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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
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COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
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EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
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GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
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NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
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<i>Vacant</i>	Morden-Winkler	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 6, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

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

Good morning, everybody. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Good morning, Madam Speaker. Would you call Bill 228, The Pay Transparency Act, for second reading debate this morning.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 228 this morning.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 228—The Pay Transparency Act

Madam Speaker: I will therefore call second reading, Bill 228, The Pay Transparency Act.

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I move, seconded by the MLA for Fort Garry, that the Bill 228, The Pay Transparency Act; Loi sur la transparence salariale, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Marcelino: Bill 228, The Pay Transparency Act, will prevent employers from seeking pay history about employees, require employers to include pay information publicly on advertised job postings and require private sector employers with more than 100 employees to file a pay audit report with the pay equity commissioner, including information on gender, diversity and pay of employees.

And it will require all bids for public tenders to demonstrate that the bidder pays women, gender-diverse individuals and men equally.

Madam Speaker, equal pay day this year was on April 4th, just this past Tuesday. Equal pay day is a global event that raises awareness of the gender pay gap. It marks how many months into 2023 the average woman must work to catch up to what the average man earned the year before in 2022.

So, in other words, the average woman had to work until April 4th, to just this past Tuesday, in order to earn what the average man earned last year. And for women that are racialized, newcomer, Indigenous or women with disabilities, our equal pay day will be running into somewhere into May or June of 2023.

So, on equal pay day, this global movement is encouraging us to wear red to mark this day. Unfortunately, the provincial government did not recognize equal pay day this year, but I hope that equal pay day will start getting recognized soon by this government, whether or not they're interested in paying—in passing pay transparency legislation because, you know, addressing the gender gap is going to take a bit of a cultural shift and in order for that to happen, we will need to raise public awareness.

The gender pay gap refers to the difference in average earnings of people based on gender. It is a widely recognized indicator of gender inequities and it exists across industries and professional levels. There are different ways of measuring the gap, but no matter how you measure it, this gap exists. The gender pay gap is worse for those who face multiple barriers, including racialized women, Indigenous women and women with disabilities.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2015 raised concerns about the persisting inequalities between men and women in Canada, including the high level of the pay gap and its disproportionate

effect on low-income women, racialized women and Indigenous women.

Now, a bill like this Pay Transparency Act only addresses a fraction of this gender-wage issue. Access to economic inequality can start at a very young age for girls, for some families and in some communities. It could mean not being able to access the family's resources for education compared to boys in the same family.

And another factor that drives the gender-wage gap is due to the fact that men and women are concentrated in specific sectors or in jobs. Women tend to be overrepresented in fields that pay relatively low wages, such as caregiving and service sector jobs. And women remain underrepresented in fields with relatively higher wages, such as science and technology jobs and in skilled trade jobs.

Another factor that drives the gender-wage gap is that men and women are concentrated in different job levels. Women's career progression is often limited, particularly in sectors with fewer women, and in many countries women are underrepresented in management roles.

And another factor is the enormous inequality that arises from the distribution of unpaid work hours. Women do much more cooking, looking after the elderly and child care than men, which in turn limits the time women can spend in paid work and their possibilities to advance in the paid labour market. This has negative implications for pay and career progression. And study after study has proven that gender discrimination affects women's pay for starting salaries and even hiring practices.

Madam Speaker, just this morning, I was awake at 4:45 a.m. making lunch for my kids so that I could try to be here by 6 a.m. so that I could work on this speech. So, it's not easy being a working mom. And I get paid the same as my colleagues, but many folks don't.

Women's economic empowerment has obvious positive consequences for women's agency, freedom and social and political empowerment. Unequal wages during the working years have long and compounding effects on gender inequality throughout the life course. And these lower earnings lessen women's economic independence throughout life.

And the consequences, you can see them the most in women's old age. There is a sizable gender gap in retirement income, wealth and pensions that arises after a lifetime of unequal earnings across countries.

Women age 65 and older receive only three quarters of the retirement income of men from public and private pension arrangements for most average countries in the OECD.

* (10:10)

Related to this, and because of women's longer life expectancy, nearly every OECD country has higher poverty rates for women than men. The average old age poverty rate for women in countries like Canada is 15.7 per cent, while for men it is 10.3 per cent.

I certainly see that in my work as the MLA for Notre Dame. In Notre Dame, we have food distribution to constituents on Mondays and on Wednesdays, and most of the people that sign up indeed are older seniors, and they're all women, and mostly racialized women.

So, how do we close this gender pay gap? Like I said, a bill like The Pay Transparency Act is really just skimming the surface, but it's an important first step. We need to also increase the minimum wage to a living wage, because many women only earn the minimum wage. We need to be able to mandate paid sick days for workers and make sure that we have affordable, accessible public child care, and that only happens when we have decent wages for child-care workers, or early childhood educators.

You know, this pay transparency act, again, is another step, but we also really need to just be promoting gender equality in society in general. Because this inequality, you know, it can start with the lack of schooling, the lack of family and work-life balance supports, public policy about child care. Parental leave is really important, and efforts improve a division of unpaid work; more work for anti-discrimination legislation; being able to improve women's access to leadership roles; and closing those gender gaps in old age and addressing that poverty there.

So, you know, last time I was here last year, talking about this, this bill didn't really get anywhere. I continued with more consultations anyways, because I know that this bill will be coming soon, whether it's this year or next year, whether it's, you know, with my leadership or another MLA's leadership, the time has come to really continue to address these gender pay gaps.

Lately I've been able to discuss this topic with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. We will be instituting some policy rounds where I'll be speaking to

different members of the Chamber. I've continued bringing this topic up and this issue up, and this bill up in my work, meeting with other constituents, and also with different women's groups, most recently at the Asian Women of Winnipeg event, where I was able to do a speech about this very same topic. It was extremely well received, and noted as very, very important, as something that folks are very interested in supporting and hoping to see here.

And just last to note, you know, I was here very early this morning, like I mentioned. We have folks here that are helping to clean our Legislature, and one of the women that I spoke to, I asked them, you know, do you get paid by folks here in the Legislature, or do you have like a different cleaning company? Oh, no, it's through here. Okay, that's great, so do you get paid the same as your male counterparts? Oh, yes, we do, of course we do, we have to, she said. And I said, because you know that in other places, especially if it's private companies, we wouldn't be able to guarantee that.

And she's like, are you sure? Not here, not in Manitoba, not in Canada. I said yes, it is like that here in Manitoba, in Canada, and we really, really need to find out where those pay gaps exist so that we can make sure that we can address that properly, because we deserve that here, and all the women deserve that here.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Questions

Madam 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; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I'd like to thank my colleague for bringing in this resolution—or bill this morning, and have this very important discussion.

Can the member advise—I understand the federal government has passed the Pay Equity Act, which came into effect August 31st, 2021—the difference between the federal Pay Equity Act and the legislation that she's proposing this morning and what areas it would cover off in difference?

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I'd just like to note for the member that this very same question

was already asked last year when we went over this, so I think the response will be the same, if you could check in Hansard.

But the federal legislation which was passed in 2021 deals with federally regulated industries and jobs and sectors. And so, everything else is still not covered here in Manitoba for private sector. We do also have the public sector covered here in Manitoba, and that was done in 1986 by an NDP government at that time.

Thank you.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I want to thank my colleague for bringing forth Bill 228. What's really interesting is that, like many of the bills that we're bearing forward on Thursday mornings, this is an invitation for us to show some leadership in a country regarding these issues that are at the forefront, especially as we're moving out of the pandemic.

This is a really important piece. And I want to thank my colleague for being so forward-thinking in this and inviting the government benches to join us on something that is this consequential. Your persistence is certainly motivating and inspiring.

The question that I would like to have some clarity on, Madam Speaker, is how could Bill 228 ensure pay equity in this province?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank my colleague for that question. A bill like Pay Transparency Act is just really the beginning to address the gender pay gap that exists here in Manitoba and across the country and across other countries in the world.

It is actually a very small step. It's really just like shining a light on the problem. It's just a pay reporting mechanism that would be occurring to show, you know, whether a pay gap even exists and to what extent. So, it's really just like turning the light on in your hallway to see what's even going on.

And it's really just a first initial step, but it's a very important step, because then we'll be aware of, you know, the depth and breadth of the issue at hand here in Manitoba.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for bringing forward this legislation and just express that I really admire her for the work that she is doing as a woman, as a mom, as an MLA. And I believe she is truly crushing it with that work-and-life balance, and so I just want to commend her on that.

The question for the member is, can she elaborate on the types of costs that might be associated with the implementation of a pay audit report for private sector businesses?

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank my colleague for that question. In my research, I did find a figure, and it was in euros; it was 1,000 euros, because it's mostly in OECD countries that this is occurring, and their average incurrence of the cost is about 1,000 euros per company per year, and that translates to about \$1,400 Canadian, a little bit more and under \$1,500 for sure.

And—but, I'd like to also note that the federal government here has instituted a digital tool; it's like an official calculator and it makes it a lot easier for companies here to use that, and so it might—so those costs might even—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Thank you to the member for bringing this legislation forward again. As she conceded in her speech, there are federal regulations in place and provincial rules in place that collective agreements reflect this in Manitoba.

So I'm—but I'm wondering, would this legislation override collective agreements in Manitoba for companies that currently have this in place?

MLA Marcelino: I'm—I'd like to thank my colleague for that question. I'm actually not too clear on the answer for him right now, specifically. I do know that movements like this has really been spearheaded by many unions and I've consulted with the Manitoba Federation of Labour and others.

So, I'm pretty sure that this is something that could be worked on, because this is something that many workers and worker advocates are really hoping will come to fruition to properly address the gender pay gap.

* (10:20)

Mr. Altomare: I just—in reviewing the bill, I know that 228 will certainly help us attract workers in sectors, Madam Speaker, that are experiencing some really deep shortages; especially in home care, where we're seeing families struggle with a lack of support and with having to rise to the challenge of providing care.

Something like 228 will certainly help alleviate some of the pressure on a sector like that.

So, why is the disclosure of salaries important in tackling the wage gap?

MLA Marcelino: Well, it's—I'd like to thank the member and my colleague for that important question.

The disclosure of the job salaries is an important step, you know, making that public. Job candidates, when they're looking for, you know, where to apply to, they're going to be able to, you know, immediately seek out which places are going to be worth their time and effort in this really tight job market.

So, that's going to help with that and reduce, you know, just—people just, you know, going through that whole, long tedious process and then eventually saying, okay, this is—this job is actually not going to be worth my time and effort and my skill set. So, it will cut down on those unnecessary steps.

But it's also, just, you know—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Martin: To the member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino), I understand here in Manitoba, we have approximately 43,000 registered businesses of which almost 90, 95, 97 per cent are below 100 people, which, if I understand—100 employees—if I understand, they would be exempt from the member's legislation.

So, how does the member reconcile the fact that some, you know, 98 per cent of employees here in Manitoba would be outside the scope of her legislation?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank my colleague for that important question. I am more than willing and happy to be able to include those small businesses if this is something that the government is willing to propose.

As this is just an initial step, we would—we were hoping to just include medium-sized and the large-sized firms here in Manitoba, because we know that administrative costs can be lessened when you are using these medium- and large-sized firms because they already have the HR in place that are already collecting this type of information.

But if the member is suggesting that we can do a little bit better, I am really, really onto that suggestion and would take him up on that, surely.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank my colleague, the member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino), for showing leadership in this piece, especially when talking to chambers of commerce, talking to women's

groups, talking to people that are most directly affected by this, Madam Speaker.

Because as you said, now that we're in the shadow of the pandemic, this is an inflection point; a point where real leadership needs to be shown, not only by government, but also by the private sector in this area.

So, how would this bill contribute to Manitoba's just and equitable post-pandemic recovery?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank my colleague for that important question. Women and marginalized community members continue to still be hit hard by the economic effects of COVID. There's still single mothers and those of us in Manitoba who make less than \$17 an hour. According to CCPA Manitoba statistics, the COVID economic recovery continues to elude these—this group of Manitobans.

In my previous role as Status of Women critic, here with the NDP caucus, I set out to gather information about the community that would constitute an economic recovery and what these members, with—and I met with business councils, industry sector councils, economists, activists, researchers, community organizations, unions and more. I—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Martin: Again, I applaud my colleague for bringing forward this legislation and having this discussion; obviously, very important discussion.

The one aspect of the legislation that the member proposes, if I understand, it's a voluntary reporting. Does the member see that voluntary reporting would ensure more accessibility to those salary differentials being addressed? Or would she see a more—impose more of a prescriptive requirement to make those reportings in order to achieve the goal she's outlined in Bill 228?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank my colleague for that question. I'm a little bit confused about what he's referring to, but I think what he's trying to say might be whether or not employees, you know—being able to voluntarily disclose different parts of their identity. I think it has to be voluntary because you can't force employees to disclose things that they don't want to disclose about their ethnicity or gender, so this whole process needs to be voluntary.

And, like I was saying earlier, this is indicative of a cultural shift and sometimes that takes a while to happen. And eventually folks will raise more public awareness about this issue. And hopefully our pay gap and transparency—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The time for this question period has also expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I do want to thank my friend from Notre Dame for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. And I also really appreciate having had the opportunity to discuss informally with her yesterday afternoon a few more of the details about this bill. And I appreciate the work that she's put into it and the consultation that she's done and the research that she's done.

And I think that I can speak on behalf of everyone on this side of the House and everyone in this Chamber that we all agree that when women succeed in society, we all succeed. And that that is definitely a goal in ensuring that women have all the tools that they need, economically, to succeed in their lives. And pay equity is potentially one of those opportunities where we could ensure that women are being given the opportunities to succeed.

I have to state that, and it goes without saying, but perhaps I'll say it anyways, in that I do speak from a very secure position of privilege at this point in my life. In the sense that when I got elected just like everybody else in this Chamber, I was offered a salary. And for the first time in my life, I didn't have to negotiate and I didn't have to disclose my previous pay history.

No one said to me, you know, what were you making in your job before? No one was making those kinds of assessments upon me, like it happened in every other job that I had ever had in my entire life. It was just, here's the salary. And whether or not you're male or female or non-binary, this is the salary of an elected official in the province of Manitoba.

And it was a real eye-opening, comforting and primary experience for me, one that I certainly do think—you know, it gave me a moment to reflect on some of my own past experiences and of course, the past experiences of many other folks in Manitoba who haven't—who have had that moment where they've gone into a job interview and they've been asked about their pay history. And, of course, sometimes they've been discriminated in the past, based on gender or other factors and haven't been paid their compensation according to their worth. And these other factors came into being.

And it's a real deflating experience when something like this could potentially strengthen that and eliminate those opportunities for those discriminations, whether they be overt or through unconscious bias that sometimes employers do have. And so there's definitely merit to pay equity—Pay Transparency Act.

I did share with the member a few of the concerns that I had with the bill as it's currently written, in the sense that the bids for public tenders requiring that they demonstrate that the bidder pays women, gender-diverse individuals and men equally.

And my only concern with that is that I would never want to see a Manitoba company or a Manitoba start-up—well, potentially if it's just under—over 100 employees, it may not be as applicable. But I—there's an assurance that I really am looking for that Manitoba companies would not be precluded from bidding on tenders because of this, and what that would look like, and whether or not that would—what the regulations would look like to support it, to ensure that we are not putting any Manitoba company at an unfair advantage.

* (10:30)

And so, I just don't have the questions answered in that regard, and something that I would certainly want to consult more, and I know the member has mentioned a willingness to also consult in that regard. And I do appreciate that.

And then my friend from McPhillips did bring up a good point in the sense that, employees with more than 100—or companies with more than 100 employees would be required to file the pay audit report, but not companies below the 100-employee threshold. And what that looks like, my friend from McPhillips had quoted 97 per cent of the employers in Manitoba would be excluded from this.

And I haven't done a lot of consultation with the business council or the chamber in that regard, and it is a question that I would wonder if 100 is the right number of employees to include in this legislation, or if there is a potential to examine that as well.

So, those are some of my thoughts about this legislation, but I really do agree with the spirit and the intent of this legislation. I think that pay transparency can—is certainly a tool that we can use to ensure equity for women and gender diverse people in the workplace, so that we can have people being paid based on, you know, equal pay for equal work, and the skill that they bring is based on the intrinsic value of their work and not on other discriminatory factors.

So, again, I really do appreciate the member's initiative here, and I appreciate her passion and dedication to ensuring pay equity for all in Manitoba.

So with that, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate, and I look forward to hearing what my colleagues and others have to say.

Thank you.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I just want to thank my colleague, the MLA—our colleague, the MLA for Notre Dame for bringing this bill forward for—I believe it's the second time that she's brought it forward.

And, you know, being the second time, some of this, what she's shared is what we've heard previously, but I do have to say our colleague, the MLA for Notre Dame, does her due diligence. She really does. She doesn't bring anything forward in this House without doing an extensive amount of research and, you know, speaking with experts and being able to stand in her place and answer, you know, any question that's brought forward, in terms of why she's brought forward legislation like this. And she's done a great job of that today.

And, you know, I can list off all of the stats around pay inequity and pay gaps. I could talk about the folks who are disproportionately impacted by pay inequity. Many folks have already done so: that it's most—it's primarily, obviously, women who are experiencing the pay gaps, but it's also disproportionately affecting Indigenous women, Black women, gender diverse folks.

But those are stats that we're all well aware of. We all know, or we all should know, this information is readily available on Stats Canada and other platforms. There have been whole campaigns to shine a light on pay inequity and how it affects people directly every single day.

And so, really, what I want to talk about today is how it is critical that, in our roles as legislators, that we take this step and support this bill. And I know that the minister for Families just stood up and spoke positively in support of our colleague bringing this bill forward, and she also stated that she believes that everybody in this House understands, and is on the same page, that women and gender diverse folks should be paid the same wages for the same work, that pay equity should be met across the board.

At the same time, I didn't hear clearly from that minister that they will be supporting this bill, which

is disappointing. And I think what is really key right now is that if anyone is going to stand up in this House and say that they believe that women, that gender diverse folks should be paid equitably, should be paid fairly, the same as their male counterparts, then just simply support this bill.

That's the step we need to take at this point. The minister also raised a couple of questions that she has, and I think it's good that she's got those questions, actually, because it shows that the minister is invested and is taking the time to read up on this bill, in all the areas. And I'm not surprised by that. I believe—I know that minister to be somebody who would take those steps and initiative.

But nothing that she's raised in this House today, none of the questions raised by PC MLAs so far in this House today, precludes them from supporting this bill. If they have proposed amendments, bring them forward. Support this bill.

If members opposite in the PC caucus believe that pay equity is one step that we can take to ensure that we're addressing child poverty in Manitoba, support this bill. If PC MLAs believe that your race and your gender, your gender diversity should not mean that you earn less on every dollar than a man does, support this bill. If members opposite believe that reconciliation is important, support this bill.

Pay equity and this bill, The Pay Transparency Act, supports all of those areas. It helps address child poverty, it speaks to reconciliation, it addresses the areas that right now, in Manitoba, are rearing their head in some of the ugliest ways.

And so, to stand in this House and say that you believe that women should be paid the same, you believe that equity and compensation through corporations and businesses should be fair across the board, support the bill. It is actually pretty simple. And we have that opportunity collectively today in this House to do so.

And, you know, I think that—I know that we're all watching in real time what is happening across the country, what is happening here in our own province in terms of the challenges around cost of living. We've seen as we've come through this COVID pandemic the people who have been disproportionately impacted by that, left behind and out of initiatives that are meant to help people navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here in Manitoba we have to think about the specific needs of residents of Manitoba and how we,

legislators in our own province, can take unique steps to ensure that our communities can survive and thrive.

This bill speaks to that. And, you know, thankfully, we have a colleague in the MLA for Notre Dame who has done the heavy lifting in terms of this legislation. Thankfully, we have somebody in this Chamber who's built the relationships, has done the research and is also so open to listening and learning and adapting to what the needs of Manitobans are in bringing this bill forward.

She's done a lot of the hard work for us, alongside advocates who for decades—for decades—have been fighting for pay equity and transparency. The very least we can do is say thank you to those advocates who've been fighting for this for decades, acknowledge the hard work of our colleague and support this legislation today.

We are in a crisis point in our province where the issues of MMIWG2S—we all saw this week the devastating realities of colonialism, of inequities across various systems, all systems affecting Indigenous peoples. Very plainly in this legislation, you know, is indicated, that Indigenous people are—Indigenous women specifically, are disproportionately disadvantaged when it comes to pay equity.

This is one small step that we can take to make sure that Indigenous women are paid equitably when they pursue economic opportunities. To me, this is a very common-sense step that we can take together as legislators.

I—someone mentioned, I believe it was the MLA for McPhillips, who talked about identifiers and whether or not folks should have to self-identify and around—I think he was referring to data points around that. The First Nations pandemic response team taught us all a very important lesson during the pandemic: that the vast majority of Manitobans, when they're asked to identify—self-identify, they will.

* (10:40)

And the minister stood up and raised the question around companies and, you know, folks who are looking to participate in a tender process and how that would affect them. And both of those areas, what I hear is a little bit of resistance to recognizing that.

Again, my first point, the vast majority of Manitobans are totally comfortable with self-identifying, providing the data that helps governments develop policies that are more equitable and advantage communities that are disadvantaged.

And to the second point, you know, the reality of it is, if we set the standard in Manitoba by way of government that says to companies that our expectation is, in order for you to access economic opportunities, you don't discriminate against women and gender-diverse people in your workforce, most people are going to get on board with that. Most people want to do the right thing.

And there's enough research to show that equity in the workplace is actually economically advantageous, whether it's Harvard, whether it's Forbes, whether it's Sanford [*phonetic*], there is a ton of research. It is irrefutable at this point that diverse workplaces result in better economic outcomes.

This legislation encourages companies, encourages organizations, to create environments, financially, that facilitate having diverse workplaces, representative workplaces, that creates—that supports economic output for these companies. So, I mean, there are a number of things that we can talk about in terms of the positive impacts that this bill will have in Manitoba.

My hope is that, if members opposite—because on this side of the House, obviously, we're all in support of this legislation. But all other members of this House, if they're going to stand up and say that they support pay equity, if they believe that women and gender-diverse people should be paid the same for the same work, and that pay transparency is important, the easiest thing that they can do—the heavy lifting has already been done—is to support this bill today.

And then let's move forward and start tackling the other areas that need to be tackled to ensure that this isn't just performative action that we see sometimes from companies but, you know, that we're actually taking real, concrete steps as legislators to make Manitoba a more equitable economic environment so that everybody has the chance at thriving.

Thank you.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): I'm pleased to speak to this bill today. As a woman with 51 years experience in the work world, this is certainly not an unknown topic to me.

And I want to acknowledge my colleague from Riel, who has also been a very successful woman within our government, and who strives to improve the lives of all Manitobans, especially the disadvantaged and vulnerable.

But before I speak on Bill 228, I want to talk about some of the women that have entered this building, that have helped move barriers and are true pioneers here in Manitoba. Pay equality is certainly very significant, but also the quality of work really resonates.

Firstly, I think of Bonnie Mitchelson. She was the first woman chosen to lead the Progressive Conservative Party in Manitoba and only the third female party leader in the—Manitoba's history. She is the longest serving MLA in Manitoba, with 30 years of continuous service.

We also have our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), the first female Premier in Manitoba, and she is helping to lead Manitoba in tremendous ways as we speak.

On June 29th, 1920, Edith Rogers made history by becoming the first woman to be elected MLA in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. And it wasn't until 1936 when the first female MLA would be elected into the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. Her name was Elin Salome Hallderson. A fact about her that is she was the first Icelandic woman to be elected in Manitoba.

Former Progressive Conservative member Thelma Forbes was appointed the first female Speaker in the provincial Legislature in 1963.

The member of The Pas-Kameesak is the first Indigenous woman elected in this Legislature, back in 2015, and we certainly want to recognize her for still being here today.

The member for Notre Dame's (MLA Marcelino) mother, Flor Marcelino, who is a very good friend of mine for many years now, was the first visible minority woman to be elected in the Manitoba Legislature in 2007.

And, of course, in 2019, our very own member from Southdale, the first Black woman in Manitoba history.

The Clerk of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, Patricia Chaychuk, also made history in 2000 as she was the first woman to hold the position—this position—in Manitoba.

So, we have a very large number of significant women who have pushed forward and led us all to where we are today. So, what I'm trying to say here is that a woman with—the women who have helped shape Manitoba, they are women that are an important part of Manitoba, and I'm proud, too, of the history around them that has occurred within this building.

Madam Speaker, there's one more person I want to mention, one other person that entered this building that has changed lives. In fact, this person has done so much for this province that they were awarded the Queen Elizabeth jubilee—Golden Jubilee Medal.

Madam Speaker, that person is you. I want to thank you for all that you have done to serve your people and to make this province better than it was before. You have left a positive impact on this province, and I am happy to have worked along with you.

I know that you're both going—we're both going to enjoy retirement, as neither of us are seeking re-election in the fall. Watching you lead question period over the past seven years has truly been an honour, and sometimes my heart just bled for you.

Every single person in this Chamber would have to agree you've helped us navigate through some very serious issues, including a pandemic. And now we stand here in so much a different place and a different world.

And as I indicated, I have been a working woman for 51 years. First of all, as a businesswoman from the age of 18 for 33 years; municipal government for eight years, and now within this Legislature for seven.

I have more than a bit of experience as a working mom, as the member from Notre Dame indicated how difficult it is for her. Back in my day, I had one week off to have each of my four—three—four children. No, I only have three—two. Very confusing. Those years were very, very busy, as she said. I know exactly what she's talking about. I got up early in the morning, and I had to bounce a lot of balls in the air—and they didn't all stay in the air—to just try and survive in our first years as a young mom of 22 with two children.

Yes, one week off to have each of my children. And back, when I think—when I just left high school, my first job—my wage was \$2.25 an hour. So, yes, I'm old. But do you know what? I'm proud of my jobs that I had throughout the years, because I always made my own way.

In fact, my first job—my mom took me to the bank to get a \$200 loan that was to pay my first rent and living expenses, and I guess I must have repaid it. So, but also as a high school student, I went from door to door selling T&T Seeds in the spring and boxed Christmas cards in the fall, because if I wanted new school clothes, I had to earn that money. But I did, and I'm very proud of that. I loved to work then, and I love to work now.

But as a government, we are also making strides that are working for the—you know, to respect the women of this province. And one of those—I think it's the most significant is making child care more affordable so that money is coming in to households instead of going towards the child care.

We announced a 'tendary'—\$10-a-day child-care program. Under the former NDP government, child-care subsidies were going to high-income people. And in fact, back in those days when my grandchildren were in daycare et cetera, they basically ran the home daycares right out of the province because they were so unreasonable to deal with, and they all shut down. And that has certainly made a significant difference in our world.

My kids were lucky to stay at home. We paid a lady for 13 years to care for our children in our home. There was no subsidies or whatever, but we were just happy to have them well cared for. It's a different world now. But now, Manitobans, I'm proud to say, can spend only \$10 a day. And some pay—parents are paying even less.

In 2021, we invested over \$600,000 in the Manitoba Construction Sector Council to deliver a career training initiative for Indigenous women in northern and remote communities, focusing on high-demand skill areas in heavy construction.

In February 2022, we announced an agreement worth \$285,000 with the Manitoba aerospace to provide gas turbine repairing training for women.

And within my MLA position, I'm very proud to say that—I believe it was back in 2005—the first meat-cutting program came to Sandy Bay First Nation and the first tranche was 20 women. I believe they started with 22; they ended with 20. That was probably one of the most significant graduations I've ever been to in my whole life. They were so proud of their accomplishments.

* (10:50)

And there was one individual that was mentioned, and her name was Adrienne Mousseau. She was exceptional within that skill of meat-cutting, and she was very helpful to all her colleagues. She encouraged them to stay, to keep going and to get jobs afterwards. It was really significant.

Well, today, Adrienne Mousseau, in Sandy Bay First Nation, is teaching that course. And the benefit of that is the meat that they process and prepare to

learn the skill goes to the elders and other people in the community that need that meat.

So, this is very significant. And this is happening in other First Nations as well. The amount of training and opportunities for First Nations women has really extended itself in the past seven years, and I'm very proud of that in my own area.

The list goes on and on, Madam Speaker, but we also want to touch on other areas.

As I indicated, I am someone with a background in small business, along with my husband and partner of 51 years. This legislation may actually make it more difficult for small businesses to compete with larger corporations, and they may not be able to compete with that salary expectation that would be made publicly available with this bill.

And I think back to our earlier years when we had no employees and we had no pay scale at that time because we were early into the business years, and we paid groceries et cetera out of the business.

But today, I'm proud to say that within our funeral home industry, we have four employees and three of them are women. And I'm even prouder to say that one of those women is a licensed funeral director from Sandy Bay First Nation. They are paid with equality and they are respected within our businesses, and we're very proud to have three female employees out of four.

These jobs could still be attractive as they are—provide more flexibility, benefits, a pleasant company atmosphere, feeling of 'inclusivity' and proper location. But there are challenges throughout our province; there's no doubt about it.

Some of these jobs could be looked over simply because the salary of larger corporations being made public, Madam Speaker. Sometimes money talks, but money does not always provide happiness. Small businesses are the backbone of Manitoba, and I would hate to see this bill hurt them even more than the current economy and pandemic already have. We need to protect small businesses at all costs. This is where a lot of skills are learned.

One last thing, Madam Speaker, I'm going to end with today is a quote from a woman in the music industry who's broken barriers never seen before. She's a true businesswoman and has worked hard to achieve her successes as well. This woman is Taylor Swift.

Back when she was just 19 years old, she wrote an article on a 15-year-old Lawrence King who was killed by a classmate for being gay. In the article, she said, we don't need to share the same opinions as others, but we need to be respectful. And I think respect in a workplace goes quite far.

I've never heard truer words and I hope that everyone in the Chamber takes time to think about this.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I want to begin by putting on record how according to 2021 Statistics Canada overall, Canadian women between the ages of 25 and 64 earned 89 cents for every dollar earned by men. Indigenous women, racialized women and women with disabilities earned even less. Because of this reality, I believe that this bill is important.

Pay transparency legislation can only help bring about better insights to potential job applicants for existing employees. For example, it might on one scale save time and avoid applying to a job that wouldn't fit the pay scale of one's needs. But even more so, Madam Speaker, it's worth recognizing that sometimes women and minority groups might not be aware that they are being underpaid compared to men doing work of equal value.

And, in some cases, if they are aware of their pay discrepancy, they might be afraid or discouraged by the idea of launching a human rights complaint against their employer. This process can be daunting. I've had people come and meet with me in my office and express that they would like to be able to bring up certain topics with their employers, including salary, vacation time, sick leave, but they're so scared their employment may be jeopardized if they do so.

This is why protections need to be put into place to protect against employer appraisals in such cases where an injustice might have occurred.

Madam Speaker, there are a few parts of this legislation I'm still curious about. The question portion of these bills are never enough time. I'm curious about the types of costs that would be associated with it; about how many businesses in Manitoba might be subject to a pay-audit report if this legislation were to be implemented; as well as how the number of 100 or more employees was chosen in terms of businesses being required to file a pay equity report.

And I really appreciate that the member from Notre Dame said that she would be very much

open and accepting of an amendment that could be brought forward to ensure that it's not just businesses with 100 or more employees, but many businesses here in Manitoba have 25 employees, have even 10 employees and we need to make sure that everyone is being treated equally. These are all curiosities that we want to learn more about and I believe we would be able to do so at the committee stage.

Madam Speaker, I also just want to think about how this proposed legislation would work in tandem with the federal government's Pay Equity Act, which came into force in 2021. Federally, the act looks close to—looks to close the gender wage gap and ensure that all workers receive equal pay for equal value. The federal act introduces proactive pay equity for federally regulated workplaces with 10 or more employees. And this is where the provincial act might be able to go above and beyond to be on par with federal legislation.

It's also really important to recognize that since the federal legislation was enacted, that removes some of the challenges that will exist between provinces that are imposing these laws and those that are not. What I mean by this is, Prince Edward Island for example, has been required to make public pay ranges and to list expected pay in job ads. And BC has moved to legislate similar transparency measures.

Madam Speaker, just before wrapping up here, I do want to just say, it was very nice to be part of a debate this morning that, I think, also lent a branch into women supporting women here in these Chambers. And it does, it feels very good to be part of that process this morning. And I want to thank many of my colleagues who shared some very kind words about one another this morning as well.

So ultimately, Madam Speaker, we believe this is a good step in legislation. Many more details to explore. Looking forward to see what the public has to say about it at committee.

Thank you.

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I appreciate the opportunity—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —to share a few words, as we're talking about the importance of equality and especially looking at past efforts from women throughout the years who have opened doors for

today's women and the successes that we do experience today.

When we talk specifically about the pay equity, Madam Speaker, one example of pay equity that's already in force, we can look at MLAs. All MLAs' salaries are posted publicly. Equal pay for every member who is elected into this House. And I do want to point out, too, that pay equity, as an important aspect of recognizing the value that women and all people bring to the workforce, is certainly an important area that we need to encourage in the private sector, in the public sector.

But, Madam Speaker, I would say that respect in the workplace is far more paramount than any dollar amount that could come to workers. And I think that that goes across the spectrum of all genders, is that when you lack respect in a workplace, then the issues don't come down to, you know, wage gaps. That's just one extra area that you know is, you know, indicative of the inequities there.

And I do want to point out that—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: Clearly members opposite are not interested in hearing the perspectives of all women in this House. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: But I would appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts as they were given opportunities as well to share theirs. And I know that in the past, they really haven't demonstrated that respect that we're really trying to encourage. And I think one—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: Madam Speaker, I've had my own experiences in the workforce as a young woman. I was working two part-time jobs during my time in university—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I'm going to have to call the members to order. *[interjection]* I'm going to have to call the members to order.

* (11:00)

And it being 11 o'clock, when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have eight minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 8—Calling on the Provincial Government to Restore Thompson's Foot Care Clinic

Madam Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Calling on the Provincial Government to Restore Thompson's Foot Care Clinic.

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): I move, seconded by the member from Keewatinook,

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has cut millions of dollars from the Northern Regional Health Authority since taking office in 2016; and

WHEREAS these cuts have resulted in the loss of services such as Thompson's foot-care clinic, which has forced people in Thompson and surrounding communities to travel far distances for foot-care services; and

WHEREAS forcing people to travel for foot-care services can be financially burdensome and goes directly against the Provincial Government's promise to provide care closer to home; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government claimed that the closure of the Thompson foot-care clinic in 2019 would be temporary, yet it has taken no actions to restore services to date; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has shown no interest in reopening the foot-care clinic despite the fact that over 2,400 people living in Thompson and surrounding communities have asked for the clinic to reopen; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has failed to offer sufficient alternative care for seniors and people living with diabetes in northern Manitoba after the clinic's closure; and

WHEREAS lack of preventative foot-care services can result in expensive amputations that greatly impact individuals lives; and

WHEREAS cuts to Thompson's foot-care services disproportionately impact seniors and diabetics, especially those who are at lower income level; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government's cuts to foot-care and other essential health-care services are short-sighted and have resulted in increased stress and pain for northern Manitobans.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to stop cutting health-care services in northern Manitoba and restore foot-care services to Thompson.

Motion presented.

Mr. Redhead: Thompson's foot-care clinic used to provide essential preventative foot-care services to northern Manitobans. But this government closed that program in 2019, and has made no effort to reopen that clinic, despite its essential service that it provides to northerners.

Thousands of Manitobans have called on this government to restore foot-care services in the North. But it's clear this government isn't listening.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

People living with diabetes have a greater need for foot-care service and the northern regional health authority has the highest rates of diabetes in the province. And Manitoba has some of the highest rates of diabetes in Canada. Despite this great need, the PCs cut the foot-care clinic anyway.

This is just one example of the government not providing northern Manitoba with adequate support. The PC government has continually cut services for northern health care, education, infrastructure, highways and has resulted in Manitobans struggling to receive adequate or even comparable service to southern Manitoba.

Northern Manitoba deserves services which will— which respect and support communities with proper funding, staffing and programming. This means returning health-care services, funding clinics and birthing centres, offering comparable health care close to home and allowing seniors to remain in the North with necessary specialized care, such as foot-care services.

The foot-care clinic was well used until its closure in 2019. Thousands of people in Thompson and nearby communities have requested the reopening of this clinic since its closure, as it was the only viable option for foot care in the region.

Without this clinic, northern Manitobans are forced to travel to Winnipeg for care that they need. That—this sent—this discourages people from seeking preventative services that they need. This will lead to a greater number of amputations, which not only causes people more pain and difficulty, but it also causes the Province more money.

Foot care is essential service for many people living with diabetes, and proper and regular foot-care products serve—severe—sorry, proper and regular foot care protects services and cases of amputation. Diabetes is a chronic illness that affects many in the North, as well as many in remote Indigenous communities.

Many northern and remote Manitoba communities require foot care, and have been forced to find alternative foot-care services which are often as far as Winnipeg. And this can be expensive to travel down to Winnipeg to seek essential foot-care services. But not only that, travelling far from home for care can also be an isolating experience.

Seniors in the North also are disproportionately affected by the closure of foot—of the foot-care clinic as a large number of people using the foot-care services in Thompson were seniors.

Seniors have been one of the most vocal groups requesting the return of the clinic. Many seniors do not have the transportation necessary to go elsewhere in search of alternative foot-care services. The need for foot care includes a need for frequent upkeep, often with individuals in danger of losing mobility, circulation or in worst-case situations, amputation. Loss of limbs is absolutely 'prevenable'—preventable in most cases with proper maintenance and care.

Thompson also continues to fall short with reproductive health and lack of abortion services. This government has let northern families go without the same services that urban centres in the south have due to the failed policies and lack of investment in sustainable northern communities.

Without accountability on returning services to the North, this government will hope Manitobans will forget about the foot-care clinic, but they won't. However, the Manitoba NDP and the northern Manitobans won't stop fighting this government to 'retore'—restore this service.

The PC government has a track record of ignoring northern Manitobans since they took office. And the closure of the Thompson foot-care clinic is yet another example.

Outside health care, the Province has also cut funding for northern municipalities. They've downloaded responsibilities for finding outside funding for projects rather than funding these projects themselves. For example, Thompson has been without a pool since 2019 after it was closed permanently due to safety concerns.

In the three years the aquatic centre has been closed, the city has been without a public pool, meaning that they have not had regularly scheduled programming that the aquatic centre offered. The closest public pool is four hours away in The Pas.

The lack of aquatic centre for Thompson is not only a loss for the city of Thompson itself, but it also for more than 50,000 Manitobans who live and work and access nearby surrounding communities. The Thompson swim club have not been able to run a club since its closure.

And seniors' regular programming such as aquacise is not been—has not been held in Thompson. Those who wished to use the facility were forced to travel four hours away to access this facility. The federal government has committed up to \$6 million for construction of a new pool. The Province has pledged up to \$5 million, and this is a rough shortfall of \$4 million.

But the costs continue to grow from its original \$15-million facility to almost \$20 million, due to a lack of funding from this government. The city is now responsible for the remaining \$5-million shortfall.

This additional \$5-million shortfall that the city will have to make up is more than the original amount they pledged to begin with and is a significant amount for a small city like Thompson.

The constant delay in planning and construction of new aquatic centre is par for the course of this government, and lack of support for northern communities such as Thompson. They make promises consistently and consistently break them, leaving communities such as Thompson further and further behind.

The persisting issue which arises in the North is that this government does not offer enough support for northern Manitoba to run and maintain programs which all Manitobans deserve. This issue across the board, whether it is recreation or like pool, health-care infrastructure or many other areas.

* (11:10)

Municipalities shouldn't bear great financial burden or be forced to make cuts to essential programs, services or staff due to the Province's agenda. We believe Manitoba municipalities deserve strong provincial support, excel and provide great services to their citizens.

Municipalities should have long-term, predictable funding. Because of the Province freezing grants in municipalities for seven years, communities like

Thompson are already losing even more ground in the time that they're taking trying to build sustainable facilities and programs.

The Conservatives keep—the Conservatives kept operating grants in municipalities frozen since 2016. At this time, the Province continues to increase demands on Manitoba municipalities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period of up to 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.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Well, good morning, and good morning to all the members joining us virtually. I would like to ask the member, is he aware of the current medical process in place for medically indicated foot-care service in northern Manitoba?

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): My apologies, can I ask the member to repeat the question please?

Mr. Schuler: To the member, I would like to ask him, is he aware of the current medical processes in place for medically indicated foot-care service in northern Manitoba?

Mr. Redhead: I appreciate the question. You know, as we know, there are medically necessary foot-care treatments currently offered, but what this PMR is requesting is the return of preventative foot-care services that was previously offered in Thompson for well over two decades, until the program was cut in 2019. So—by this government.

So, what this PMR is doing is requesting a return of that service.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I'm wondering if the MLA from Thompson can explain a little bit more about the other essential health-care services that the PCs have cut in northern Manitoba.

Mr. Redhead: I thank the member for the question. You know, we know that health care in the North is suffering under this government. You know, when

I worked in health care, the Thompson lab had a staff of 14 running diagnostics and blood work and all these other essential programs to—for health care.

Right now, that department is operating with three lab techs. And so we know that, under this government we've seen cuts after cuts after cuts when it comes to essential health care in northern Manitoba. So yes, that's, you know, just another example of this government's lack of respect for health care in the North.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I would ask the member for Thompson, because he raises an important issue here, do you know approximately how many people with diabetes are in the Thompson and Thompson area, and how many of these people with diabetes would have foot problems?

Mr. Redhead: I thank my colleague for the question. You know, I don't have the exact numbers, but what I do know is that Thompson and the region has the highest rate of diabetes in the province. And so, we know a service like a preventative foot-care service can provide essential care and save the government money when it comes down to amputations.

We know that the cost of a toe amputation is roughly \$14,000, where a foot-care visit is 50 bucks. It just makes sense to restore this service for diabetics and seniors.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I thank the member for bringing resolutions forward. I will always be proud to stand in the House and ask questions or talk on health-care issues.

It's important that, as we do with every bill, we provide some type of constellation—consultation with area residents. And I'm wondering if the member from Thompson can explain who he had consulted before bringing this forward?

Mr. Redhead: I thank my colleague for the question. You know, there is a petition currently before the House with over 2,400 signatures from constituents in Thompson. Not only that, but you know, the Thompson seniors society has been a strong advocate for the return of this program. And we've met with the Health Minister and the Minister of Seniors regarding preventative foot care.

So, when it comes down to listening to my constituents, that's exactly what I'm doing. And that's why I'm bringing this resolution forward.

Ms. Naylor: In addition to the 2,400 signatures on the petition that has been read into this House many,

many times, has the member also talked with other folks in his community about health-care services that they're requiring and aren't receiving in the North?

Mr. Redhead: Thank you for that question. You know, my office continues to get emails, calls on a daily basis because of this government's cuts to services. We know that when we're talking about nurse vacancy rates at Thompson General Hospital, we're looking at about a 40 per cent vacancy rate when it comes to nursing services.

You know, and when it comes to services like access to abortion, access to foot-care services, access to lab techs, you know, it's—my office continues to get these types of frustrating requests and—asking to advocate for better services. So, there's a number of issues that we still have to fight for—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Currently, basic foot care, like filing of nails, cleaning, moisturizing skin can be provided by the health-care team for patients in the hospital and residents in long-term care or clients in the home care as part of the overall bathing and grooming care they receive at no cost to the patient.

Is the member for Thompson (Mr. Redhead) aware of these services provided?

Mr. Redhead: You know, when we're talking about foot-care services, I've had members or constituents come to me and say they've requested exactly what the member has asked: you know, basic nail filing, basic grooming.

But when you're a diabetic, that is actually not allowed. They're actually not allowed to touch any of your foot surrounding area because of the risk of infection. Only a certified nurse who has taken the proper training is allowed to do that because of the risk of infection.

And so, the member's question, I mean, it's—I can't say—no—it's not necessarily provided to all of them in northern Manitoba, and so—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Naylor: Thank you to the member for Thompson for explaining the difference between the type of health care that is and isn't offered.

I know from my own mother who was never hospitalized, but lived in her own home until she died in her mid-90s, she required foot-care services to

prevent amputation as she aged because of diabetes. So, she was fortunate to live somewhere where that was funded.

But what I'm hearing, if you could just repeat it again, this is not offered to anyone who isn't already receiving health-care services and is just in their homes. Is that correct?

* (11:20)

Mr. Redhead: I thank the colleague for my question.

That is correct. But not only in their homes, but actually, like I said earlier, actually in hospital. So, members who are diabetic in hospital requesting basic foot care, it is not provided to them. They're not able to access that because of the lack of this service. It's not being provided.

And like I said, someone with diabetes who requires basic—even a nail trimming, is not able to access that because of the—there's no trained nurse specific when it comes to foot care.

And so, it's important to have these services in place for all of Manitobans, not just in the south here. You know, it's a basic service that's offered in Winnipeg. There's—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Schuler: Can the member opposite tell the House whether or not the residents of Thompson are currently being provided with medically indicated foot-care service under the N-R-H-A?

Mr. Redhead: I've been told by the CEO of the N-R-H-A that medical necessary foot care is being provided. My constituents, on the other hand, say otherwise. I can't say first-hand, I haven't visited the— a member, like, requesting this in hospital.

I haven't seen any medical foot care being provided in hospital. My constituents say otherwise, so based on that, I will say no.

Ms. Naylor: I'd like to ask the member for Thompson why he thinks that the Province does not want to save money, reduce pain and stress for northern Manitobans by restoring Thompson's foot-care services?

Mr. Redhead: I thank the member for the question. I think it's pretty obvious that this government just does not care for northern Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

The honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor). It is supposed to be, actually, a member from another party. I didn't see anybody stand.

But I do see the member for Springfield-Ritchot standing, so I'll recognize that member first, according to the rules prescribed by and for this House.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Having had the misfortune of living under an NDP government and knowing the disastrous outcome of those years—in fact, people of Manitoba turned on that particular government in a substantive way.

I would point out that surviving the ensuing elections—our one member, that's the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe)—and he is the only individual that is surviving from that government, but he knows how disastrous the NDP were and the disastrous effects they had on our health-care system, where you actually had a better chance of flying to Toronto, getting care and flying home—you would be seen faster than sitting in one of the hospitals here in the city of Winnipeg.

There were all kinds of reports, there were all kinds of studies and statistics that came out that showed not just were we amongst the worst in the country, we were amongst some of the worst in North America; our wait times and the wait for any kind of diagnostic services.

And as has been pointed out by our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), that was in the good days. That was before we faced a pandemic. The NDP mismanaged a health-care system and broke it, basically. They broke a system. Wonderful hospitals that have a great, proud tradition were ranked amongst the worst in North America.

And that is the legacy of an NDP government. So, now we have a NDP member trying to make things look like we weren't the inheritors of an incredibly broken system, and then soon after we got elected went into a pandemic, pandemic which was worldwide and had very serious ramifications on the nursing, the medical profession, doctors and all the individuals that support our hospital and our medical system.

It was very trying, it was burdensome, it was hard on those individuals. Many of them decided to retire and get out of the medical profession. I know for a fact, many in my community and my circle of friends

who had thought that they would still put in a few extra years decided that they'd had enough and decided to retire. And that is a worldwide phenomenon.

So, our government stood up to those challenges. We took them on. They were difficult days, and to the ministers of Health up to and including the current Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon), who is doing a fantastic job, contrary to the negativity and the misinformation and the non-facts—and I'm choosing my words carefully. I don't know if the House has noticed; there are certain words we're not allowed to use in here.

So, all of the non-facts that are being used during question period and in speeches in this Legislature—and I would point out to members opposite that they are paying the price. People are seeing through that. And they are starting to recognize that they have, in our government, a government that faced some of the most trying times of our modern civilization.

I'd like to point out there is actually no living elected official from the last pandemic alive today. So, we actually went into this one, and again, the medical system has changed a lot in 80 years. So, we were faced with completely new challenges, and we faced them head on.

Was it tough? Was it difficult? Yes. But in that time, our government decided that we would fund the health-care system to unparalleled amounts never seen before. Surprisingly enough, the same individuals that day in, day out, talk about more money and needing more money, and needing more this and needing more that, are exactly the same individuals, and I look over their benches, each and every one of them, every year, voted against the budget that gave more money and more supports to a health-care system.

Each and every one of them, starting with the Leader of the Opposition, right back all the way to the member who is putting forward to this resolution, they are all the same individuals who talk about needing more money in a health-care system, and then more money is put into a health-care system, and then they get up and vote against the very thing that they asked for.

So, just so that members opposite understand what they do. They get up day in, day out and demand more money for health care, and then more money is put into health care, unheard of, unparalleled before in the history of this province, the kind of supports that

our government has put in. Never before seen in the history of this province.

And those very same individuals who get up every day and ask for more money, vote against it. So, they get what they ask for—so then, the only option they have is to vote against it.

What did they vote against? Let's have a look: \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at the University College of the North. That was put in the budget, that is being put forward, that is something that is necessary for the North. The very same individuals who get up and talk about we need more for the North, and when it's put there, the first thing they do is they get up and they vote against it.

Have you ever seen something so chaotic on the opposition benches, that you give them what they're asking for, and they vote against it?

Well, let's see. What else did they vote against? Our government committed \$812 million, the largest single health-care commitment in Manitoba's history to improve rural and northern health care, and here's a test for the Chamber: Who got up and voted against 812 million more dollars for a health-care system?

Some Honourable Members: The NDP.

Mr. Schuler: The NDP. Interestingly enough, on the government side they got it right. On the opposition side, all of a sudden, it's silent. And they should be silent because they should be ashamed of their record. They get up and they ask for more, they get more and they vote against it. No wonder they failed that test.

* (11:30)

A significant portion of the \$812 million is being used in the creation of a new intermediate health-care hub in northern Manitoba. And the very member who gets up with a resolution asking for more money, asking for more services, voted against it. He voted—so what's interesting is he first voted against what he was going to ask for. He's voting—he voted against the money and what he was going to ask for. He voted against it and then gets up and asks for it.

So, I guess it's kind of like that saying, I was for it before I voted against it. I think I have that right. So, this is how members opposite in the NDP operate. They get what they want. They vote against it; then they put resolutions in front of the House asking for what they voted against.

That's how they operate. And then you wonder why we had a system when they were in government

that was the worst in North America. Because these are the same people that get what they're going to ask for and vote against and then ask for it, although they voted against it. These are the same individuals. It is the same philosophy. It is the same group that ran a health-care system into the ground.

So, I would point out to colleagues opposite—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler: —that they vote for the budget—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler: —vote for the very money; they vote for the programs that they're asking for. They should vote for our budget and pass it along and actually appreciate the men and women who are providing these services on a daily basis, and they do it with unbelievable professionalism and integrity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): You know, it's—we hear so many interesting things coming from this member. And the fortunate thing is that despite being treated like they're absolutely stupid, northern Manitobaners—Manitobans are not stupid and they know what their actual experiences are and what services they have. And somebody sitting down here on Broadway can't tell them differently.

Thompson's foot-care clinic used to provide essential preventative foot-care services to northern Manitobans. The PC government closed the Thompson foot-care clinic in 2019 and has not made any effort to reopen the clinic despite the essential services it offered to the North. And thousands of Manitobans have called on the PC government to restore foot-care services to the North. But it's clear the PC government is not listening.

People living with diabetes have a greater need for foot-care services, and the Northern Health Region has the highest rates of diabetes in Manitoba. And this is just one example of the PC government not providing northern Manitoba with adequate support.

The PC government has continually cut essential services for northern health care, education, infrastructure and highways, which has resulted in Manitobans struggling to receive adequate or even comparable service to southern Manitoba.

Northern Manitoba deserves a government which will respect and support communities with proper

funding, staffing and programming. This means returning health-care services, funding clinics, birthing centres, making sure that northern Manitobans have adequate access to sexual assault services and to abortion services, offering comparable health care closer to home and allowing seniors to remain in the North with necessary specialized care such as foot-care services.

This government also froze municipal funding for seven years. We know that, you know, municipalities need long-term, predictable funding, but because of the province 'freezing' grants—freezing grants to municipalities for seven years, communities like Thompson are already losing even more ground in a time that they're trying to build sustainable facilities and programming.

The Conservatives kept operating grants from municipalities frozen since 2016 and the Province continues to increase demands on Manitoba municipalities. The PC government cut infrastructure by hundreds of millions of dollars, and over four years their government left \$1 billion of budgeted infrastructure unspent.

The provincial government's continued cuts to northern communities does not stop at municipal funding, however. With ongoing fire crises in the North, municipal fire services have also been dealing with woeful underfunding from the Province and a complete lack of support in the face of increased need for emergency services.

As for this important PMR brought forward by my wonderful colleague from Thompson, we know that the foot-care clinic was a well-used clinic until its closure in 2019. While the closure took place under Brian Pallister as premier, but this government, under the new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), has sustained this closure through the past several years. And thousands of people in Thompson and nearby communities have requested the opening of this clinic since it was closed, as it was the only viable option for preventative foot care in the area.

Foot care is an essential service for many people living with diabetes as proper and regular foot care protects severe cases from facing likely amputation. Diabetes is a chronic illness that disproportionately affects many in the North, as well as many in remote Indigenous communities.

And many northern and remote Manitobans that require foot-care treatment have been forced to find alternative services, which are often as far away as

Winnipeg. This can be expensive, even if travel is covered, as people are forced to forgo wages in order to travel down to Winnipeg. And travelling far from home for foot care can also be an isolating experience.

Seniors in the North were also disproportionately affected by the closure of the foot-care clinic as a large number of people using foot-care services in Thompson were seniors. Seniors have been one of the most vocal groups requesting the return of the clinic. And many seniors do not have transportation necessary to go elsewhere in search of alternate foot-care services.

The need for foot care includes a need for frequent upkeep, often with individuals in danger of losing mobility, circulation or in the worst cases, chance of amputation. According to Diabetes Canada, adults with diabetes are about 20 times more likely to have a lower limb amputated than any other Canadians. And 85 per cent of those procedures are preceded by a foot ulcer, which can become infected and heal—and sorry, and lead to amputations.

But this loss of limbs is absolutely preventable, in most cases, with proper maintenance and care. Amputations are also expensive operations that cost the government significantly more than preventative services would cause. But it's not a surprise that this government can't be bothered with the prevention of diabetes. They also are not willing to provide preventative services that can prevent overdoses. I don't think prevention is in their vocabulary.

This government is incapable of planning ahead or putting the priorities of the most vulnerable people first. The closure of the Thompson foot 'care'—foot-care clinic makes no sense. It puts northerners at risk and it will cost the government more money in the long run.

Beyond being nonsensical and poor planning, it is dangerously negligent of the province to have not returned foot-care services to Thompson. Almost six months ago—six months, Mr. Deputy Premier—Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Premier visited Thompson and told CBC News that she was aware of this issue. According to CBC, she said, we're going to look into the matter and make sure that we can deliver those services to those who need it.

That's what the Premier of this province told CBC News in Thompson six months ago. Yet here we are. No sense of urgency from this Premier. It's great she was able to find Thompson on a map and gave some media interviews while she was there during

an election year, but the people of Thompson, of northern—all northern Manitobans need her to deliver on health-care services for northerners now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, MLA Danielle Adams, the previous NDP MLA for Thompson before her sudden and tragic death, called on the government to restore health-care services. The current MLA for Thompson continues to call on the government to do the right thing. If this Premier has the power, if she has the power to prevent the amputation of toes, feet or legs in Manitobans, why wouldn't she?

* (11:40)

Even Diabetes Canada called on the Province to implement health policies that support and prevent and manage diabetes foot complications and reduce the risk of lower limb amputations.

Unfortunately, health-care cuts such as the closure of the Thompson foot-care clinic, is nothing new for northern Manitobans under this PC government. Northern Manitobans need more support in health care, whether it is the need for more workers, programs, services or centres.

In the northern region's own words, obstetrical service in Thompson is in a very fragile state; gynecological wait-list in Thompson remains a concern; endoscopies have fallen dramatically at Thompson General Hospital. During the pandemic, when the PCs should have been shoring up long-term care, they chose to cut it, including \$586,000 cut from the northern regions.

Plans for a \$5.3-million primary clinic in The Pas, and a \$9-million northern consultation clinic in Thompson were cancelled by this government in 2017.

The PCs' failures in northern health care run deep. Patients were without hot water in the Thompson hospital for months. This reduced patients' quality of life; were given sponges to clean themselves instead of being able to take a shower.

Conservatives cut our health system right before a pandemic. The government should be held accountable for undermining our hospitals right before the virus struck. The PCs closed Thompson's brain injury unit during the pandemic due to a supposed temporary relocation of space and resources. However, the building remains empty ever since, with no scheduled return of services.

Thompson also continues to fall short in reproductive health care due to a lack of access for abortion care. As my colleague from Thompson has said, the

Manitoban NDP and northern Manitobans won't stop fighting for the PCs to stop their cuts and restore services.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I honestly wish we had a little bit more time for questions of the member of this bill—or this resolution, pardon me. Because I do have a couple.

But before I get into that part of it, there was one thing that the member mentioned in one of his answers that really 'trigued' some interest in me. And the reason I ask the question of who he consulted—and I appreciate his honesty, that he really didn't consult with anybody. He did have 2,400 people sign a petition. He did have seniors' advocates support what he's doing, and I can appreciate that.

But I'm really surprised that he did not take the opportunity to reach out to the northern regional health authority and verify—he may have misspoke, I can certainly understand that, and I appreciate that if that's the case.

Because I, again, as I've mentioned many times in this House, I've—was involved in health care for 21 years, and I know Helga Bryant, who was the CEO of the northern regional health authority. I worked with her personally. She's a great individual, would have been more than happy to sit down and talk to anybody in the community.

And I'm looking at the member and he's shaking his head, so I'm sure he knows who Helga is. And he maybe even took the opportunity to have a conversation with her. But she was—she's a dynamic lady who had a dynamic team.

Now she's retired, and maybe the member took the opportunity to talk to Raj Sewda, who is the new CEO of the northern regional health authority. And again, I'm not sure, so that's why I asked, you know, if it would have been nice if we could have gone back and just asked a few more questions, just to get that clarity.

So, maybe I'll have the opportunity for the member afterwards to even give me a call or meet with me and just kind of update me on the conversation that he did have with the northern regional health authority, if that is the case.

The other question that I wanted to ask—and I unfortunately didn't get the opportunity because sometimes 10 minutes for questions just isn't enough time because we all have questions that we need to

ask, because it gives us the ability to better respond and understand any bills or resolutions that come to the floor.

And I am curious, though, if the member could have told us—maybe he wants to write me an email afterwards and let me know or catch me in the hallway or something like that—or I'll come over or you come over.

But I would like to know who hires nurses in Thompson. I would like to know who hires nurses in the northern regional health authority, because there seems to be a missed—miscommunication out there on who actually hires nurses in this province.

I know for a—in Prairie Mountain Health, where I worked, I know Prairie Mountain Health hired some nurses, but the Brandon Regional Health Centre hired some nurses. The Dauphin Regional Health Centre—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Isleifson: —hired some nurses. So, I'm just curious of who the member thinks hires nurses in our province.

Nurses—and the member opposite says, and he's blaming nurses or something like that—I don't quite hear them when they chirp because it's my turn to speak—but nurses do an amazing job. They do an absolutely amazing job for us in our province. And I take—my hat's off; I give them tons of respect for nurses and they do an incredible job.

And, you know, we always come back for some reason and say, you know, they're heroes through the pandemic. Well, yes, they were, but they're heroes every single day that they go to work and they help someone feel better.

They help someone live that extra hour, that extra two hours, that extra whatever. They help people recuperate and get back home to enjoy our lives. So, I respect them immensely, along with all health-care workers.

When we talk about health-care workers—and we hear it a lot from the opposition about health-care workers—we get a look—it's just all front-line workers. All front-line workers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Health-care workers could not perform in the OR if it was not for housekeepers.

They could not perform any surgeries, any type of bedside work if it was not for those working in laundry services. They could not do anything if it was

not for those working in dietary services. Every single member that works in health care has my utmost respect for the work they do.

I had the distinct privilege of being the director of environmental services for laundry and housekeeping for a year while the director was on maternity leave. And believe me, I really learned to understand what they do and respect the work that they do on a regular and ongoing basis.

And sometimes it's really hard to sit and be quiet when opposition talks about—you know, when they kind of degrade the health-care system. There's some amazing angels out there, and I definitely respect them all.

I know there was some talk about diabetes and issues with diabetes. And I've never said this in the House, but I will today, that I am a type 2 diabetic. I understand what it's like. I have a cousin who is a type 1 diabetic. I have a friend who is a type 2 diabetic that relies on insulin and pumps.

And, believe me, I understand what they go through. I also understand the importance of this budget that we put forward that increases funding for those suffering from diabetes. And, again, it's appalling that the NDP would bring a bill forward condemning our government, when in fact they're the ones who are voting against providing supports for those in our province who are dealing with diabetes.

I looked at the resolution itself, and the first line in the resolution comes out with a myth about cuts in health care. I just went back—it said, right from 2016—and I went back, 2015 to 2016—the difference between the NDP budget in '15-16 and the Conservative budget in '16-17 was a 5.9 per cent increase.

So, I'm not sure—and I know the member struggles a little bit, especially when you look at the overall amount of money invested in this year's budget in health care alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know, and it's not just in health care. I mean, our government has invested, you know, \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at the University College of the North.

* (11:50)

So, to sit back and say that—and I heard a number of times, even this morning, where they say we don't respect those in the North. That's terrible. My—terrible, but true, they say.

So, I would challenge that member who said that—I don't know who it was because I didn't look over

there. I spent many, many years up north. My grandmother lived in The Pas. My cousins still live in The Pas. I still go up and see them on a regular basis. And you'd better believe it, I give a darn toot about people in the North. You know, and I would say more words if I could, but I'm trying to be politically correct in the House here by saying what we can.

But it is disappointing that when we invest an \$812-million single health-care commitment to Manitoba's history to improve rural and northern health care that this opposition refuses to support the people that benefit the most from these investments. And it's not just health care, it goes and on and on and on. But I will certainly stick to health care because that's what we're here for today.

And if we look at nursing shortages, the opposition—I'm not sure if they just get up in the morning and say, well, what's in the newspaper today? What can we build up today? But they need to kind of broaden their perspective and look outside of Winnipeg. They need to look outside of Manitoba, maybe even look outside of Canada and see what the world itself is going through, and especially North America, when it comes to human resources in health care.

I had the distinct pleasure—and I know some members in the opposite side of the House as well—we're in—down in—I think it was Kansas—down in Wichita, Kansas last year. I sat on the health-care forum. I believe I was the only one on the health-care forum from Manitoba and they talked about the challenges of health-care shortages throughout North America. So, it's definitely not something that's unique to Manitoba. It's not the fault of any individual government throughout North America.

Maybe, however though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if back in those 17 years when the NDP were in power, if they did a little bit of planning so that they knew people were going to be retiring and moving on and changing things, we might not have been in such a poor spot as we are now.

But the investments we're making—and a good example is the \$200-million investment in the health and human resources action plan to recruit health-care workers. It's a great opportunity to really push forward.

And again, I just do not understand how day after day, this opposition can rise in this House, demand more, demand more, demand more and yet, when we provide more, they vote against it. It just does not

make sense. It's—I struggle to understand the opposition's ideal about how you improve something without investing. I guess they just want to tax more.

House Business

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business. Pursuant to rule 34(8) I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway). The title of the resolution is condemning the provincial government for breaking its provinces—promises to seniors on personal-care-home beds.

Sounds good. It's a good one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Opposition House Leader that pursuant to rule 34(8) the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private member's business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Elmwood. The title of the resolution is Condemning the Provincial Government for Breaking Its Promises to Seniors on Personal Care Home Beds.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We will now resume debate on the resolution before us this hour.

Are there any further speakers?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The decision by the Conservative government not to support the foot-care clinic in Thompson is shameful. It is incomprehensible when one looks at the health-care system as a whole. The government clearly doesn't understand the role of prevention and the critical importance of preventive health measures to keep people healthy.

In referring to international conditions, as the former MLA has done, I will do as well. In the United Kingdom, they estimate that 1 per cent—or just under 1 per cent of their health budget is related to diabetic foot care and ulcers, amputations, hospitalizations, ICU care. And in Manitoba, we have a higher proportion of people with diabetes than in the United Kingdom. So, our proportion is probably higher.

Now, 1 per cent of Manitobans' health-care budget is \$70 million a year. And if we prevent problems with diabetic feet, then we have the potential to save \$70 million a year—not small.

But also, think about it. If you're putting people in diabetic foot-care prevention in Thompson, you will

decrease the need for health-care professionals in the acute care.

Right now, we have emergency rooms which are full in Winnipeg. We have hospitals which are full. We have increasing budgets for transportation for people to Winnipeg.

Why is this happening? Part of the reason it is because the Conservatives have not understood that it's really important to prevent problems before they come more severe.

With a health-care system, you need to balance what you're doing in terms of prevention and acute care. And if you don't look after 'prevenchive' care, then you're never going to be able to afford or sustain your acute-care system. And this is a sad example of how preventive care is being neglected in Thompson.

Now, with diabetes, the problem is this: that if you're not looking after the feet properly, you are more likely to have a diabetic ulcer. If you have a diabetic ulcer, you're more likely to have an infection. If you have a diabetic ulcer, you're more likely to have an amputation.

We can prevent a lot of health-care problems. We can improve the situation for emergency rooms for hospitals and for transportation costs if we do much better in prevention. We should indeed be preventing diabetes in the first place and doing that much better, but that's not happened under either the NDP or the Conservatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will sit down now so we can have a vote.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I just want to echo a few words my fellow colleagues put on. And I know the member from Thompson, you know, is passionate and wants to see, you know, the best for his community. And by that, he can help support this government by voting for some of the things that we have brought forth.

I mean, when we look at the insulin pumps, and I've heard so many times today about diabetes and, you know, the impacts on foot care, et cetera. And they refuse to support government on those needs that we have. They—you know, the 9.2 per cent increase—and the members are heckling because they don't want to hear the truth. Their life is about putting fiction—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wowchuk: —and it's very difficult—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wowchuk: —when you try to share the facts—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wowchuk: —and they can laugh all they want about the importance of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hour being 12 noon, this House—when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Swan River will have nine minutes remaining.

When this matter—or, the hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m. today.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 6, 2023

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