or different areas that they can purchase and get their protein that way. Having that steak dinner with the family, the sit-down meal at the table where you get to discuss what's happened throughout the day—I know we used to sit down with our kids all the time at the end of the day, and we made it mandatory to have a sit-down meal at home so that we could catch up on everybody's day and find out what was happening. And oftentimes we would have steak or pork chops or chicken or any of these areas.

But, nowadays, I don't think families can afford that and they can't do that same amount of feeding

their family because the costs have just skyrocketed under this NDP government. And it's just deplorable, actually. And that could—should concern every member of this House.

Because when families lose confidence in their financial future, it affects the entire economy. Consumer spending slows. Business investment slows. Population retention becomes more difficult and we talked about that earlier, honourable Deputy Speaker, is the out-migration of individuals leaving our province for what they believe is greener pastures.

* (13:50)

So, with those words put on the record, honourable Speaker, I just want to say to the members of Brandon West that are tuned in, probably the 23,000 that are watching right now and that are very thankful that our PC government is standing up for them when it comes to affordability to try and help them live a life that every Manitoban should: I am happy to support you. And thank you for the honour of being here in this esteemed Chamber.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

House Business

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): On House business.

The Deputy Speaker: On House business.

MLA Fontaine: I would like to announce the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet in camera at 6 p.m. on May 27, 2026, to consider the hiring of the Chief Electoral Officer. If the House is still sitting at that hour, the committee will meet as soon as possible after the House rises. If the House is still sitting at 9 p.m. tonight, the committee will not meet tonight, but will instead meet in camera at 9 a.m. on May 28, 2026, to consider the hiring of the Chief Electoral Officer.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet in camera at 6 p.m. on May 27, 2026 to consider the hiring of the Chief Electoral Officer. If the House is still sitting at that hour, the committee will meet as soon as possible after the House rises. If the House is still sitting at 9 p.m. tonight, the committee will not meet tonight, but will instead meet in camera at 9 a.m. on May 28, 2026, to consider the hiring of the Chief Electoral Officer.

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Mr. Khan: I rise today, once again, to speak to Bill 53, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, commonly known as BITSA. I rise today for the third time to speak to the NDP if they will finally listen to Manitobans. It's now over 24 hours we've been sitting straight in this Legislature with not one word from the NDP on the record.

The media might report it as a debate. A debate is a two-way street. This NDP government refuses to even engage in any sort of conversation. They refuse to listen to Manitobans. But I proudly will stand up with my colleagues, with our colleagues on the PC side of the House, and bring forward your concerns, bring forward your questions and your worries as you try, as you struggle to make ends meet living in this province under an NDP-ruled government.

The debate is about one simple question: Is life becoming more affordable for Manitobans under this NDP government? Yes or no? Unlike the Premier (Mr. Kinew), we will answer that question. And for many families across this province, the simple answer is no.

Life is not becoming more affordable in Manitoba under this NDP government. Families are struggling. They're struggling to make ends meet, to pay rent, pay mortgages, with fuel, hydro costs; with everyday costs that a family has to pay, they are struggling under this NDP government.

The cost of living continues to rise while families are expected to do more with less. Yet this government, this Kinew government, wants Manitobans to believe that Bill 53 is a meaningful affordability bill. It's comical. It's comical because those Manitobans that are listening at home or have been following the Legislature know that what this NDP government has proposed is absolutely a joke.

The same government who hadn't even put up a single speaker to defend their own budget, to justify what their Bill 53 is, to try to make sense of their terrible budget, they won't even do it; 24 hours for someone to stand up and put words on the record, and they won't do it. They have the courage to heckle from across the way, to laugh, to bark, to try to intimidate, but they don't have the courage to put words on the record.

Why is that? Because they know they've fallen short. They know that they have completely missed the mark because the problem with Bill 53 is not that it does anything. It does nothing. The problem is it absolutely does nothing when it comes to affordability

for your family in Manitoba. It doesn't do enough in all of the other areas that this budget bill should touch on, which I will go into in much detail.

What Manitobans increasingly see from this government is symbolism ahead of solutions. It's big flashy announcements with no work. Catch the spotlight, but don't do any of the actual hard work behind the scenes. Take credit for what previous governments have done: the building of the Portage la Prairie hospital, which is now closed under the NDP; the opening of eight RAAM clinics under the previous PC, zero under the NDP.

But they should stand up and proudly take credit for opening a drug consumption site in Manitoba. That is where the priorities—and we are hear from the members across the way. They want to open drug consumption sites. Our side of House, recovery, access to addictions medication. Them, they want to provide you a place to do a needle and they support it.

But they still won't stand up and put words on the record when it comes to that. This symbolism that this government and this Premier are well-known for of going out and making announcements but not actually fact checking anything before, is really coming home to roost.

Manitoba's teacher society has said the exact same thing—that looks like political theatre when the Premier makes announcements on banning YouTube. Manitoba Nurses Union questioned this Premier where they say we can't find any of the nurses that you talk about. The Manitoba paramedics say that the numbers that the NDP have gone out on are false, and that there is actually a net loss of paramedics in this province, not a net gain of 200 like they promised. There's a net loss.

The Speaker in the Chair

Manitoba jobs agreement, which I'll touch on as well, is dividing Manitobans. And now they're picking winners and losers when it comes to local restaurants and businesses. There's so many examples of how this Kinew government wants to get out and take the spotlight, take the flashy picture, impress their followers on TikTok [*phonetic*]-TikTok and Instagram, do a dance, make a cake, change their clothing.

But when it comes to doing the work behind the scenes, they have fallen flat, and that is what Manitobans are seeing in this budget. Families are asking for help; they can feel it. They can feel it every time they go to the grocery store, every time they open the fridge to make a healthy meal for their families, every time they go to the gas pump. And at the end of the month when

the bills are due, Manitobans are continuing to face rising property taxes, historically high property taxes, higher housing costs, growing government spending, continued affordability pressures and bracket creep after the removal of the tax indexation, which this Kinew government, this Premier promised he wouldn't get rid of. He promised Manitobans he will not get rid of tax, that he will keep tax indexation in place. And he removed it. He literally broke that promise to you.

The reality is simple. The more inflation rises, as it is in this province, where Manitoba has the highest inflationary rate increase in the country, where food costs inflation rate is the highest in the country at 4.9 per cent. As inflation rises, the more the government—the more taxes rise, the more Manitobans pay in taxes, even when they are not actually getting ahead, Honourable deputy Speaker. This is not affordability.

This is this NDP government taking \$20 out of your wallet and putting a nickel in your back pocket. Actually, not even a nickel. Pennies. Sorry, I misspoke. Pennies is what they're putting back in your pocket, taking 20 bucks out. And the way they're going, they're going to be at \$100, taking it out of your pockets.

On our side of the House, we believe that's wrong. We want to put money back into your pocket so you can make the decision on where you spend your money. Nothing demonstrates this disconnect more than the centrepiece, the crown jewel, the big announcement this government made when it comes to affordability, and that was saving you PST on junk food.

Families are struggling with mortgages, rent, hydro, fuel—like I mentioned—and this government wants to save you money on Cheetos, on Cracker Jacks, on pop, on Slurpees. This is literally where the centrepiece of this NDP's budget is. Where are you going to get a Slurpee from when they close down all the 7-Elevens? It's a great question. Businesses are fleeing the province. We'll talk about that later as well, Honourable deputy Speaker.

* (14:00)

But this is the priority of this government. The priority for affordability is saving you money on junk food. At a time when families are wondering if they can even afford groceries at all—healthy groceries: apples, fruits, vegetables, meat, non-processed foods. They're wondering if they can afford that at all, and this government is actually picking winners and losers.

They're picking junk food to be the winner. They want to incentivize you to buy junk food.

How does that even make sense from a health perspective, from a societal perspective? When obesity and diabetes and health concerns and cardiovascular disease are at a rise, this government is offering incentives to buy junk food? Even my 13-year-old son understands that's insane and that doesn't make sense.

Former NDP MLAs are coming out and speaking. MLA Cerilli is saying that this doesn't make any sense and yet this NDP is foiling ahead. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself told national media, from his words, his mouth, himself. Again, I know you're sitting at home listening to this speech you say, well, how can we trust anything he says? And you're right. You actually can't. But he said \$100.

So he probably shot on the high end of that as well and it's going to be significantly less. But he says he wants to save you \$100 for a family of four. Not even a hundred bucks each. A family of four will save \$100 on this PST tax. It's embarrassing. It's not the right thing to do.

On our side of the House, we've proposed an increase to your basic personal exemption. They want to laugh, they want to ridicule, they're just upset that they didn't think of that idea. They're just upset that it's a really good idea and it's going to make life better for Manitobans but the arrogance of this NDP government and Premier refuse to humble themselves and say: you're right, it is a good idea, let's work together.

On our side of the House, we've said let's work together. On our side of the House, we've said you could take the full credit for it, just bring this measure forward for Manitobans. It makes sense, increase your basic personal exemption from \$15,000 to \$30,000. That means you won't pay any provincial tax up to \$30,000.

Well, who earns \$30,000, honourable deputy–Honourable Speaker now? Minimum wage workers, single moms, single dads, students, people trying to rebuild their life, maybe, people trying to get ahead. The poverty line in Manitoba is about \$25,000.

This government wants to start taxing you after from you make \$15,000. So from \$15,000 to \$25,000, which is below the poverty line, this NDP government believes it's right to tax you. We think that's wrong. We want to actually increase that to \$30,000 to give you back up to \$3,000 a year; \$250 a month. Imagine what you and your family could do with \$250 a month.

Now, you might say this is political theater, you're just bringing up talking points, but it's a real plan. It's a common sense plan. The question is, why are they refusing to even discuss it? Why are they refusing to stand up and defend their own budget bill? Why has the NDP not put one speaker in 24-plus hours? In over 60 hours in this Chamber this session, we have discussed budget, affordability, costs, taxes, but within the last 24 hours, our colleagues, our members on the PC side of the House have not left this building.

We are trying to work with this NDP government. The Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) laughs now. The Minister of Families laughs when we talk about affordability. How many families and organizations does she work with when she goes and laughs with them? We know she laughs at ASL interpreters. We know she laughs when families are being—*[interjection]*

Now we have the minister of homeless addictions wants to jump in on the—*[interjection]*

Minister of Families again is heckling. Minister of addictions—and here's the fundamental difference, Manitobans will see this. I am standing up trying to talk about affordability and here they are attacking me and we're talking about ministers attacking us.

An Honourable Member: Stop talking about the women in my caucus.

Mr. Khan: It has nothing to do with male or female, it has nothing to do with—it has to do with the merit of the quality of work.

The quality of work by the Minister of Families is awful. The quality of the Minister of Families' work—she fails families. Where we talk about affordability for families, when we talk about affordability for families, the Minister of Families wants to yell at me.

It is not a matter of sex or race or gender. It has to do with the merit, the quality of work, and the quality of work by this Minister of Families is an F. Failing Manitobans, just like the Minister of Finance has failed Manitobans when it comes to this budget, Honourable Speaker.

Now when you look at the centrepiece of this budget bill, let's take a quote—direct quote from Kelly Higginson, the president of Restaurants Canada, said about this budget, and I quote from a public document: The PST exemption was the centrepiece of the Manitoba budget. So, it is both disappointing and concerning that the Premier cannot find time to meet with the industry that will be most harmed by this

NDP government's approach. End quote, said Kelly Higginson, president and CEO of Restaurants Canada.

Quote again: This policy creates a government-directed tax advantage for large grocery chains at the direct expense of local restaurants, their workers and the communities they support. End quote. There you have it right there, from the president of Restaurants Canada, saying that this NDP government is picking winners and losers.

There's another quote from her. It says: This is not a neutral affordability measure and it is not a tax cut on food. It is a shift between competitors. Consumers only receive relief if they change their purchase—their meals—which actively shifts demand away from restaurants and towards large grocery chains even when the food product is identical. At its core, this policy uses the tax system to pick winners and losers. End quote.

That is a direct quote from the president and CEO of Restaurants Canada, an industry that brings in \$42 billion into this province, an industry that hires our youth, the next generation of employees, of leaders, of builders, of entrepreneurs. This is what the president of Restaurants—CEO—Canada is saying. As I mentioned, Honourable Speaker, that was a public quote that was in the newspaper today as well.

Now, good jobs have to be more than a slogan. This government called their Budget 2026, was supposed to be a budget that was supposed to help with jobs and lower costs and better health care. All of that has turned out to be false. They've completely missed the mark. Good jobs—not under the NDP. Lower costs—not under the NDP. Better health care—definitely not under the NDP when wait times have doubled, tripled, and quadrupled, when Manitobans are dying waiting in the ER for services that this NDP government won't call the public inquiry to. All of these things are worse under the NDP government.

Just like I opened with when I said Manitobans have to answer some questions: Is life more affordable under this NDP government? And the answer is no.

Just like health care, just like crime, just like cost of living, every single thing is worse under this NDP government. Manitobans deserve more than words. They deserve more than a fake smile and a flashy news conference. They deserve more than confrontational behaviour. They deserve more than barking and intimidating and heckling and yelling across the way.

When someone questions you on the quality of work you're doing, it is a question on your ability to

do the work. That's what our job is. The 'minister' of— and Families again wants to continue to heckle. Really unfortunate that when we talk about families, this is the approach of the Minister of Families. The government says—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please.

Members cannot continue to just holler across.

Mr. Khan: I want to thank you for calling the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) to order there because it is very hard to hear when you're being heckled at constantly. I guess the minister didn't—I guess the minister learned from the Premier (Mr. Kinew). It's on that whole side.

Twenty-four hours have gone by. Not one member has put a word on the record. What is this government's strategy for growing our province? Absolutely nothing. You have to grow the province, you have to grow the economy, you have to grow the business sector, you create the environment. Jobs will be—you create jobs. You have good paying jobs. Families can get ahead working those jobs. They can pay their bills. They can afford to buy healthy food. They can see a prosperous future under you, but not under this NDP government because the economy is not growing. Our economy is going in opposite direction. Investments are leaving the province. Our youth are leaving the province.

The structural tax in this province is set up to hurt growth, to penalize success under this NDP government. Why? Because they believe your success should all go to the government and the government will decide how to spend the money.

Where is the plan to grow private-sector investments? Absolutely nothing. Where is the strategy to compete with neighboring provinces? Nowhere to be found. Saskatchewan, Alberta, both economically booming provinces; Manitoba—opposite direction.

* (14:10)

We must compete. We must be at the table. We must compete for investment, for jobs, for workers, to create opportunities. Families don't just need affordability today, they need confidence for tomorrow.

That's how provinces grow, that's how economies grow, that's how businesses grow. The confidence in the future. And under this NDP government, that confidence has been crushed. From top 10, being ranked in the mining industry, to well into the 30s and 40s now. From an A+ in red tape reductions under the previous PC, they now have an F.

Investments are leaving. Businesses do not have confidence. Even the mayor of Winnipeg himself said he was disappointed with the NDP's budget, that they did not recognize the importance of investing in the waste water treatment plant. That waste water treatment plant would guarantee development, growth, opportunity, economic prosperity, for the—not only the city of Winnipeg, for the province. The Province said, no, we don't want to give you any money. Nowhere in the budget is to be found. The Premier goes out and says, oh, there's money there, there's money in the budget. Where? It's nowhere to be found.

The mayor, Scott Gillingham, came out against that because people are seeing that this government is not doing what they said they were going to do. Prosperity creates affordability. That is the cycle Manitoba needs to build. They're not going to build it under this NDP. The Premier said somehow magic—is going to wave his magic wand and LNG will be flowing in three years. Not under this NDP. I'll remind the Premier and the NDP government that Manitoba is the only province in Canada to be left off the federal major projects list. Even after all the photo ops and shoots with Prime Minister Mark Carney, nothing.

How are you going to get LNG in three years? You haven't even tabled your legislation for your Indigenous Crown corp., and you've been talking about it for two and a half years, Honourable Speaker. Permits take years. There's the permafrost issue, there's the investor issue, there's the consumers, the supply chain. There's so many issues that this Premier said, three years and it done. Well, in three years, let's look back at what he's done in three years. Nothing. So what makes you think in three years he's going to get LNG out of Churchill? He's not.

Honourable Speaker, Alberta came out with their pipeline plan. They said minimum seven to 10 years. This is Alberta, who has experience doing this. Manitobans are raising concerns. Manitobans will continue to be a have-not province under this NDP government. It's telling that so many industries have come out against this NDP government, against this Knew government. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Harvest Manitoba, Doctors Manitoba, Manitoba Nurses Union, Manitoba Teachers' Society, Winnipeg Construction Association, Construction Association of Rural Manitoba, Manitoba Heavy Construction—so all came out against this NDP dove-government.

They came out on them for a few things that they all had—one was that they don't listen to them, they

don't consult them, they don't listen to them. It's a problem; 24 hours we've been sitting here trying to get the NDP to listen to Manitobans, to listen to their own followers on their Instagram and TikTok feeds, because this is what they're saying: We want real affordability measures to be seen in this budget bill, and they're not in there.

This is all we're doing as opposition, is bringing the voice forward and they won't do it, Honourable deputy Speaker. This NDP government has divided Manitobans. It has picked winners and losers; union, non-union; 12 per cent this NDP government supports, 88 per cent they're shutting out of it.

I mean, I have so many more great things to talk about when it comes to how much this budget bill has actually really brought Manitobans together against this NDP government. How much this budget bill and their empty talking points has really mobilized Manitobans to come forward and say, you know what? What they sold us is not what they're delivering. What he said, bail reform in 100 days, health—fixing health care, growing our economy, economic horse pulling the social cart: dead. Horse is dead. So Manitobans are seeing it now for what it is.

So this budget bill, actually, I believe for the future of the province of Manitoba is a good thing because people will see. They're waking up. They're seeing that Manitoba is falling further and further behind on this. Honourable Speaker, this bill was presented as an affordability bill, but Manitobans need more. They need more action, they need more relief, they need more vision and they need more affordability. The reality is that families are still struggling and they deserve a government focused on making life easier, not more expensive.

But Manitobans, again, are asking a simple question: Is your life in Manitoba, is my life in Manitoba, better, more affordable, under this NDP government? The answer is no. Is life easier? No. Can I afford groceries more now than I could in the past? No. Can I afford rent now? No. Can I afford my mortgage? No. And can I keep more of what I'm earning? No. Not under this NDP.

Affordability is not measured by slogans. It's measured by whether families can get ahead and too many Manitobans still cannot get ahead under this NDP.

We believe Manitoba can grow. We believe Manitoba can compete again. We believe Manitoba will be a have province, but not under this NDP gov-

ernment. We believe Manitobans deserve real affordability, real opportunity and a government focused on results. We will always work for families; we will always work for you and we will grow the province of Manitoba to being a have province, unlike this NDP government which fails when it comes to this budget bill.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Further speakers?

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: So just before we move on, we have seated in the public gallery from Faraday School, there's supposed to be 25 type 3-to-5 students under the direction of Madly Friesen and they're located in the constituency of the honourable member for Point Douglas (Ms. Smith), and I believe there's some more coming yet.

We welcome you here today anyway.

* * *

The Speaker: Are there any further speakers?

Seeing none, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Speaker: So the question before the House is second reading of the budget implementation and taxation amendment statutes act, 2026, Bill 53.

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Speaker: All those in favour of adopting the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Recorded vote, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: A recorded vote has been requested. Please call in the members.

* (15:10)

Order, please.

The one hour provided for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I'm therefore directing that the division bells be turned off and the House proceed to the vote.

The question before the House is second reading of the Bill 53, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

Division

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

Ayes

Asagwara, Blashko, Brar, Bushie, Cable, Chen, Compton, Corbett, Cross, Dela Cruz, Devgan, Fontaine, Kennedy, Kinew, Kostyshyn, Loiselle, Maloway, Marcelino, Moroz, Moses, Moyes, Naylor, Oxenham, Pankratz, Redhead, Sala, Sandhu, Schmidt, Schott, Simard, Smith, Wiebe.

Nays

Balcaen, Bereza, Byram, Cook, Ewasko, Goertzen, Guenter, Johnson, Khan, King, Lagassé, Narth, Nesbitt, Perchotte, Piwniuk, Schuler, Stone, Wasyliv, Wharton, Wowchuk.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Ayes 32, Nays 20.

The Speaker: The motion is accordingly passed.

* * *

The Speaker: And now, the hour being past 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on May 27, 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 26, 2026

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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