



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
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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
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie, 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	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
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MOYES, Mike, Hon.	Riel	NDP
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NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
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PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
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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>	Transcona	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 13, 2025

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

Private members' business—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Acting Official Opposition House Leader): Well, good morning, Honourable Speaker. Would you please call for second reading of Bill 224, The Budget Bill Public Accountability Act.

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now do second reading of Bill 224, the budget bill accountability act—[interjection]

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

**Bill 224—The Budget Bill
Public Accountability Act**

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I move, seconded by the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook), that Bill 224, The Budget Bill Public Accountability Act, be now read for a second time.

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Midland, seconded by the honourable

member for Roblin, that Bill 224, The Budget Bill Public Accountability Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mrs. Stone: I am pleased today to speak on my very first bill that I've introduced as a Manitoba legislature, and this is a bill that I am quite passionate about, because for years and years, we've seen politicians increasingly avoid public 'scrutiny' and public accountability. We've seen politicians hide from the public. We've seen politicians control the media and sneakily hide information from the public, including in complex legislation, only to discover after the fact that there are negative impacts on the public.

And as a taxpayer, this really frustrated me, and when I ran for elected office, I committed to my constituents that I would be transparent and accountable and ensure that the government, and as legislatures, that we would continue accountability and strengthen accountability to the public and to Manitobans that we are there to represent.

And, you know, we often ponder, as elected officials, why public trust in governments erodes more and more as time goes on. Public scrutiny is important, it's a key part of democracy and freedom of thought and expression and it keeps politicians accountable to who they represent. And, here in Manitoba, that is Manitobans and Manitoba taxpayers.

So I am bringing this bill forward to advance the public's ability to scrutinize the government and also to advance transparency and accountability of taxpayers' dollars. You know, so I will say, you know, obviously this bill is related to budget bills, and what we have seen over the years—and, you know, no party is innocent from stretching BITSA and putting in minor amendments that don't necessarily have to do with budget implementation or budget matters themselves.

But what we certainly saw last year was BITSA being exploited and major stand-alone pieces of legislation being stapled onto the back of BITSA that had absolutely nothing to do with financial matters. And we're here today to say that that was wrong, and we're here today to try to correct that in the future, not just for the current government but for future governments as well.

Unfortunately, as I've mentioned, we have seen BITSA bills get stretched far beyond their original intent over the years. And, most recently, as I mentioned, in the past year, the NDP rammed through major pieces of legislation without any public say, without any public 'scrutiny.' Of course, I'm talking about the \$24-billion omnibus bill that was passed in the fall; this increased taxes on Manitobans, it increased taxpayer dollars to political parties, it is where the NDP undemocratically pushed through major stand-alone pieces of legislation on labour, seniors, election financing, things that had nothing to do with budget implementation matters.

But in addition to the actual budget and taxation changes, these changes that the NDP rammed through, they didn't have anything to do with the budget. So that's where this bill comes in, is to not only ensure that the public has say on matters that are included in BITSA, but that there is the public 'scrutiny' of financial matters themselves.

Now, we're not talking about something groundbreaking, we already do this for other bills here in Manitoba. But yet the bill that actually deals with taxpayers' dollars and impacts their bottom line is not subject to the same scrutiny that other bills are.

Now, as I had said, these were not minor changes that were included in the previous BITSA bill, and that's why this bill is so important today. With this bill coming forward, there would be no reason for a government to try to hide information from the public through BITSA because it is going through public committee.

Now, I will say, you know, we're not asking for a lot here. In the spirit of transparency and accountability, we're asking for a minimum of 10 hours to allow the public to come to the Legislature and make representations as to what matters to them for what is in budget bills.

So this is where this bill comes in; it is about transparency and accountability to Manitobans on all budget bills and budget matters. It ensures transparency and accountability to Manitobans on their hard-earned dollars by following the process that is set out for every other bill here in Manitoba.

One of the most important and key bills that we have, the largest bills, the bills dealing with taxpayer dollars, are—is not subject to the same scrutiny that other bills are, and this is really critical for the public to be aware and informed of how their dollars, their hard-earned working dollars, are being used by the

government. Government does need to be accountable to how they spend Manitobans' hard-earned money, and they need to be transparent in the ways that they are doing it.

* (10:10)

It is simply wrong that government can increase taxes without giving the public an opportunity to respond at committee. It's wrong that stand-alone, major pieces of legislation can just be tacked on to the back of a budget bill just because there is a loophole that allows them to do it, just because one word might be included in a budget document, that then they can then put that into a budget implementation bill. This was exploited last year by the current NDP government when they did ram through major legislative changes without Manitobans having a say.

So this bill is intended to strike a little bit of balance in the spirit of transparency and accountability. It's intended to ensure that government can still move forward with their agenda and enact the changes that are announced in their budget while still allowing the public to be able to come through and make public representations at committee to the legislators, to be able to have their voice and have their say to the people who they elect. But it—and it allows that public 'scrutiny' by ensuring that public committee does happen.

If budget bills go to committee, like I am suggesting through this bill, then there's no reason why the NDP—or any other government, for that matter—can add non-budget items into BITSA. There would be no reason for this; thus, they'd be unable to hide potentially controversial legislation from the public like what we saw earlier this year.

And as I said, although this has been done for years and years, and I'm sure that is what the members opposite are going to say, the non-budget items that are being added to BITSA are getting bigger and bigger and less and less related to the budget itself. Also, they're getting more and more controversial.

The NDP, when they added these major pieces of legislation onto BITSA last year, came under a significant amount of fire from stakeholders across the province. So I'm going to read just a couple quotes from stakeholders.

After this happened, the CFIB said, quote, by—in a public post: By introducing these changes through BITSA, the government appears to be explicitly ignoring public feedback on these bills, as BITSA's not required to go before committee. This lack of

transparency has left business owners feeling shut out of critical conversations about policies that directly affect their operations.

The chambers, the employer council, Winnipeg instruction, Merit, CFIB also wrote an open letter to the Minister of Labour (MLA Marcelino) with their frustration of the lack of transparency that happened with BITSA last year. Quote: We are writing to express our concerns regarding the recent passage of significant pieces of labour legislation which have been proclaimed in force with little or no meaningful consultation with the business community.

This is exactly what this bill is aiming to avoid. This is not how legislation or laws should be made. The public deserves better from its legislatures.

This is why I am bringing this bill forward. The intent is to help avoid surprises to the public and to key stakeholders who may want to comment on a specific section of a budget bill that impacts their business, their families or their daily lives.

As I mentioned earlier in my comments, we are not asking for a lot here: a minimum of 10 hours in the spirit of transparency and public accountability for the public to come to the people they elect and have their voices heard. If the NDP government truly has nothing to hide, especially as we come into their next budget next week, then there is no reason—if they have nothing to hide—there is no reason why they should not support and pass this bill.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question. No question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): Well, the member for Midland and myself can agree on one thing for sure when she says that Manitoba has experienced years and years of a government mismanaging their finances and pushing key issues under the rug to avoid being presented at committee.

Manitoba had seven and a half years of their failed PC government, and that's why they voted them

out, because the first people to hide something in a BITSA bill included the one and only Brian Pallister. And what did he choose to hide? Legislating away at the rights of Indigenous children.

And so, when it comes to moral grounding, does the member for Midland feel that legislating away the rights of Indigenous children—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

Members will quit hollering back and forth across the Chamber.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, as I mentioned in my remarks and to answer the member for Radisson's question, this is why we're bringing this bill forward: to ensure that the public does have their say on budget matters.

What we saw last year, the NDP taking major pieces of legislation—so yes, you know, this has been done in the past, where the loophole has been used and things have been added to BITSA; minor amendments. But this was exploited by this NDP government six months ago with major pieces of legislation attached to BITSA.

So this is why we are bringing this bill forward to ensure that the public has accountability and their say. And these are areas where I would think—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I thank my colleague, the member for Midland, for her hard work on this important legislation, as well as for her valued contributions to this House as the Finance critic.

Can the member for Midland talk a little bit more about the importance of this bill? Why is this bill so needed today?

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for Borderland for the question.

And, you know, this bill is needed because of the public trust and public scrutiny that this NDP avoided through their \$24-billion omnibus bill last year, attaching major, major pieces of legislation onto the back because they knew that those bills would be controversial for the public, and they wanted to avoid that.

They didn't want to have to sit in front of the business community that disagreed with some of their changes, so they tacked it onto BITSA which doesn't go to public committee unless this bill is passed. And

that's how it was rammed through. And stakeholders have come out and they've expressed their sincere disagreement and disappointed with this NDP government for doing that.

This bill—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Dela Cruz: Here in Manitoba we have one of the most lively, transparent democracies possible. We have a process where citizens can go to committee, not once; they can go to their MLAs again in between. There's a whole drawn-out process that allows citizens of Manitoba to participate.

And what happened, this recent BITSA bill? A lot of the things that we legislated into that BITSA bill were prevented from going to committee by members opposite, which was the whole reason we put it in there.

And so why do members opposite suddenly think that accountability and public input is important?

Mrs. Stone: Well, there's one part of the member's comments that I do agree with: that we do have processes that are transparent here in Manitoba for all other bills, except for the largest bill that deals with taxpayer dollars.

How is it that budget bills do not get the same important scrutiny that other bills that come forward here in Manitoba have?

This is where this bill, that should be passed in the spirit of transparency and accountability, closes that loophole to ensure that the public has a say on how their taxpayer dollars are being spent and how budget items are being implemented. But it also avoids major pieces of standalone legislation being tacked onto the back to avoid—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I, too, would like to thank the member from Midland for bringing forward this very important bill which will ensure that this government and future governments have to take the BITSA bill to committee.

Speaking of committee, the member mentioned that the committee could sit for no less than 10 hours in committee. I'm just wondering if it's possible that the committee could sit for extra time because I'm sure there will be a lot of stakeholders and citizens that would like to make representations on the budget.

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for that question, and yes, absolutely.

* (10:20)

We put in the bill a minimum of 10 hours with consent from the committee; we can always sit longer, you know, if the NDP decides that they only want to sit for 10 hours and there's still public representations to be made, then that's their decision and they will have to respond to the public on that.

But we put in 10 hours to at least give the public some opportunity to respond to budget bills, and I think that that's important. It can always sit for longer; that will be determined by committee. And I think that this is an important bill to come forward to ensure public scrutiny, transparency and accountability for the public.

Thank you.

MLA Dela Cruz: Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we understand the importance of defending our democracy, which is why we took the 2023 election incredibly seriously. We were elected with a mandate to fix the mess that they left us, including a \$2-billion deficit.

Honourable Speaker, the members opposite say that, you know, they want to limit debate on the budget bill to 10 hours. Meanwhile, our government is here all year-round listening to Manitobans.

And so I want to ask the member: Why should Manitobans trust members opposite will listen during these 10 hours when their failed PC government mismanaged the Province's finances after being in power for seven and a half years?

Mrs. Stone: Well, as of right now, the public doesn't get a say on budget bills at public committee. That's where this bill closes that loophole. As I mentioned in my earlier comments, we're putting in a minimum of 10 hours that can certainly be extended to ensure the public their right to say.

I strongly believe that public scrutiny is important when it comes to government decisions and how Manitobans' hard-earned dollars are being spent and how legislation is being implemented. This is why we have this process for other bills that come forward to this House, and I truly believe that financial bills deserve that same level of scrutiny.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I also would like to thank our colleague here from Midland in bringing forward this important legislation.

As my colleague has mentioned, there was a lot of bills rammed through, or legislation rammed through, on the BITSA bill of this NDP government last year, and specifically, some major labour legislation.

I would like to ask the member: What else have the NDP and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) been avoiding in terms of public scrutiny and transparency? Is there anything else that you feel that they are maybe not being fully transparent on?

Mrs. Stone: Absolutely. Day in and day out, we see the Premier take media into his office, avoiding anyone else that could possibly listen to what he has to say. He is not being truthful to Manitobans about how taxpayer dollars are being spent—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the member to please withdraw that comment. Calling other members not truthful is against the rules on parliamentary language, so please withdraw and apologize.

Mrs. Stone: I withdraw and I apologize for that comment.

The point of this bill is to ensure that the public does have the ability to have a say on legislation. I'm not really sure why the members seem so against the idea of having the public come and scrutinize their legislation.

And as I've mentioned, this isn't just for the NDP; this is for governments in the future. This is a key part of democracy to allow the public to come into the Manitoba Legislature and have their say on how taxpayer dollars are being spent.

There is no reason why the NDP should not vote for this bill unless they have something to hide in their upcoming BITSA bill this year.

The Speaker: The honourable member for mid-sorry, the honourable member for Radisson.

MLA Dela Cruz: Honourable Speaker, the member opposite doesn't seem to understand, so I'll repeat it again.

When it comes to the BITSA bill very recently, we were elected to implement every piece of legislation in there after a democratic committee hearing, which they blocked.

Honourable Speaker, I'll ask again: Why do they feel like they have the authority to lecture this side of

the House, and all of Manitoba, frankly, on financial responsibility?

Mrs. Stone: As we've come to a close in question—the question period of this morning, I'd just like to put a few quotes on the record for the member as to exactly why the public and stakeholders are frustrated with what the NDP did this past year.

The Winnipeg chamber, the Manitoba chamber, Manitoba Employers Council, Winnipeg Construction Association, Merit Contractors and CFIB in a joint letter to the minister: We're writing to express our concerns regarding the recent passage of significant pieces of labour legislation which have been proclaimed in force, with little or no meaningful consultation with business.

Like I said, the only reason that the NDP would not support this bill that I am bringing forward today, is if they have something to hide from Manitobans again—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The floor—the time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): En ce Mois de la Francophonie mondiale, je vais m'adresser en français – dans la langue de Molière, ainsi que dans la langue de Louis Riel.

Et je vais être honnête avec vous, Monsieur l'Honorable Président, c'est difficile pour moi d'écouter aux propos hypocrites qui viennent de l'autre côté de la Chambre. L'échec du gouvernement progressiste-conservateur envers les Manitobains est apparent. Nous avons réalisé beaucoup de progrès au cours de l'année écoulée, mais il reste encore beaucoup de travail à faire si nous voulons réparer sept années et demie de coupures et de mauvaise gestion – de mauvaise gestion – de la part des conservateurs.

Il est ironique que les Progressistes-Conservateurs essaient de dire qu'ils écoutent maintenant les voix des Manitobains alors qu'il y a seulement un an et demi, ils ignoraient – ils ignoraient – absolument les travailleurs de la santé et de l'éducation. Leur bilan est stupéfiant et représente l'ampleur de l'échec qu'ils ont infligé aux Manitobains, comme lorsqu'ils ont dévasté notre système de santé, et ce pendant une pandémie mondiale, obligeant les gens à aller hors de la

province pour recevoir des soins ou à vivre sans soins de santé adéquats.

De 2017 à 2019, les coupures des conservateurs ont laissé les Manitobains dans une situation précoce, avec certains temps d'attente les plus longs du pays. Les conservateurs ont également fermé cinq des six cliniques qui étaient destinées à réduire l'encombrement dans les urgences.

Le centre de soins d'urgence à Misericordia Health Centre, qui fournissait un soin médical essentiel pour la santé mentale et les problèmes liés à l'usage des drogues, a été fermé.

Le centre des femmes âgées et le centre familial de Saint-Boniface ont également été fermés par les membres de l'opposition, mais nous rouvrirons les centres – le centre des femmes âgées, un service vital pour fournir aux femmes les soins de santé dont elles ont besoin.

Les conservateurs ont réduit le budget de l'autorité de régulation de la santé de 36 millions de dollars. Ils ont coupé 30 millions de dollars pour financer une nouvelle installation de CancerCare.

Et c'est époustouflant, même je dirais loufoque, de les entendre ce matin parler d'un amendement ou d'une loi pour responsabiliser ce gouvernement quand ça vient à la transparence de nos budgets, quand ils ont aussi supprimé un programme de 4,2 millions de dollars qui aurait incité les étudiants en médecine à travailler dans des régions rurales. Et la liste continue, monsieur l'honorable président.

C'est aussi intéressant de voir mes homologues de l'autre côté de la Chambre presque pas à l'écoute de ce que j'ai à dire, et des fois on se demande à quoi pensent les membres de l'autre côté. Quand le membre de Borderland (M. Guenter) pense qu'on devrait joindre les États-Unis ou que le membre de Fort Whyte (M. Khan) dit merci au président américain pour les tarifs –

Translation

In this International Month of La Francophonie, I am going to speak in French: the language of Molière, as well as the language of Louis Riel.

I have to be honest with you, Honourable Speaker: it is difficult to listen to the hypocrisy coming from the other side of the House. The failure of the PC government to deliver for Manitobans is clear. We have made a lot of progress over the past year, but there is still much work to be done if we are to repair

seven and a half years of Conservative cuts and mismanagement.

It is ironic that the Progressive Conservatives are trying to say that they are now listening to Manitobans, when only a year and a half ago, they completely ignored health and education workers. Their record is staggering and illustrates the scale of the failure they have inflicted on Manitobans, such as when they devastated our healthcare system during a global pandemic, forcing people to go out of province for care or to live without adequate health care.

From 2017 to 2019, Conservative cuts left Manitobans in a precarious situation, with some of the longest wait times in the country.

The Conservatives also closed five of the six clinics that were intended to reduce overcrowding in emergency rooms. The Misericordia Health Centre's urgent-care centre, which provided essential medical care for mental health and drug use-related problems, was closed.

The Victoria Hospital Mature Women's Centre and the St. Boniface Hospital Family Medical Centre have also been closed by the opposition, but we will reopen the Mature Women's Centre, an essential service for providing women with the health care they need.

The Conservatives have cut \$36 million from the health regulatory authority's budget. They have cut \$30 million earmarked to fund a new CancerCare facility.

It is mind-boggling, I would even say crazy, to hear them this morning talking about an amendment or legislation to make this government accountable when it comes to the transparency of our budgets, when they have also cut a \$4.2-million program that would have encouraged medical students to work in rural areas. And the list goes on, Honourable Speaker.

It is also interesting to see my counterparts on the other side of the House hardly listening to what I have to say. Sometimes you wonder what members opposite are thinking—when the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) thinks we should join the United States, or when the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) says thank you to the American President for the tariffs—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would remind the member to keep his comments relevant to the bill we're discussing. He's spent a lot of time talking about other things, so please bring it back to the bill we're discussing.

* (10:30)

MLA Loiselle: Merci, l'Honorable Président. Ça fait chaud au cœur de savoir que tous ceux dans la Chambre sont à l'écoute quand je parle en français durant ce Mois de la Francophonie manitobaine.

Alors, revenant à la loi sur la responsabilité du projet de loi de budget, notre gouvernement est un gouvernement à l'écoute. Les Manitobains nous ont dit qu'ils voulaient un budget qui réduit les coûts pour les familles et répare le système de santé. C'est exactement ce que nous avons fait.

L'objectif, donc, est que notre gouvernement est un gouvernement qui priorise les Manitobains. Lorsque les Manitobains nous ont élus au gouvernement, nous avons compris – nous avons compris que nous avons une responsabilité importante : travailler pour eux et améliorer notre province.

Depuis, nous avons travaillé dur pour remplir le mandat qu'ils nous ont donné : reconstruire le système de santé, soutenir l'éducation et réduire les coûts.

Et notre bilan témoigne de cela. En fait, nous avons créé l'une des provinces les plus abordables du pays. Sous la direction de notre ministre des Finances (DLA Sala), notre taux d'inflation est l'un des plus bas au Canada, à une époque où les prix augmentent partout dans le pays.

Au cours de notre première année et demie au gouvernement, nous avons veillé à introduire plusieurs mesures pour la vie abordable afin de permettre aux Manitobains de réaliser des économies. Cela inclut un rabais de sécurité de 300 dollars qui aide les Manitobains à créer des foyers et des entreprises plus sûrs grâce à l'achat d'équipement de sécurité.

Donc, Monsieur l'Honorable Président, j'aimerais continuer par dire que notre gouvernement est à l'écoute. Nous nous battons pour les Manitobains et les Manitobaines. Nous faisons preuve de transparence. Nous faisons preuve de respect envers les Manitobains et les Manitobaines, et je suis fier de partager avec vous que notre budget 2025 va continuer à prioriser ce que les Manitobains et Manitobaines attendent de ce gouvernement : continuer à prioriser l'éducation, continuer à prioriser les soins de santé, compris – on va continuer à prioriser l'avancement des femmes dans notre belle province.

Et sur ce, Monsieur l'Honorable Président, j'aimerais remercier la Chambre de m'avoir écouté ce matin.

Translation

It is heartening to know that everyone in the House is listening when I speak in French during this Month of La Francophonie manitobaine.

So, returning to the subject of the Budget Bill Public Accountability Act, our government is a government that listens. Manitobans told us they wanted a budget that reduces costs for families and repairs the healthcare system. That is exactly what we have done.

Our objective is to have a government that puts Manitobans first. When Manitobans elected us to office, we understood that we had an important responsibility: to work for them and to improve our province.

Since then, we have worked hard to fulfil the mandate they gave us: to rebuild the health-care system, to support education and to reduce costs.

And the record speaks for itself. The fact is, we have created one of the most affordable provinces in the country. Under the leadership of our Finance Minister, our inflation rate is one of the lowest in Canada at a time when prices are rising across the country.

In our first year and a half in office, we have been careful to introduce several affordability measures to help Manitobans save money. This includes a \$300 safety rebate that helps Manitobans create safer homes and businesses through the purchase of safety equipment.

Honourable Speaker, I will continue by saying that our government is listening. We are fighting for Manitobans. We are being transparent. We show respect for Manitobans, and I am proud to share with you that our 2025 budget will continue to prioritize what Manitobans expect from this government: continued prioritization of education, continued prioritization of health care, and—let's not forget—continued prioritization of the advancement of women in our beautiful province.

And with that, Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank the House for listening to me this morning.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): It's a pleasure to be able to put a few comments on this important legislation put forward by the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone), and again, I thank her for her work in holding this government to account and ensuring that we fight for transparency, for taxpayers and for all Manitobans in this House, because this is the people's

House. This place belongs to Manitobans. We're here because Manitobans sent us here.

And so it's important that as we go through the process of legislating, which is why we're here, that we allow Manitobans to see what bills are being passed, and allow them to have—to make public representations and to have their say and express their will as well.

And I think it's important just to highlight for those listening, as well, that the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone) puts forward this bill in response to a loophole that exists where the budget implementation and tax statutes act, or the budget essentially, is able to go through this Chamber without having to go through the normal process of committee where public can come forward and make comments.

And that is one feature that exists for all other legislation and it's something that we can be proud of as Manitobans. We're one of the few provinces, I think, across the country that has that feature, where Manitobans can register to speak on a certain bill and at committee, come forward and make comments on that legislation.

Unfortunately, last year, in their very first budget, this NDP government packed their budget bill full of other pieces of legislation in order to avoid scrutiny from the public, in order to avoid having the public come forward and make their representations and to be able to ram it through under the radar.

And so it's what we call an omnibus bill. And so it's important that we close that loophole; that Manitobans have their say, especially on financial matters. It is probably, as the member for Midland said, the most important bill that goes through this House every year, and it's—it has to do with taxes and the way we spend the money that—Manitobans' taxpayer dollars.

So this bill is incredibly important. I'm proud to support it on behalf of the constituents of Borderland who sent me here, and I think that the requirement for 10 hours of public scrutiny is important and it is a minimum, but it is a start and I think it's very important.

And as I said, you know, last year's BITSA bill, the—that governs the current fiscal year that we are in, was packed full of things that Manitobans just caught us—caught Manitobans blindsided. Things like, well, the NDP feathering their own nest with future subsidies at Manitobans' expense, removing transparency and accountability for Manitoba Hydro, watering

down the powers of the Public Utilities Board. These were all things that were packed into the BITSA bill.

And other things as well, like the bill—Hydro will no longer be accountable to Manitobans for Hydro's debt, deficits and borrowing plans. That's really significant since Manitoba Hydro, it's well known has a debt that rivals our provincial debt. It's a significant burden, and ultimately, Manitobans are responsible for Manitoba Hydro's debt. If it all goes down, we're going to be the ones—Manitoba taxpayers are the ones left holding the bag, and so management of Manitoba Hydro is incredibly important and it's important that Manitobans have their say. It's a utility that belongs to Manitobans, by the way, and so they ought to be able to have their say.

And so it's, you know, deeply concerning that these are all elements that were in this last budget bill. And so, as a result, the member for Midland and our caucus is supporting bringing forward and supporting this important piece of legislation to ensure that Manitobans have their say and that we protect the democratic process.

You know, democracy isn't something that sits in a jar on a shelf and we take it down every now and then and talk about it and look at it and perhaps admire it. Democracy is about action. It's about allowing people to express their will, and so it's—and so that means allowing them into this place to have their say on important pieces of legislation and not preventing them from doing that.

And so, with those few words, I look forward to voting in favour of this bill, and I'm disappointed to hear comments from across the way; it doesn't surprise me. We are running an arbitrary \$1.3-billion deficit this year, and our fiscal house is not in order.

It's—they are—they were left with a \$270-million surplus and they've now turned that into—well, first they said \$800-million deficit, now it's \$1.3 billion, and that was before the tariffs. So we're spending like drunken sailors during the good times and now that the bad times are here and there's no fiscal room left, we're in really big trouble.

So I think a lot of Manitobans lack confidence in the fiscal leadership of this government, and it's important that they have their say, so I look forward to supporting this legislation. I thank the member for Midland for her work, again, on this important legislation.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Order, please.

Before introducing any other members to speak, there's some guests in the gallery that are leaving right away. So I'd like to draw everyone's attention to the public gallery, where we have with us 25 students from Andrew Mynarski school, under the direction of George Bravo. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar).

We welcome you here this morning.

* * *

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): I'm happy to get up and stand—to talk today about the budget bill accountability act, and from a perspective as a former correctional officer and a worker who worked in the civil service.

* (10:40)

I stand before you not just as an MLA and former correctional officer, but as someone who's lived the realities of our justice system, both its strengths and its grave shortcomings. Over the years, I wore a duty belt loaded with tangible tools of safety, control—you know, handcuffs, baton, pepper spray, radio. These instruments, as vital as they are for our immediate security needs, represent only a part of our story. They are in many ways the physical manifestations of a system designed primarily for containment.

But, as I have come to understand, true progress in this field stems from addressing a deeper, more complex cause of criminal behaviour through genuine rehabilitation and investments in our community support. I have continuously believed that—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would once again remind the member to keep his comments relevant to the bill we're discussing here this morning.

Mr. Oxenham: So I've believed that physical tools help us manage these dangerous situations, but real long-lasting change comes from—only comes from when we invest in programs that tackle the root causes: poverty, mental health challenges, substance use, unemployment and a myriad of social conditions that lead individuals down a path of crime.

The evidence is clear. Our justice mandate in Manitoba is not simply order, but to reduce recid-

ivism, foster public safety. And I've witnessed how policy decisions and—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Once again, I would remind the member to keep his comments relevant to the bill we're discussing here this morning.

Mr. Oxenham: Not long ago, funding for the essential rehabilitative programs was frozen by the previous PC government in Manitoba. In doing so, they effectively forced community organizations, organizations that had been the lifeline for countless offenders to crumble under financial strain. It was underfunding in their budget that caused countless offenders to crumble and to lose hope.

The Speaker: Order, please.

I need to remind all members that the bill we're discussing here this morning deals with how the budget gets implemented, not with specific monetary things that may or may not be in the budget. So we need to keep our comments related to how the bill gets implemented. That's the whole point of this bill. So it's—try and keep that in mind when you're speaking.

Mr. Oxenham: Thank you, Honourable Speaker; I appreciate your guidance.

So we made a priority that we invest in the future of our province by prioritizing education. Ensuring that we're prioritizing our next generation means that we continue to make smart and targeted investments that would enable Manitoba's—Manitobans to live a good life.

I remember, while working in the correctional facilities, that they were closing the Dauphin jail. And I remember colleagues of mine being very worried and very distraught because a source of income, a source of stability, for a centre that was, you know, seen as a beacon of hope in many cases where people had an opportunity to come and find a better path to go on. And not long after, a couple years later, the Agassiz Youth Centre was also closed, which, you know, you think that in a government's budget—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Once again, the member has strayed far away from what the bill before us is about. It's about the budget implementation process. So if he could keep his comments to that, it would be appreciated.

Mr. Oxenham: Appreciate that guidance again.

Health-care unions said the 2022 budget would not be able to address lack of staff, with wait times for surgeries skyrocketing. But our government, we vow to be different than the PCs, and we prioritize the needs of every Manitoban.

And we are rebuilding Manitoba. That's what we do. And that's why we've been working to rebuild our health care and education system, to make sure that all Manitobans are empowered to live a good life. The work that we have done over the last year and a half is proof to every Manitoban that we're continuing to make good on our promises to them.

Honourable Speaker, I just want to close my remarks by saying that I have a lot of respect for my colleagues, and one thing that folks working in correctional facilities can count on is our government to have a strong budget.

So thank you, Honourable Speaker; appreciate the time.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Well, good morning again, Honourable Speaker. I just want to put a few words on the record here in support of Bill 224, the—brought forward by my colleague from Midland.

My—I guess my question here is, what would a government have to fear by this bill? This bill isn't out to penalize just the current government, it would—not penalize, it will affect the governments moving forward. It will ensure all governments moving forward cannot—or they can still put legislation into BITSA, but it will be under public scrutiny. So I would almost suggest this should be a bipartisan bill, and I would encourage members from the government side to speak in favour of this bill.

I think we can—on this side of the House, we can say that BITSA in the past had a few—had a little bit of legislation in it when we were in government, but last year was a real anomaly with the amount of bills that were included in BITSA last year. And that certainly has never been the intention of BITSA. And I think there was a lot of important legislation that the government introduced last year, and I think, as the member from Midland said, there was a lot of groups that would have liked to have been at committee to talk about, especially, some of the labour portions of the bills included in BITSA, and that wasn't possible.

So in my mind and in this side of the House mind, the Bill 224 is an excellent bill. It will hold the government of the day to account but it will hold future governments to account. So I would urge members to

get behind this bill and that we have the vote on this fairly quickly.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The honourable member for—the honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): You know, I'd like to congratulate the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone) on bringing forward her first bill. So that's always exciting and, you know, a big step, I guess, for all of us as legislators. It's always exciting to have that time.

It's a pleasure to get up and talk about accountability. But I do find it a little bit disingenuous, and so I just, for a moment, I wouldn't mind speaking in regards to how we came to Bill 224. And, basically, thinking back to this past year, the members opposite were trying to gum up the system. And so while it's all fine and good to say, you know, Bill 224 is going to improve the accountability of financial matters and that Bill 224 is going to more—help us be more transparent, I think it's really important to realize that this is coming forward because of the incredible amount of erroneous points of privilege and points of order that took place.

And so, you know, we can talk about Bill 224 and ways to improve our democracy and we can talk about ways to improve accountability, but I think most Manitobans, and the Manitobans that I've spoken with—and I have spoken with an incredible amount—I do try to take outreach very seriously and I take my job as a representative of Riel very seriously. I've heard from Manitobans that it was—that it's shameful, that it was shameful that we were ringing the bells for hours on end, that there wasn't actual debate going on but instead we had these erroneous points of privilege, these erroneous points of order day after day, one person after another, so that our democracy couldn't function. And I find that that is—that's troubling.

* (10:50)

And so it's—it is problematic. I'm always open to improve accountability. I think that that is something that all of us across, you know, across the aisle can agree on; that accountability is paramount.

I would like to just point out one thing: that we're actually one of the few provinces that still have that, if I'm not mistaken.

An Honourable Member: The only province.

MLA Moyes: We're the only province, so thank you very much. And I'm not suggesting that that's something that we should do away with. I think that public input is incredibly important. Whenever we're discussing different pieces of legislation or discussing different priorities, I think it's incredibly important to hear from Manitobans.

But one of the things that I always say to Manitobans, whether I'm knocking on the door, whether I'm hosting a town hall, whether I'm at a coffee shop; whatever it is, when I'm speaking with constituents, I always let them know that they don't have to wait for an official process.

And so while I appreciate Bill 224 and I appreciate, you know, the transparency and the accountability piece, they don't have to wait to talk to MLAs on our side. My door is always open. My phone line is always readily available because I want to hear from Manitobans. I want to hear from my constituents.

And so each and every member on this side of the House believes in accountability, and I'm willing to have those tough discussions. I'm will—if somebody disagrees with a position that our government is taking, I want to hear from them because I do think it's important and that's how we improve the legislative—our different bills that are coming forward in the legislative session.

And so while Bill 224, you know, we can try to make—we need to have 10 hours of this or we need 10 hours of that or we should do this or that; that's all fine and good but at the end of the day we are all accountable to Manitobans. I'm accountable to the people of Riel and each and every day we are open to hearing their thoughts. We are open to hearing their opinions and I take that job very seriously.

I would also like to suggest that Manitobans had their say in 2023. They rejected the divisive and spiteful policies of the last government and they rejected the most hateful campaign in Manitoba history. And so we have a strong mandate. And so, you know, we can talk about—but we're talking about accountability and, ultimately, we are accountable and they were accountable for their policies and that's why they got voted out.

And that's what democracy is all about. Manitobans had their say. They said, we've had two terms of a terrible government that was not listening to Manitobans, that was putting them further and further behind, making life more expensive,

absolutely ruining our health-care system. And so they said, there's the door.

And so we have a strong mandate. And so, you know, accountability goes—ultimately, elections are the greatest accountability piece. And so while Bill 224 is—you know, we can talk about the—we should do this, but I ultimately think that that's almost getting into the weeds a bit. Like, the ultimate accountability is to our constituents and so this is important things when we talk about democracy.

And I also do want to just point out that I do find it ironic that, you know, members opposite, especially for—I'm going to point out that the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) gets up and talks about democracy and whatnot when, at the same time, the member for Borderland was talking about joining—making Canada the 51st state.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I've asked the member to keep his comments relevant to the bill.

MLA Moyes: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for that guidance.

But I do think that our democracy is critical and so I want to ensure that there isn't any interference in our democracy. And that, you know, that goes for ensuring that there's different mechanisms in place, but ultimately, everyone on this side of the Chamber, everyone in our government, every single MLA stands up for Manitobans, and we will continue to stand up for Manitobans and stand up for Manitoba jobs, unlike some of what we've heard from other—from members opposite.

You know, we are an open and transparent government. We are constantly doing consultation. We just actually got through a budget consultation. I was able to take part with a lot of other members from south Winnipeg and heard directly from Manitobans.

So while we can talk about these internal processes where someone has to come down to the Legislature and present their views, and that's all fine and good, I'm—you know, I think that that's important as well, but I also think that it's important for us to take our message and the ability to hear from folks on the road. We need to hear from other people. And so we went into the community. We opened the floor up. The Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) was there. The members of the entire south Winnipeg were there. And we listened. And that's what it's about. We were listening to what Manitobans had to say.

And I know that there's snickering on the other side about listening, and I know that they think it's funny that, you know, listening to Manitobans, what an idea. You know, they love putting forward a bill, Bill 224, and say we should have more public consultation. But when we say hey, we're going on a listening tour, they laugh. They're like oh, you're just listening. I don't find that funny. I think that listening to Manitobans is all of our jobs.

And so I think it's actually quite shameful for members opposite to laugh at that idea. To suggest that listening to Manitobans, that hearing their voice and building it into our legislation is laughable. It isn't. That's exactly what we were sent here to do.

And so while it's—you know, we can get into the minutia of how do we improve our democracy and how do we debate this piece of legislation or how do we debate that, I ultimately think bringing Manitobans together is the way forward. And we've heard that loud and clear. We've heard what we need to do. We've heard about rebuilding health care, which is what we're doing. We've heard about making life more affordable, which is what we're doing.

And we're going to continue to do that good work each and every day, because ultimately, the members on this side of the aisle are here for Manitobans, and we are going to fight day in and day out for each Manitoban and each of their jobs, unlike members opposite.

And so, with that, I would just like to conclude my remarks and just say: the people of Manitoba can rest assured, we're going to continue to do that good work.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): I'm honoured to stand before you today as a part of a government that listens. A government that understands the challenges Manitobans face and takes real action to address them.

From the moment we took office, we knew the responsibility we carried. Manitobans entrusted us with a mandate, a strong mandate, to rebuild health care, strengthen education, lower costs for families and to be accountable, and that's what we're doing.

C'est un honneur pour moi d'être devant vous aujourd'hui en tant que membre d'un gouvernement à l'écoute, un gouvernement qui comprend les défis auxquels font face les Manitobains et qui prend les mesures concrètes pour les relever.

Dès l'instant où nous avons pris nos fonctions, nous savions la responsabilité que nous avions. Les Manitobains nous ont confié le mandat : rebâtir les soins de santé, sois à l'écoute, renforcer l'éducation et réduire les coûts pour les familles. Et c'est exactement ce que nous faisons.

Translation

I am honoured to stand before you today as a member of a government that listens, a government that understands the challenges Manitobans face and that takes concrete measures to address them.

From the moment we took office, we knew the responsibility we carried. Manitobans entrusted us with the mandate to rebuild healthcare, to listen, to strengthen education and to lower costs for families. And that is exactly what we are doing.

English

When discussing a bill that talks about accountability, it's important to realize that we inherited a province weakened by years of reckless spending and mismanagement. The previous government left behind a staggering \$1.97-billion deficit, the money mismanaged at the expense of everyday Manitobans.

So when we talk about accountability, who's accountable now? They ignored health-care workers, underfunded our schools and failed to provide relief for families. But we are changing that. We brought in an independent auditor to expose the truth about our province's finances. This is all a part of being accountable. There are many ways we can do it. And we remind that being accountable is that affordability is a top concern for Manitoba.

We had to take decisive actions to lower costs. We cut the gas tax for—

* (11:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have eight minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Provincial Government Job-Destroying Payroll Taxes

The Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on the Provincial Government Job-Destroying Payroll Taxes, brought forward by the honourable member for Midland (Mrs. Stone).

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I move, seconded by the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk),

WHEREAS Manitoba's economy and workers are under threat with increasing costs and taxes imposed by the provincial government on families and businesses; and

WHEREAS the payroll tax is a tax on jobs and drives business away from Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the provincial government is responsible for the second highest job-destroying payroll tax in Canada behind only Quebec;

WHEREAS only three other provinces have maintained a job-destroying payroll tax; and

WHEREAS Canada, the Territories and six other provinces are all free of the job-destroying payroll tax; and

WHEREAS Manitoba businesses are struggling under unfair tariffs imposed by the American government and require meaningful, permanent relief; and

WHEREAS the provincial government job-destroying payroll tax makes Manitoba less attractive for new businesses to come to Manitoba and for investors and job creators to grow the economy; and

WHEREAS under the provincial government the unemployment rate has soared from 4 per cent in 2023 to over 6 per cent now in 2025; and

WHEREAS during a recession, the Pawley NDP provincial government created the job-destroying NDP payroll tax in 1982; and

WHEREAS the current provincial government is leading Manitoba into another recession with high unemployment levels; and

WHEREAS the previous PC provincial government began to phase out the payroll tax in successive budgets in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, taking many small- and medium-sized businesses off these tax rolls entirely and reducing the cost of the payroll tax for thousands of other Manitoba businesses; and

WHEREAS the ongoing threat of US tariffs, the current provincial government has only offered a temporary, three-month deferral of the payroll tax to Manitoba businesses; and

WHEREAS Manitoba needs a competitive business environment to attract investment to Manitoba and strengthen the local economy in the face of US trade action.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to make the province more attractive to international investors and new businesses by completing the phasing-out of the job-destroying payroll tax permanently, provide real relief for businesses struggling under American tariffs and reversing the provincial government's trend of growing the tax burden on Manitobans.

Motion presented.

The Speaker: A question period of up to 10—sorry, the honourable member for Midland.

Mrs. Stone: Good morning, everyone.

I bring this resolution forward to call on the NDP government to prove that they are serious about supporting Manitoba small and medium businesses and jobs in a long-term and meaningful way. The most impactful way that they can do this today is by phasing out the job-killing payroll tax for Manitobans.

The current NDP payroll tax is a regressive, anti-competitive, anti-growth form of taxation that deters increased jobs, it deters increased wages and it deters increased investment here in the province.

This is the exact opposite of what we need to be doing, especially in today's uncertain economic climate. This resolution could not be more important and timelier than it is right now as we continue to face business uncertainty, market volatility and investor concern.

But first, I do want to recognize all of the businesses here in Manitoba and entrepreneurs that are the backbone of our province and our economy. It is you that keeps the economy going, it is you that is the economic horse. And it is you that is providing Manitobans with the jobs that they need. This is exactly why the payroll tax is such a slap in the face to Manitoban businesses that make our province function and give Manitobans the jobs that they need. This is by far the worst, more punitive tax for businesses that we have here in this province.

This is an issue of competitiveness and supporting our own businesses right here at home. We're talking about home-grown entrepreneurial businesses where many of the individuals live, work and operate their businesses right here in our communities in Manitoba.

The reality is—the reality that businesses are facing is that they can only absorb so much. And the Province cannot tax their way into economic growth. The best way for economic growth is to remove these

punitive taxes and let the businesses grow, let the businesses flourish, and let the businesses hire Manitobans with the jobs that they desperately need.

With the cost of products increasing and inflation, the payroll tax has become an increasing burden on small businesses. This tax is not indexed to inflation, even as inflation has skyrocketed over the past couple of years, and the reality is that Manitobans, not just the businesses, but Manitoba employees are paying the burden of this as well.

I have worked in small business, I have worked in large business and I've run my own business. I have worked in both the agriculture and manufacturing sectors and I can tell Manitobans and speak in this House that decades of high taxation and anti-business decisions have left Manitoba's economy weak in comparison to other jurisdictions. Not just other jurisdictions across the world, Honourable Speaker, but other jurisdictions here in Canada.

If we look across Canada, Manitoba is one of the few provinces left that still has a payroll tax. Saskatchewan and Alberta both do not. Manitoba also has the second highest payroll tax, just aside from Quebec. Manitoba's payroll tax is half of what Ontario's is. Manitoba's payroll tax is double to what Ontario's payroll tax rate is for businesses with remuneration over \$2.5 million.

The past few months, in particular, should be a wake-up call to the Province, that their approach to taxation needs to change. And the reality is this is becoming more and more apparent in the wake of American and Chinese tariffs and this tariff war that Canada is caught in between.

Echoing Loren Remillard from the Chamber of Commerce's words, this tax weakens Manitoba's proposition. We need to minimize the negatives and grow the positives. The payroll tax is not a positive.

The NDP asks Manitoba businesses how they can help. And there are things the Province can do to create a stronger, more resilient business environment. But the support that Manitoba businesses need right now, I'm not sure that the NDP can put their ideology aside to make that happen. This resolution is their first test, and we'll see if they support this resolution, which would be a true call and a true testament to supporting Manitoba businesses during this very difficult time.

The former PCs were moving in the right direction, to phase out the payroll tax, moving many, many small businesses off of that threshold. This was

unfortunately not followed through when this NDP government was elected. And this was a big mistake, especially in the realities of high inflation, high cost, market volatility, investor concern and tariffs that we are facing from both China and the United States.

* (11:10)

There are only a couple individuals on the government benches that have actually worked in business or run their own business, so they might not be aware of what a job-killing payroll tax actually is. So let me put it into very, very simple terms for them. The payroll is a tax on the remuneration paid to Manitoba employees. This is a tax on how much Manitobans are being paid. The amount a business or employer owes depends on the total wages of people.

Let's just let that sink in. Manitoba is literally taxing wages and people through this payroll tax. But this isn't just a tax on wages and salary. The tax is also placed on benefits, employer-paid gratuities and tips, employer-sponsored life insurance premiums, bonuses and any other additional payments an employer may give an employee.

This is just absolutely absurd, Honourable Speaker. It is a punishment for employing people. It's a punishment for actually increasing the number of jobs in Manitoba. This is such a regressive, antiquated tax policy that is hurting Manitobans, and it is hurting Manitoba businesses right here in the province, plus this doesn't even include Trudeau's payroll tax increases that happened a couple years ago with CPP, and it was expanded in 2019.

In addition, payroll taxes must be paid regardless if a business is making any profits. Not only does this tax then cut into increasing wages for Manitobans, but it also cuts into increasing benefits for their employees, and it is a deterrent for hiring more Manitobans, which does in turn increase costs on consumers in the end.

Businesses, as I've mentioned, can only absorb so much. If the sufficient profit margins aren't there, paying this tax is coming from somewhere else. And ultimately, it's raising the price on consumers, it's reductions in hiring and retention and ultimately lower wages. Every single one of these members' union friends should be sounding the alarm that this tax even exists. This is a tax on paying people, Honourable Speaker. This is a tax on increasing jobs. This is a job-destroying payroll tax.

Mr. Diljeet Brar, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

There's an inaccurate portrayal that the payroll tax only impacts larger corporations, but this is blatantly false. Even the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics outlines the percentage of small businesses under 100 people make up almost 98 per cent here in Manitoba. And those highest sectors of businesses are health care and social assistance, retail and construction. I would say that those are pretty critical services that we need here in Manitoba.

So, you know, here's some examples for the members opposite to make it even more clear why this is a job-destroying payroll tax. Say there's a small medical business in Transcona, started with seven employees 10 years ago. Their reward to tripling their business in employing 30 people today is having to pay the payroll tax. Another example, a manufacturing plant in Winnipeg employing under 75 people: payroll tax of \$8,000 a week. That's almost half a million dollars a year for 75 people that are manufacturing goods here at home that we then don't need to bring in and import from other countries like the US.

The Fraser Institute has also shown payroll taxes have a negative and statistically significant impact on wages. This is punitive cost on businesses. The red tape to administer payroll tax adds burden to the small businesses. We need more job growth here in Manitoba, not less, and it's time that the NDP step up and stop taxing the exact people that are pulling that growing and larger social cart.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): A question period of up 10 minutes will be held, and questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another party; any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): The failed PC government had every opportunity to make life more affordable for Manitobans but instead they chose to cut programs, freeze wages and make bids for private corn-Crown corporations.

My question for the member opposite is: If the PCs are truly concerned about affordability in our province, why did they vote against our \$1,500 homeowners affordability tax credit that makes it easier for

Manitobans to afford to pay their mortgage or buy their first home?

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Our PC team voted against that because phasing out the education property taxes would have had a much stronger impact on Manitobans keeping their hard-earned dollars in their pockets.

In addition, the former PC government increased thresholds on the payroll tax to get more and more small businesses off the payroll tax. But more needs to be done as there's still a significant number of small and medium businesses that employ under 100 people that have to pay this very punitive job-destroying payroll tax.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): I just—I want to thank my colleague, the member for Midland, for bringing this important resolution forward here.

And a question I have is, I was wanting to know who she consulted with and who actually supports this resolution?

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for that question.

Manitoba businesses have been clear that they support the phase-out and the overall elimination of the 'job'-destroying payroll tax. I consulted with Canadian Taxpayers Federation, federation for independent business and the chambers.

And I'd just like to read a couple quotes from those stakeholders that have also been put out there publicly to prove to the members opposite who supports this. The CFIB, in their current budget submission to the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), has said: Reducing overall tax 'burden' is the No. 1 priority for small businesses, and payroll taxes were cited as the most harmful costs to small businesses in Manitoba. That is the quote from the Canadian federation for independent business in their current budget submission to the current Finance Minister.

Mrs. Schott: The failed PC government had seven and a half years to make life more affordable for Manitobans, but instead they used their power to raise taxes on most Manitobans while dismantling our health-care system.

Why did the Pallister-Stefanson government threaten a health-care premium that would increase the tax burden on Manitobans or else they would face more cuts to valuable health-care services?

Mrs. Stone: You know, deputy-honourable Speaker, it's comical to hear members opposite talk about affordability when over the past two years and entering their second budget, they have made no long-term affordability measures. All we've seen are freezes and delays and deferrals and holidays. There has literally been not a single long-term measure. The only long-term measure they put in was their \$1,500 tax 'cre' where Manitobans would have been better off going with the phase-out and the complete elimination of education property taxes altogether. So it's comical hearing from the members opposite talk about affordability when they have not introduced a single long-term or meaningful affordability measure for Manitobans.

This job-destroying payroll tax, it is that. It is job-destroying. It is limiting businesses from being able to increase wages—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Member's time has expired.

MLA Jeff Berezka (Portage la Prairie): Thank you so much to the member from Midland for this very important resolution in looking for ways to save Manitobans more money.

We are a province that is in a highly competitive market. Are we losing business because of this payroll tax, not only to other provinces but to other countries as well?

Thank you.

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for the question.

And both my colleague and I have worked in the agri-food sector. And we've seen first-hand investment leave this province and going to neighbouring jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan and Alberta, as well as to the US. And this is a problem.

And now we are in a predicament in Manitoba where we need to grow our economy and we're faced with these tariffs. This is going to be a significant challenge for Manitoba because of the poor anti—the poor tax decisions and the anti-business rhetoric that NDP governments prior created for this province.

And we saw businesses leave. We've seen investment leave. We've seen—currently Manitoba has dropped to second last in dollars devoted to mining and forestry—critical minerals that we need here in Manitoba.

* (11:20)

We've seen development projects being cancelled and not supported by this Premier (Mr. Kinew). Let's remember, this Premier supported the Leap Manifesto and the 30-by-30 plan, which doesn't allow key development projects to happen in Manitoba.

Where does he expect this tax base to grow if—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Member's time is expired.

Mrs. Schott: Affordability got worse under the failed PC government for northern communities after they froze funding for municipalities and overwhelmed them with more responsibilities. Our government is bringing prosperity to the North, creating more and better-paying jobs and creating a more competitive economy that can help drive down costs.

Why do the PCs neglect the needs of northern Manitobans and make life more expensive for them?

Mrs. Stone: The former PC government was on path to eliminating this job-killing payroll tax. They increased the thresholds that businesses would then have to pay from, like, \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million, taking many small businesses off of the payroll tax completely.

This is how you grow jobs in Manitoba. Keeping job-destroying payroll taxes, which is a deterrent to increasing jobs in Manitoba, a deterrent to increasing wages in Manitoba and a deterrent for increasing investment in Manitoba, is not the way to go. These taxes that are supported and, quite frankly, introduced by former NDP governments, are exactly why Manitoba is in the position it's in.

And seven years of the PC government working to improve made a—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Member's time is expired.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): As a former business owner that employed 70 people, paying payroll tax of nearly \$200,000 a year, that money could have been directly spent on helping more people come into our company by buying—purchasing equipment, creating opportunities for different markets.

My question is: Who is in support of this resolution?

Mrs. Stone: I thank the member for his question.

And, you know, similar to the member, I've worked in manufacturing, you know, industries that in—small businesses that were employing under

100 people and saw the detrimental effects that this payroll tax had on increasing wages, benefits and jobs altogether, while also seeing investment leave this province and this country, as a result of taxation and anti-business rhetoric.

So I had already mentioned earlier, CFIB supports to eliminate the job-killing payroll tax. The Manitoba chamber also has put out a statement saying that it continues to advocate for the elimination of the payroll tax, which has been identified by business leaders as the greatest impediment to economic competitiveness and—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Member's time is expired.

Mrs. Schott: The failed PC government turned their backs on renters for seven and a half years as rental costs skyrocketed by cutting the renters tax credit. Our government is helping renters keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets by increasing the maximum renters tax credit from \$525 to \$575.

Can the members opposite tell us: Why did the PC government raise taxes on renters when they cut the renters tax credit from \$700 to \$525?

Mrs. Stone: You know, clearly, the members opposite don't have any idea of what the payroll tax is because I haven't actually received a question about what the job-killing payroll tax is.

So let me remind the members that the job-killing payroll tax is a tax on employees; it's a tax for hiring more Manitobans; it is a tax on competitiveness; it's a tax on economic growth. The very people that are pulling this growing and growing social cart are the people that this NDP wants to continue to tax.

If they really cared about small businesses here in Manitoba, then they would support this resolution; they would follow through with the phase-out of the payroll tax on Manitoba businesses. The timing is now. This is—there is not a more timely—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Member's time is expired.

Mr. Piwniuk: I just don't want to have—one final question with my colleague here.

I have a very good friend who's actually in the business of supplying employees to big companies, and with this resolution going forward here, and if it actually happens where they lower the payroll tax, how much would it

benefit a new employment in the—in every sector of this economy?

Mrs. Stone: I thank my colleague for the question.

And many of us, on this side of the bench, at the very least, have worked in business. And we've seen the damages that the job-killing payroll tax has on Manitoba's small businesses—98 per cent of Manitoba businesses employ under 100 people. These are home-grown entrepreneurs that work, operate and live in their communities where their business is, and they're trying to employ more Manitobans and give more Manitobans with wage increases and job growth. And this tax is a deterrence to doing that. Let's remember. This is a tax on jobs. This is a tax on employees as much as it is a tax on employers and this is exactly why—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Member's time has expired.

Before I recognize any other members, we have some guests in the gallery—the time for the question period is expired.

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Before I recognize any other members, we have some guests in the gallery. We have seated in the public gallery from Andrew Mynarski School, 25 students under the direction of Mr. George Bravo. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar).

Thank you.

Debate

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): Si vous êtes d'accord, avant de commencer aujourd'hui, je tiens à dire que le mois de mars est le Mois de la Francophonie mondiale. C'est un moment important pour célébrer la langue française, et pour me part, j'essaie de pratiquer autant que possible. J'encourage mes collègues manitobains et canadiens à surmonter leurs hésitations ou leurs craintes et à essayer eux aussi.

J'ai aussi été encouragé par mes amis de l'École South Pointe et mon ami, le député de Saint-Boniface (M. Loiselle), à parler français dès que possible. Alors, j'ai pensé essayer aujourd'hui.

Translation

If it is all right with you, before I start today, I would like to mention that March is the International Month

of La Francophonie. It is an important time to celebrate the French language. For my part, I try to practice as much as possible. I encourage my fellow Manitobans and Canadians to overcome their hesitations or fears and give it a try too.

I have also been encouraged by my friends at South Pointe School and my friend, the MLA for St. Boniface, to speak French as often as possible, and I thought I would give it a try today.

English

So thank you everyone for humouring me there for a moment to speak some French. I just wanted to say that this month is francophone month globally, and it's really important that we practise our French and don't feel too nervous about it. Just give it a shot.

So here we are, honourable Speaker, again. We're back at it with another hyperbolic resolution from the opposition. It does feel a little bit like the PCs left the sort of bad slogan machine on all night, and we got a whole bunch of strange Mad Libs which is like job-killing over and over again. You know, I do this with my kids. We talk about adjectives and descriptive words and how we should maybe work on—working on our vocabulary together.

And so I'm speaking specifically about your resolution. So that's the relevance—is it's specifically about the wording of your resolution right now. *[interjection]* Yes.

So adjectives are very important and how you describe things, how you talk about things, your words, and in this bill, it's been—it's quite something to sort through. It's—it once again, sort of pretends to be about strengthening Manitoba's economy but says nothing about the real work that actually goes into building a strong, competitive province.

I know that there's some limitations within a resolution and the member opposite is trying to bring something forward that they're passionate about. So I'm happy to be clear about that and say, you know, I love debates about economic policy. I'm glad that we're having this conversation today. And, you know, ultimately I would say a thriving economy doesn't necessarily just happen because you yell cut something loudly, right?

So in a thriving economy, when governments make sort of smart, long-term investments in the things that actually help people and businesses succeed, that's how you get a thriving economy, and it happens when we invest in things like schools so that

every kid, no matter where they live, gets a great education and has skills to drive innovation and growth, you know, and build that economy here at home. It happens when we build health-care system that doesn't leave people behind or waiting for care, struggling to access mental health supports, and I'm so proud that we've hired an additional 1,255 net-new health-care workers to work on that plan.

* (11:30)

You know, this resolution specifically speaks about how we can make sure that we keep people here in Manitoba, and I really appreciate that. But what we need to do is we need to make sure that this province is a place where families want to stay, where workers want to build their futures and businesses can depend on educated work force and reliable infrastructure. So when they look at Manitoba, they want to bring people over, and they don't just necessarily see a massive deficit of \$2 billion, for example, left by a former government. And we're working on cleaning that up, one day at a time. So that's what we're focused on, honourable Deputy Speaker.

And while the opposition seems to be sort of workshopping new slogans—*[interjection]* And I can see that they're very worked up by this; I'm getting a lot of talk back and forth, they're very excited about the words that I'm putting on the record here today, I'm obviously getting some support. So I appreciate that, it's fantastic. And we can have a conversation about this after too. I'm happy to talk more about the good work that we're doing, that you seem to be excited about, so appreciate that.

You know, and we're expanding health-care access, like I said, which is directly tied to what we're talking about here. So we're hiring more nurses, more doctors, improving emergency care. And it's specifically related to things that are involved with, for example, a health care and education levy, so a payroll tax, you know? These are the sort of things that bring money in and we're always open, as a government, to continue having those conversations.

You know, we're also investing in education because that is such a big part of this, and the member from Midland kept bringing this up about making sure that we're doing everything we can to bring businesses to Manitoba—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

I would like to remind all members that we are debating about payroll taxes, so I would ask the

member to bring his comments towards payroll tax debate.

Thank you.

MLA Pankratz: Absolutely. So specifically here in the resolution, it's talking about driving business away from Manitoba, and so I'm talking about what sort of things drive business away and decisions that are made here in Manitoba.

And so when you want to cut something like a health-care or education levy, this is a problem, right? And so we're always open to having that conversation. Our Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) is consistently talking with business leaders in the community about this tax, how it affects them specifically and how that might look going forward.

Now, this was also something which, hypocritically, I mean, the members opposite, they brought it forward and applied it every single year they were in government, right? So how was it job-destroying then? Is it—was that the issue while you were in government, too, and this would fix it?

Now again, it seems like we are the ones who have to clean up the mess of the governments who was here before. So we are investing in education to keep people here in Manitoba. We're talking about tax policy, we're talking about the economy here in Manitoba; it's incredibly important.

We're also—you know, we're talking about affordability because we know businesses, on top of things like a payroll tax, they need to know that when they come here, their employees are going to be comfortable, that they're going to be able to stay here and that they're going to be able to continue to work and be happy employees because that makes them more productive.

So things like a new school in Prairie Pointe, for example, which is incredibly exciting. That's a great one. Things like the unprecedented funding of new firefighter and paramedic positions, you know, in Waverley.

So the key to keep those folks safe, you know, we have new businesses popping up in Waverley all the time and I have great conversations with them about the many factors; many, many factors that put pressure on them as a business. And perhaps, one of them might be a levy around health care or education, and that's a conversation that I'm willing to have and we'll continue to have that conversation to see how we can productively move forward.

And I think that that's the difference here, is that, again, I'm seeing from the other side a lot of slogans and yelling, but there's no real productive dialogue around how we can effectively change things here in Manitoba to move our economy forward. And that's the work that we're doing as leaders here in Manitoba every single day.

And so, when we were given this mandate in 2023, it was incredibly important. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) said, when people are ready to step up and get help, the government is going to be there for them. And that is the work that we're endeavouring to do every single day.

So, you know, under the previous government, we had ERs cut, which, again, that would be closed and that would specifically sort of affect business, and I've talked to business owners. When we're speaking about the effects or the decisions that they make based on the climate in a certain province, health care is one of those issues, and that's something that we're working to rebuild. Education is one of those issues specifically. The payroll tax, sure, is one of those issues.

This is a much larger, nuanced conversation that we have to have. And so I appreciate that the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone) wanted to bring this forward today. And it's a great conversation to have.

But, ultimately, I would say, you know, what happened while they were in government? They had the opportunity for seven years to cut this tax and they didn't do that.

So what I would just say to close things off here, you know, this feels a little bit like a trailer and not a movie, this resolution, right—it's kind of like the bad action movie that's written badly but has a lot of explosions. So they sort of—they say the same things over and over and over again about job-destroying, job-killing.

But Manitobans aren't really interested in that spin. Ultimately, they see the difference between a caucus that talks a lot and the team that actually delivers. And while the opposition keeps trying to rewrite their record, we'll just keep on doing the work for Manitobans because that's what leadership looks like and that's what they elected us to do.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): I have to say, wow, if this is the only strength they have, is to put up a unionized firefighter as a speaker—and none

of them have any experience in any business opportunities here that they ever had to see what we on this side have.

I have to say, I want to thank my colleague for—the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone) for bringing this resolution up, how important it is, especially in this environment. So if this is the strongest speaker that the NDP can bring up here about payroll taxes, how important the—how important this subject really is—*[interjection]* It's disgusting how they're clapping for that individual, honourable Deputy Speaker.

When it comes to payroll taxes, no one on that side has any clue. I don't think any of them actually had a person on a payroll, had to even pay payroll. I actually, over the years, when I first started my business, and I actually bought the business, I had to do payroll. I bought a business that was already existing, I bought the corporation shares and there was, you know, there was debt that came in with the business.

But you know what? My focus was—my new partner, business partner and myself—our focus was to build a business. That was our focus over the years. The 20 years I was in there we grew that business. We actually employed—we started with about four employees. By the time we—I sold the business, we had over 30 employees.

And the fact is, I remember the early days; I had to worry about if we were going to make payroll because, you know what, every member in that—our—all our employees were actually basically family to us. We wanted to make sure that they were taken care of first. We wanted to make sure they had benefits. We wanted to make sure that they had a good environment to work in.

But there were some sleepless nights, honourable Deputy Speaker, that I had to do in the early days. But we grew that business. We were successful. We focused on relationship building with our clients. We basically worked—make sure that we were—I put, you know, hours in: 12 hours a day just to build up my business.

And, honourable Speaker, when we have a member who comes up from Waverley who speaks here, who doesn't talk about anything about business, if this is the strongest member they have in the business community, that's frightening.

There's—it's a shame that they even clap for this individual, honourable Deputy Speaker. The only person that I know actually has a business here on that

side is the member from Seine River, and I'm surprised that she didn't get up to speak first.

And the fact is, there was no relevance in the speaking notes from the member from Waverley. And that should be ashamed. And I'm 'hoshe' every business owner actually listens to what they had to say and that was—it was so important that—*[interjection]*

You know what, the member from Rossmere—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

Mr. Piwniuk: —is actually heckling me. The fact is, she was a lawyer and she couldn't even make it as a lawyer, so now she's actually an MLA. She couldn't be—she said she couldn't even afford to be a lawyer, honourable Deputy Speaker, so—that was in her speech.

* (11:40)

So I just want to continue with this—how important this is to a business'—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

Please bring it down, my friends. Please bring it down. Let me listen what the member who has the floor has to say.

Mr. Piwniuk: Going back—*[interjection]* You know, I just don't—I want to have my opportunity to speak. We gave your member time. I just want to say, honourable Deputy Speaker, I remember when our business became very successful, and we actually had more than 20 employees. And that was the day that I had to have the notice from our accountant, saying that you guys now have to pay payroll taxes. That was a big impact because I remember it was—and it was a hit to us for the whole year of over \$20,000.

Every two—every—it seemed like every two years we actually hired a new person in our firm. And that was actually a punishment for actually hiring somebody, a one extra person now, and the fact is, the impact—this was during the Selinger days, and honourable Deputy Speaker, this was the impact to us. And it actually makes businesses basically stay stagnant. Because the fact is, every time you actually earn more, employ more people, they get taxed. And members should know that, you know, most of them are unionized teachers, unionized nurses. That's all they have on their side. Maybe a firefighter. And no business experience from that side. They have no clue

what payroll taxes are. That's why they couldn't talk about payroll taxes. That's why there's no relevance.

You know, I got people in the business community that come to me every day. These are my friends in the business community. And they're very—they're really concerned about this NDP government. They're actually chasing away business. At the time when we're doing these tariffs, honourable Deputy Speaker, it is so—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

Mr. Piwniuk: —it's so important that we—this is important topic here. This gives us opportunity to make sure that they can be competitive, especially when it comes to—we don't know what's coming at us, when it comes to this President of the United States right now. And our businesses are very worried about that.

When we stop hiring people, when there's a recession happening, I want to—*[interjection]* If, you know, the member from Rossmere will have her opportunity to stand up, talk about payroll tax. Because I don't know—think she even knows anything about payroll taxes. *[interjection]* Yes. So—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

Mr. Piwniuk: So, honourable Deputy Speaker, I just want to continue with my—the importance of this resolution. Because it is important to the business community. The people that employ over 80–75 per cent of the employees in this province, they're not on—unionized employees. And when you have teachers who got a tract—a contract, and the fact is, they're almost the second highest paid, with one of the lowest standard of livings here in this province, we are paying—they're looking after their friends. But they're not looking after—they're not looking after the business community with 75 per cent of the employees that are put—work with small businesses—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please. Order, please.

I would ask all the members to please show some respect to the Chairs and each other. Please.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, I respect you in that Chair, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to give a few more words on the record when it comes to the importance of the—our business community. They're worried right now. And when people start worrying, employees start worrying about their own jobs, they stop towing back on consumer spending.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, 75 per cent of the economy is consumer spending. With over 75 per cent of employees are with—working where private companies. This is concerning. This is concerning for the manufacturers, who employ a lot of people in this province. Its concerns with the employees in this province. Because at the end of the day, if we go into a recession, they have less money to spend. They hold back. And the fact is, then this government will get more and more into debt if they don't look at this—how serious this matter is.

They can heckle back and forth here, but this is very serious to our province right now. For the uncertainty. I spoke a bit about the tariffs, honourable Deputy Speaker, in the House here. When there's uncertainty out there, people are scared. People stop spending. We need this government to be active; to make sure that they can reduce the payroll taxes because that is the direct—when it comes to—for making sure employees stay in their jobs. Because if all of a sudden there's uncertainty, there's uncertainty across the border, around the world, with China and the US, this is very concerning to employees.

And a lot of times, these employees are finding it's harder and harder to make ends meet right now when their house—property—if they're in a house of \$400,000. Today, in Winnipeg, it doesn't take much to have a \$400,000 house. The average house in Winnipeg is over half a million dollars right now. And they're all going to be slapped with a property tax increase. They've already been slapped with a carbon tax, gas prices and the tax holiday's back—not there anymore. And the fact is they're feeling at the pumps right now, honourable Deputy Speaker.

The affordability right now is really scary right now. If people start holding back because of the uncertainty, that hurts all of us. And the fact is, this government, if they keep on spending the way they are, there's not going to be the revenue. They're not focusing on the revenue. They're not focusing on economic development, and that is very concerning to me and to all my business friends out there. They're really concerned.

And I have a person who actually works for Pinnacle and the fact is, they employ a lot of employees into the—when 'manufaction' is ramped up. And right now, they're not seeing that. They are very scared that a lot of that business is going south—are going elsewhere, to other provinces.

When Saskatchewan—I come from the border, Saskatchewan-Manitoba border, I represent. When

Saskatchewan doesn't have a payroll tax, they have a lot of have province, it hurts us on the western side. And I've always been a proponent for the western side of Manitoba. I always—I grew up in Russell. I live in Virden. I represent Turtle Mountain. This is very important to Western Manitoba, that especially my manufactures who live along the US border. This could change the dynamics of what they do in the future.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): I have to say, some of the rhetoric this morning has been a little bit disappointing. I think we can have a conversation about the resolution without launching into personal attacks. To the Minister of Education: you have my utmost admiration for your work prior to politics.

I think a lot of the things that we were hearing from the other side and some yelling about relevance, well, let's have a conversation about affordability in Manitoba. The member just spoke about relief at the pumps. It was actually our government that gave consumers and Manitobans a break at the pump for a full year and on their gas tax and implementing a permanent 10 per cent reduction. That wasn't something the PC government even considered doing.

Now we're talking about the health and education levy today. It's been in place since 1982. We had the Filmon years, we had Brian Pallister, we had Heather Stefanson. If it was such a deadly, dire, dire levy, they had their chance to remove it.

And what I found a little bit ironic was I remember sitting here in 2023 during the budget, up in the gallery, and listening to the budget delivery, and of course there was this big commitment to, we're going to kill the payroll tax, starting January 2024, knowing full well they weren't going to be on this side of the House anymore. So playing politics with this issue is a little bit disingenuous.

And I just want to give a brief shout out to the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. I've had the privilege, prior to politics, of being involved with the Winnipeg chamber, and I really commend the work that Loren Remillard and his team has been doing at the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce in advocating for Winnipeg businesses.

And of course, Loren was also a part of the trade mission that our Premier (Mr. Kinew) had organized out to Washington, and a lot of that work that we've been doing to bring business and labour together, particularly at a time right now where we're talking

about the threat of tariffs, the Trump tariffs, to our economy. And I think—and Manitobans can rest assured that our government is taking the necessary steps to Trump-proof our economy, to provide relief and to provide safety to Manitoba businesses. And they're going to see a lot of that in our up-coming budget, as well.

But something I do recall from my time attending Winnipeg chamber meetings, just to, respectfully, push back at the member of Midland's assertion, that nobody on this side has any experience or familiarity with business. Well, you know, I may not have owned a business, albeit, but I did work in the business sector and I do have a fair bit of appreciation for the work that our small, medium and large enterprises have in Manitoba.

And it is a little bit ironic, honourable Speaker, and I feel I do have to say this, that you know who else is a small-business owner? A taxi driver. A taxi owner who paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for a taxi medallion, but for whatever reason, the Progressive Conservative government doesn't consider them small-business owners. And when they kiboshed the taxi board, what happened to the price of their medallion? It plummeted.

* (11:50)

So imagine you purchase a house, \$400,000, and you think, here's an asset, this will grow, this will appreciate in value, I will put money into this. Pretty sure this is still relevant. You're going to put money into this, and suddenly—suddenly—government makes a decision to kill the value of that investment. We wouldn't tolerate that if that happened in any other business sector, but the fact that we did this with the taxi owners of Manitoba and thought nothing of it, that reeks of hypocrisy.

So, of course, to all the owners and operators out there: Our government actually sees you as small-business owners.

Honourable Speaker, we've had, I think, a pretty robust conversation about the health and education levy here and, of course, all the other work that's going on, on this side of the House, that our government is undertaking to make life more affordable. But listen, if there's any step that our government can take to help Manitoba businesses, small and medium enterprises in Manitoba, fare through these very challenging and uncertain times, then our government will consider that. Our government is not stuck in any sort of mentality or way of thinking. We're certainly not

pitting any two sides of our economy together. We're not pitting labour against business; we're not pitting business against labour.

And that's a little bit of the rhetoric that I heard from the other side, which I think is unfortunate, because I think both go hand in hand. And, you know, something that I used to hear quite a bit previously, before being elected, from the business community and sitting in round tables, was just how disconnected the previous government had become from the business community itself.

So this notion that only members on the other side know what the business community want, only they can speak to the business community, I would fully reject that. And I think that, if anything, Manitobans can trust that our government, whether you're a small-business owner—and I represent a part of the province that a fair bit of new businesses have done openings, have recently opened shop in Manitoba and made investments, and I have nothing but admiration for these folks because owning a small business is—it's a lot of work and it's a lot of risk. And members opposite who own businesses too have my admiration. But, again, I don't think it's anything about pitting labour against businesses.

So, honourable Speaker, with that, I'm going to yield some of my time back to my colleague, the Minister of Transportation. I know I'm excited to hear about the work they've been doing in their relationships with Washington and trying to protect the Manitoban economy.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Thank you—*[interjection]* Thank you so much for that.

It's—you know, when I think about these times that we're in right now with the tariffs that we're faced with from both Donald Trump and China, is—when I look at the agriculture business and look at the short margins that they have, and I want to tell you about two businesses, unfortunately, that I had worked for and left Manitoba because of the payroll tax.

One of the companies was a company from the UK that decided to locate into Manitoba. Their business continued to grow, their business continued to grow up, but they started having to pay a heavy payroll tax. And they said that when they had to pay that payroll tax, that there was no sense of being in

business in Manitoba again. So that great company that was called Fausen *[phonetic]* became Nutrien and is now located in Alberta because their company was not forced to pay payroll tax at that time.

Second company—again, when we're dealing with the tariffs like we are currently dealing with right now, it was a US company called Legend Seeds that decided that they wanted to be part of Manitoba because of our soybean-growing area here as well too. Lo and behold was the day that I had to tell a number of our employees that we had to leave because the payroll tax, again, was impeding them from being able to do business here in Canada.

That business is still doing very, very well in the United States, because they couldn't make a dollar in Canada because of the payroll tax. So what we're doing is we're steering potential investors away. And when we look at provinces beside us that are very aggressive in this—in the ag industry—we only have to look as far as Saskatchewan and Alberta, because they have a distinct advantage overtop of us.

And then on top of that, not only with our payroll tax are we being impeded with here, but a carbon tax that every leadership person in the federal government and we still continue to charge this at that point. We're a province that is in a highly competitive market, yet we're doing nothing to bring businesses here.

So at this time, I'd like to listen some more to what we have from the other side, so I will cede the floor to them.

Thank you.

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I'm grateful to have a few minutes to put some words on the record today. Because this PMR, it does talk about a lot of topics. I mean, from some of the blowback I'm hearing from the other side today, I think they haven't read it, because it very clearly talks about concerns about tariffs, concerns about affordability. So those are some of the things that I'd like to comment on today.

Certainly, as my colleague has already referenced, you know, this Premier (Mr. Kinew) has made an incredible effort to build up a really, really strong business and jobs council in this province. He has incredible support from the business community; I certainly hear that everywhere that I go. And one of the places that I had the opportunity to go with the Premier and with members of the businesses job council was as part of the delegation in April 2024 to Washington.

And, you know, some of what was so important about that meeting was the opportunity to reinvigorate Manitoba's US engagement, relationship and presence, which was critical, even ahead of the election. We spent a lot of time down there, talking about the impacts of whichever party were to be—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

MLA Naylor: —and so it was important that we were having those conversations rebuilding relationships that had been critically damaged by the—being ignored by the previous PC government, simply ignoring the importance of trade, pulling, you know, a trade office out of the US, refusing to really work with our partners.

And so we were there to do that work. We knew then, and we talked about it at great length, that a second Trump presidency would mean greater unpredictability in our trade relationship and in border security. So I was very pleased to join the Premier (Mr. Knew) on that trip, along with the Business and Jobs Council.

We had the opportunity to meet with the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Hydropower

Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the national state Department of Agriculture, Washington International Trade Association, the Canadian American Business Council. We also had meetings with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, and that was organized, actually, by our friends at United Steelworkers.

So long before the Trump presidency, we knew there were risks around tariffs, and we knew that this trade relationship was critically important. And we took those steps on behalf of business owners in Manitoba. The importance to continue—I mean even with this focus on buy local that is so critical, we cannot stop working with the business community in the US. The business community is not Donald Trump, right? So he's making a mess of things for the business community—

The Acting Speaker (Diljeet Brar): Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have seven minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 p.m., this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 13, 2025

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