

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

Vol. LXXVI No. 44A - 10 a.m., Thursday, April 28, 2022

ISSN 0542-5492

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 28, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come—*[interjection]*—Apologies. Thanks.

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, Anishininkewuk *[phonetic]*, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehenthowuk *[phonetic]* nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated.

The honourable Opposition House Leader—*[interjection]*—Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, Deputy Speaker, pursuant to rule 33(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 St. Vital (Mr. Moses). The title of the resolution is

Calling on the Provincial Government to Develop Better Policies to Protect Youth in Sports.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Opposition House Leader, pursuant to rule 33(8), 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 St. Vital. The title of the resolution is Calling on the Provincial Government to Develop Better Policies to Protect Youth in Sports.

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Ms. Fontaine: Deputy Speaker, would you please call Bill 234, The Drug-Related Death Bereavement Day Act, for second reading debate this morning.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 234—The Drug-Related Death Bereavement Day Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We will now call for second reading in debate Bill 234, The Drug-Related Death Bereavement Day Act.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I move, seconded by the member from The Pas-Kameesak, that Bill 234, The Drug-Related Death Bereavement Day Act, now be read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Smith: 'Gerds' me great honour to bring this bill forward in honour of families who have lost loved ones here in this province due to drug use. This bill isn't being brought forward specifically by—I'm the voice of it—but it's being brought forward by families that have attended here in the gallery, folks like Moms Stop the Harm, Overdose Awareness Manitoba and, unfortunately, a new mom that has had to join this group, Arlene—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. If I could just ask the clerks to get the clock going. I believe that's—no problem, just a technical error. Sorry about that.

Mrs. Smith: So, a new mom that has recently joined this group, unfortunately, Arlene, who recently lost her son—these families need places to grieve. They need a day to mourn.

Often, you know, Mother's Day is a day that families reflect on loved ones that they've lost. These should be days where moms are celebrated. Father's Day's another day where, you know, fathers should be celebrated.

Again, you know, they're grieving the loss of their loved ones, and many others: caregivers, aunties, friends, you know, cousins, those that were—that loved these people. And this day would do exactly that. It's a non-partisan bill. It's being brought forward, you know, in reconciliation, really. It's about the mental health of families and helping them to, you know, grieve on that day, to come together, to support one another.

We have a monument at The Forks that, under our government, was erected, and, you know, families go there daily to go and mourn their loved ones. This is similar to that. It would give people, families, friends, those that even aren't directly affected that want to support—that, you know, want to help families who are struggling. Because I know a lot of families that reach out to me every day that are struggling to get their loved ones the support that they need. People themselves are, you know, reaching out.

And I know that there's an inquest right now for Lee Earnshaw, and we'll, you know, certainly hopefully see some action come out of that and more resources allocated so that we're not having more family members that have to go through this. We had 407 deaths last year. Again, that had to come from a family member.

We have another bill before this House, Bill 217, that, you know, really lets the community know that there are bad drugs out there. And these are the drugs. And it puts, you know, some responsibility on this government, which this government is responsible for. They are responsible for letting the public know that there are people dying in our province, how many people and what is the drug that they're overdosing on.

I talked into—talked in this House about my brother-in-law passing away in November last year. There was a bad drug that was called down. It was the Winnipeg police who actually released that information. And people were able to make informed decisions and the police were telling them, don't use by yourself, make sure you have a naloxone kit, make sure you're close to somewhere if you do overdose that you could get some help.

* (10:10)

Unfortunately, 407 people died, and the year before that it was 387, Deputy Speaker. These are people's loved ones; these aren't just numbers and, you know, over the course of four years, 1,200 lost loved ones due to drug use in this province.

And these aren't just folks that are overdosing. These are folks that have lost hope, and families have told me that their loved ones have committed suicide because they couldn't get into the services that they needed. So, these families need to be honoured. Our Province, you know, has a responsibility. And we can do that today.

And, you know, I'm, you know, asking that we get unanimous support in this House for this bill. It's a non-partisan bill. It's just a day that recognizes and gives official recognition, because these families have been doing this for years now.

And, you know, we need to help educate the public about this through our Legislature when we honour that day, but also to reduce the stigma because there's so much stigma that surrounds this issue. And, you know, even talking with Arlene before we came into the Chamber, she didn't talk about, you know, the use of—her son's drug use because, you know, people judged her: Why weren't you doing something as a mother? And that's what happens; people are shamed. They're blamed, and that shouldn't be happening.

This bill will help reduce that stigma. It'll help educate folks. It'll help folks know that there is actually something happening and that they are welcome to come and wrap themselves around these families and, you know, community members and friends. And, you know, this is—this isn't something that should be a growing community and, unfortunately, you know, it continues to grow in this province. And this government can do something about it today, so.

I know I've talked to the minister yesterday; her and I sat down and had a discussion about, you know, this bill. And, you know, I hope that they were able to convince the other side that, you know, this is the right thing to do around reconciliation. A lot of these folks are Indigenous or have Indigenous friends or, you know—and it's corner to corner to corner of this province. There isn't a single person that hasn't been touched either by drug addiction or someone who's been lost to drug addiction.

We have kids in the school that are struggling. You know, this would help educate them as well. And, you know, we have the power. That's what we were

elected here to do, is to bring that voice of the people here and to help educate those in the community.

So, I want to, you know, say *miigwech* to the families and, you know, the organizations that have joined us today. And, you know, I also want to give a shout-out to Jonny, as well, for the work that they do because it's super important, you know—the reports that they've done and the extensive front-line service that they've, you know, offered to folks and kept folks alive. And, you know, the harm reduction approach that they take is something that I wholeheartedly believe in, and that is the direction that we need to be going. So, *miigwech* and sending all of you lots of love, and this is in honour of your loved ones.

Miigwech.

Questions

Mr. Deputy 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.

Mrs. Cathy Cox (Kildonan-River East): I'd like to thank the member from Point Douglas for bringing this forward. My heart is full as I listen to you and as I see the family members up in the gallery. Thank you.

I'd just like to ask you the significance of establishing the Sunday before Mother's Day as the drug-related death bereavement day, why that day?

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I thank the member for that question.

So, this day was a request from the families that have been meeting the Sunday before for the last many years. It was a day that they identified because a lot of, you know, families on Mother's Day, like I said, you know, are grieving and it's a time to be celebrated as a mom and for, you know, families to come together. So they wanted a place to put that before that day happens.

And then I've also spoken to fathers as well who would love to have that day and recognize that day and, you know, have their Father's Day to celebrate with their loved ones. And we know that there's many other holidays that, you know, there's that empty spot at that table and this would just give people a place to, you know, mourn their loved ones, to grieve and really

come together and support one another and have the community wrap themselves around them as well.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I want to thank my colleague, the member for Point Douglas, for bringing forward this very important bill. It's one that I know this member has been working tirelessly for since she was elected, and being the voice of families, being—ensuring that when we come to this Chamber that we're lifting these families so that they know they're supported here in this Chamber.

And I want to ask the member, respectfully, how will this bill help Manitoba families grieving the loss of their loved one?

Mrs. Smith: I thank my colleague for that question, and I know that my colleague has, you know, really been supportive of the folks in his community that have lost loved ones and have been—has gone to events. And this event—this—or, not event, but gathering specifically would be about supporting the families, about recognizing—as legislators, as a Province—their grief, their pain, and really educating community about it.

And I think that's super important about, you know, community knowing that there is a day that people are gathering. There is a space that people are gathering, that they're not alone—

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

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for Point Douglas for bringing this forward and really just commend her on all the hard work that she has put into bringing issues such as addictions and overdose into the Manitoba Legislature. And also the vulnerability that she has shared, as I believe it's touched all of us MLAs here in this House and it's really gone a long way.

I'm wondering if the member can share with the House how we, as legislators, could work towards furthering—removing the stigma around drug abuse?

Mrs. Smith: I've spoken in this House several times about safe consumption sites. I've, you know, gone to other provinces and listened and, you know, spoke with people who were not only using, but were working the front lines, and families who've lost loved ones that have now, you know, taken up working in these spaces to help save lives. And, you know, safe consumption sites is certainly one way that we could, you know, educate but also remove the stigma and give people a chance to live.

In any of these consumption sites right across Canada, there has never been anyone that's lost their life to overdose. People are connected to services—

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

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I do thank the member for bringing this resolution forward, and I want to acknowledge the families and parents with us in the gallery today.

I'd like to ask the member if she can share how Manitobans could meaningfully engage on this special day?

Mrs. Smith: So this would be a recognized day. We would recognize it in the House here. We would announce where the gathering is going to be. Folks could come out and support the families on this day. And it's super important to have, you know, community come together and to, you know, really let these families know that they're loved, that what happened to their loved one needs to stop and that they're there to stand with them in supporting them, in stopping the overdoses in Manitoba.

And, you know, like I said, safe consumption sites is one way, but also recognizing to educate and to reduce the stigma that so many people are facing around using—substance uses.

* (10:20)

Mr. Altomare: I do know that we're, as a province, on a journey of reconciliation. We know that there are important steps that we can take to ensure that, when we say we're going to do things, we actually put actions behind what we're saying. Families need to hear that; they also need to see this action.

So, I would like to ask the member from Point Douglas, talk to us a little bit about how important this is for our journey of reconciliation in our province?

Mrs. Smith: So, when speaking with families, families have told me that—like, I shared Arlene's story—there's lots of stigma around this, lots of judgment. Families feel like they have to suffer in silence, and many people who are using feel like they have to suffer in silence.

Many of, you know, our homeless community are suffering in silence, and they need to know that we support them, that there are supports out there, and that we as a government can move towards reconciling some of the past, you know, trauma that's been inflicted on them, especially around residential

school, '60s scoop, you know, children in CFS. Many of these kids are—end up in these systems, and, you know, this is one day just to—

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

Mrs. Cox: Miigwech, again, to the member from Point Douglas for bringing this forward.

I would just like to ask you if there's any other provinces or jurisdictions across Canada that have a bill like this or a day of remembrance.

Mrs. Smith: So May 1st is a national day that they recognize, but this would be specific to our province. So, you know, families have come and really—it was actually last year in June that it was approached by Overdose Awareness Manitoba, and they had invited me out to their gathering.

And I haven't really looked across jurisdictions, to be honest, because I'm just really focused on supporting the families here and making sure, as a Province, that we're supporting those families and making sure that we're reducing the stigma and giving them a place to put their grief. And, as well as, you know, making sure that community is coming out to support them and letting them know that they don't have to suffer in silence, that there are people that care and that we are going to do what we can as legislatures—

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

Mr. Altomare: All of us here are elected to ensure that we bring forth bills that look after the welfare of our citizens. That is in the prayer that begins our sessions here every time we come to this House, and it is important that, as members, we become a unit in ensuring that we are looking after the welfare of our citizens as it is outlined in the prayer.

So, I would like to ask the member, why is it important—or, how would it be important to families that this bill receive unanimous support of this House?

Mrs. Smith: Well, as legislators and as a Province, you know, signalling to the rest of Manitoba that this is important, that we care, that we are bringing the voice forward of those who are grieving.

And I want to give a shout-out to some of the front-line workers who are also here, Comm.UNITY.204 who goes out on the front lines and, you know, feeds folks, distributes harm reduction supplies, and many other folks that are here that—you

know, the women action therapists, as well, who work with a lot of our youth that, you know, might be, you know, exposed to these types of substance uses and, you know, folks that are ensuring that they're getting the right information.

So, we can do the right thing as a Province, as legislators, as a government and help ensure that community is educated, but more importantly, that families are supported and that they have a place to put their grief and we end the stigma around drug use.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for questions has ended.

Debate

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

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I, too, would like to thank the member from fort–Point Douglas for bringing forth this very important bill. Appreciated being able to connect with her yesterday for a brief conversation where we were able to share various points from each of our perspectives, and I was able to let the member know that I absolutely do support this bill.

And I also want to acknowledge everyone who has joined us in the galleries. Grief is a universal experience, but very individual in how each of us carry it. It—the journey of grief is a long and—a very long road, and every day has a new challenge.

I can recall, even for myself, grieving the death of my nephew. Nighttime—when I did fall asleep—with grief, you'd have the memories and the dreams of the good times, and you've have about five, 10 seconds when you woke up in the morning where you kind of felt like things were kind of normal, and then it would hit you all over again that they are not physically with us.

And when stigma and shame are part of that journey, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the pain is just that much heavier to bear. And that's why it's incumbent on all of us to work towards reducing and removing the shame in order to promote healing and moving forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I recently had a tour of the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre and Mr. Scott Oake was there and shared a part of his journey. And what many people don't necessarily understand unless they've walked this path is all of the sleepless nights; the added burden of the worry; the efforts put in to seeking different avenues of supports, of treatments,

anything, desperately, to help their loved ones to get back on the path of healing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had a discussion with Mr. Oake, and, you know, we talked about how there's been a movement to understand addictions in general, specifically as they pertain to alcohol or even nicotine, that we have this understanding that it's lifelong. You never are cured of your addictions, although you can stop using whatever particular item you are addicted to.

But that conversation doesn't extend into illicit drugs, and it needs to, because addiction is a universal experience; however, the different things that you're addicted to can present differently.

We also spoke about how a lot of the attention is given to all of the negative and, you know, criminal aspects and involvement when it comes to illicit drugs.

There are also a lot of success stories and positive hope stories out there that we need to build upon. We need people to know that when they are in the midst of their addiction struggles that there are avenues that will offer help, will offer hope.

But for this bill, we also know that many families will face this grief, this unbearable, unfair grief to carry. And we know that that's a lifelong weight to have with you, and so we too recognize how important it is—as one of the first steps—is to have a bereavement day to acknowledge that everybody's carrying pain, but this is a specific pain; that this day can absolutely work towards reducing that stigma, move towards compassion, move towards understanding, and certainly sit down and learn from each other so that we can offer more supports, more help.

Individuals who struggle with substance abuse are not isolated in their struggle. The entire family lives with the struggle. The entire family struggles not only in who to speak to, when to speak because of the stigma, but feeling that ownership of, we have to find this help. And that's a huge burden to be placing on these families.

So that is why our government has invested in a number of different initiatives—not only to help the individuals who are struggling with addictions issues, but also the families.

And we will continue to work on harm reduction strategies, and I know that I have offered to the member that we can sit down and we can talk more

about specifics. We can find ways that the governments can address and really respond to the needs within the communities, and I do look forward to learning more from the member from Point Douglas.

* (10:30)

And again, I want to thank you for bringing this bill forward and I know that our government supports you in this.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): It's quite an honour to be asked by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) to share some of my experiences and to second this very important bill for our families here in Manitoba, including ours here in the Chamber.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to share with the public here as to why we're here. The bill seeks normal—this bill seeks to normalize the experience of grief and establish a community where mourners are allowed the time to grieve as a collective to remember and to heal.

Across the province, many Manitobans continue to struggle with addictions, and the pandemic has only made it already deadly, and the ongoing public health crisis of the opiate 'overdose'—overdoses and deaths are worse.

Too many Manitobans have been lost to addictions, are still struggling or are watching a family member or friend suffer: 372 Manitobans died from an overdose in 2020, 87 per cent higher than in 2019. The situation last year was even worse: 407 Manitobans lost their lives to overdose.

As more and more people are touched by addiction, more and more families are left with the grief of an overdose death, yet the unique experience of grieving an overdose death is still pushed under the rug. It hides out in the shadows; it is veiled in guilt and shame and stigma and discomfort.

Grief and bereavement are the natural, normal and expected responses to the death of a significant loved one in your life. Feelings of grief can last much longer than society recognizes or supports. In many ways, we never get over the death of a loved one.

While grieving the loss of a loved one is hard enough, deaths due to drug overdoses are often accompanied with a complicated type of grief. The drug-related death bereavement day is a powerful way

to stand together and remember and grieve those who have lost their lives to overdose.

While meth-related deaths are double from 2018 to 2019, opiates have taken over since the pandemic and reached an all-time high and—has reached an all-time high. Meth is causing a huge spike in blood-borne illnesses such as hepatitis B, is 10 times higher than—I lost my spot here—as syphilis has still increased nearly four times in just a few years—thank you.

So with that—with crystal meth, I remember standing here and watching the former premier throw down a report regarding safe consumption sites. And I thought that was the most disrespectful thing a leader can ever do to someone's work, people's work, and throw it on the ground. And not one member of their team bothered to pick up that report that was thrown on the floor in this Chamber. And that report had many, many solutions; had many, many solutions to help our loved ones, including mine, who are suffering from addictions.

So I just wanted to share a story here. I have a younger sister. She's my young mother's—I mean, she's my late mother's youngest. I have three of her daughters. Crystal meth is her poison. She is somewhere here in Winnipeg West End. We haven't seen her in a couple years, but the only time we hear from her is when she's in jail. She's sober; she thinks of us. But when she's on the street, meth is on her mind. And, in fact, meth is taken in order to stay awake during the night so you're not attacked or raped, so way of survival as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just received a couple of invoices to my mail regarding three paramedic pickups for my sister, three different addresses here in the city. My daughter and I went to go to one of those addresses last night to go see if we could try to find her. The person who looks after that building didn't hear from her.

We had to call the hospitals—St. Boniface, HSC, Grace Hospital—three hospitals that my little sister were taken to—was taken to. And I was informed I had to fill out some forms regarding accessing patient's information. So they emailed that to me. So that's day two now of trying to find my sister who has been struggling with addictions since the age of 13.

March 18th, March 19th, March 21st was when my sister was picked up at three random addresses. So since my late mother died, I feel like I'm my sister's mother. And whenever I open up the newspaper, if there's a body found in the river or anywhere, I always

think it's her. And I hold her three daughters very home-tight to my heart.

I really support this day of bereavement, because one day, maybe I'll have to use that day. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm asking this government to do the right thing: support this bill unanimously so our families, including ours, can receive that day that we need to reflect on our loved ones.

Ekosi.

Mrs. Cathy Cox (Kildonan-River East): I'm humbled to support this bill today and recognize and thank the families and the health-care workers that are here with us today in the gallery. I'd like to acknowledge the member from Point Douglas for sharing the heartache that she and her family have experienced, of losing her father and her brother-in-law to drug overdoses.

I recall with sadness that moment when she shared with all of the members in this Chamber the loss of her brother-in-law. And while we are on opposite sides of this Chamber, we all join together to support each other at times of personal crisis.

And I want to again offer my sincere and profound sympathies to the member opposite for her loss. My heart breaks for her, for her family, her sister and the children left without support of their dad. It's not easy sharing our personal stories, but during my time here, I have learned that by sharing our life experiences, we can make a difference in the lives of others.

As politicians, people see us as leaders. They only see us from the outside, however, and they have no idea that our families, our friends and even us experience the same heartbreak and challenge as every other Manitoban.

I recall when the member from The Pas-Kameesak shared her personal story, and because of her honesty, we have changed to expand the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program in the North—thank you for that—so that youth and individuals no longer have to wait to travel to Winnipeg for treatment. This change occurred because she was brave enough to share her story with all of us legislators here in this Chamber.

And my heart goes out to the member as well for sharing her sad story about her sister. We can never imagine the heartbreak that the family experiences and the challenges and the concern from not knowing where she is from day to day.

I would dare to say that there is not one of us here in this Chamber that has not themselves or had a member of their family affected by addiction or mental illness. Often, it's a topic that's not shared or discussed because, as the member from Point Douglas said, there's a stigma attached.

* (10:40)

That's exactly why it's so important that we as politicians, as leaders, share our stories, so others understand that they are not alone in their struggles. Our former premier, Gary Doer, had a daughter who struggled with lifelong eating disorder, and I am grateful to her for sharing her story about her battle so that others know they are not alone.

Life is not perfect, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I've shared with members in this Chamber about my personal story about the loss of my brother, Greg, to suicide. And I was the same as many others. I kept the reason for his passing a secret. I didn't share it with our three sons that he died by suicide, that he took his own life as he could no longer tolerate the demons and the darkness that he struggled with for so long.

Madam Speaker, I was afraid and worried that our boys might consider ending their lives when the pain or darkness of life became too much. But I've come to understand that if I can save even one person, one life, from that same fate by telling my family's story, then that is what I must do.

As I stated, no life is perfect and no family is perfect. I recall, like the member from The Pas-Kameesak said, when my husband and I searched the streets of Winnipeg looking for my brother. I remember the tears and the worry and the concern on the faces of my mom and dad as they lived through my brother's struggle. And I remember that fateful day on the cold dreary morning of December 24th when I received that call from my father telling me that my brother had ended his life the day before.

My life stopped at that moment, as I know life has stopped for all of you, when I realized that our family would never, ever be the same. Losing a brother, losing a sister, a mother, a father, filled all of us with a range of emotions, and, unfortunately, it also fills us with shame. For years and years, I never spoke of my brother's loss. Even my best friend wasn't aware of my brother's passing until I shared it with him.

While we now speak more openly about suicide and drug-related deaths, there is still a stigma related to these illnesses, and it's important that people realize that mental illness and addiction is an illness.

So I'd like to say again to the member from Point Douglas, thank you for bringing this very important bill forward. I am honoured to support it. I am honoured to speak to it today.

And I would like to just say to all of the families and to all of the caregivers here in the gallery today, thank you. Thank you for all of the—for sharing your story. Thank you for all of the important work that you do, for helping others, for ensuring that others don't have to live—or trying to ensure that others don't have to live through these same tragedies that you have endured, these same struggles. Miigwech to all of you. You are all in my heart. Love to all of you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Drug-related deaths are disturbing, tragic, sad.

We are discussing today making the Sunday before Mother's Day a drug-related bereavement day. It's important to have this day. It's important to recognize the many who are hurting from the death of a loved one, a friend, who has died. We need to be able to share these stories of those who died, for from this sharing, we can get relief; we can get a wider understanding of what has happened and what led to the situation, and, as a result, we can dedicate ourselves as MLAs to preventing future deaths.

It is also a time to tell the truth, as we see it, of the inadequacy of the current provincial approach to helping those with substance use addictions.

The fact that deaths from—drug-related deaths are preventable is clear. It is not easy. It is tough. It is maybe some of the most difficult things that there are in health care, in social work, in psychological help. But it can be done, and it needs to be done better.

We need to have a system where people can go when they need help and get that help. It's not enough to have a system which is only there part of the time. Too many people, when they have recognized that they need help and gone for help, it has not been there at that particular moment at that particular time.

We also need a system which is seamless in moving people from the initial search for help to an effective approach to addressing the condition, the addiction.

We have to recognize, as has been increasingly done, that addiction is too often a chronic condition, not something that we can solve immediately, totally. Even those who are able to end their addiction to substance use, to the drugs, and come out of the other side and do well, for many it is a continuing, lifelong

battle, a lifelong time to be aware of the pitfalls, of the problems; a lifelong time to continue to have some level of support.

But, certainly, the approach that has been taken for many years, which is a 21- or 20-date-day treatment approach, has not worked and is now recognized as not being appropriate or working anymore; that individuals need not only to go through a phase of treatment and help, but also, beyond that, they need a period when they're in supportive housing, where they can continue to be away from the situation, the circumstances, the environment where they have had problems with their addiction in the past.

And there are places that are doing this now, including at St. Boniface Street Links and Morberg House, where they have often found ways to house and support people for prolonged periods of time until they can get back on their feet and, in some cases, to support people not once, not twice, not three times, but time and time again, where it comes through, where it's needed.

And what is amazing to me is the incredible work that has been done by people have been through a substance use condition and have come out the other side and have been really amazing and important contributors to our society. They have often developed an empathy and an understanding which is badly needed, an understanding of what they have been through in terms of the stigma and how we can move beyond that.

* (10:50)

And it is amazing, the contributions that so many have made once they have been helped. It is one of the reasons why this concept of stigmatizing people is just wrong, because each person is a human being and each person has potential. And we have to do what we can to help people reach their potential.

And some people are able to reach an extraordinary level of potential, even continuing to use drugs, but the ones who manage to overcome the use of drugs and get on to a life which is free of drug use, it is incredible, and we need to tell some of those stories too, because those stories can be important in helping us understand how people have succeeded, how people have achieved, and the contributions that they have made.

It is a time to reflect on what has happened in the last two years when we've had this extraordinary increase in drug-related deaths in Manitoba, and it is

time to rework how we approach addictions and do it in a much better way than we have been doing it.

There have been many lessons learned, and it's time that we learned from those lessons and made the changes that are needed to prevent the tragedies, the terrible things and the disasters that have happened in the past.

It is not an easy way, but it is a possible way, and, working together, I believe we can achieve something much better than we have at the moment. And that is one of the reasons that I'm here, as an elected MLA, and I stay here, because I see the potential possibility to do much better.

With those words, I look forward to having an annual day to recognize what has happened in the past, and the individual tragedies and to share the stories and hope we can use this as a place where we can learn and move on, and move on to a better place, in terms of preventing the problems that have so plagued so many in Manitoba for so long.

Thank you.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): –Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to put just a few words, very briefly, on the record, and I am mindful of the time.

I do want to, again, thank the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) for bringing this forward, and as the member said, doing it on behalf of all those impacted, some of whom are in the gallery with us today. And I do want to say that I agree with many of the sentiments that have been expressed by colleagues in this morning's debate, and it's clear that this Chamber is a special body; it does have its low points but there are times when we can come together and do really meaningful things.

And so I believe that the member for Point Douglas and the—and her drug-related death bereavement day act will be meaningful to many families.

I'm a young parent myself. My—our oldest is at a different stage in life. His birthday is in September but he told Alicia and I this morning that he wants just presents for his birthday, no cake, so he's at that point, but, you know, I understand that as they get older, that parents have to let their children make choices, and so that's something that, you know, even makes me fearful sometimes, to think about their future.

And so I just sympathize with all of those parents who have poured their heart and their soul and their time and resources into raising their children, and then there comes a time when, as I said, you know, they

begin to make their own choices, to mature and to take risks and to succeed and to fail. And sometimes these choices lead to bad outcomes.

And so, you know, I—for all those who've lost loved ones, you know, my heart goes out to you and I think this day will be an important part of drawing recognition to these issues as well as raising awareness and also drawing support for those who have been impacted.

So with those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to supporting this resolution and will allow others to speak.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'm just going to take a couple of minutes. First and foremost, I just want to say miigwech to the member for Point Douglas for bringing forward Bill 234, and again, in honour and in partnership with families across Manitoba who have lost loved ones to overdose.

I want to quickly just acknowledge everybody that's in the gallery here this morning for all of your work, everything that you do, day in and day out, to draw attention to the addictions crisis that we have here in Manitoba, but also working on the front lines with individuals, with Manitobans, with our loved ones who are struggling for a myriad of ways. I lift each and every one of you up today.

I want to also just acknowledge Rhonda Kardal, who is struggling right now in respect of the death of her beloved daughter. On behalf of, I'm sure, all of us in the Chamber, we can agree to send our love and strength to her as she navigates the next days, weeks and certainly months and years.

You know, I think—and I agree with everything that's been said here this morning. You know, there are moments when we come together in this Chamber to do what's right, when we know that no matter what side of the aisle that we sit or stand on, that we all are connected in some small ways and typically, it is from those struggles and those journeys that Manitobans face. And we are no different on this side than on that side.

And so I do want to say miigwech to all of the members who stood up today to support Bill 234 with the kind words, with the support for the folks that are in the Chamber, and the folks that are not in the Chamber that are watching this and that are on the front lines right now as we speak. Miigwech to everybody. We stand in solidarity today. And again, to all the families who have bought this forward, miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 234, The Drug Related Death Bereavement Day Act.

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

I declare the motion carried.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Deputy Speaker, would you canvass the House to see if there's a will to call it 11 a.m.?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 11 a.m.? *[Agreed]*

And just to note, then, the resolution hour will close at 11:59. We'll have a minute short.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 12—Calling on the Provincial Government to Resolve Issues Afflicting Northern Manitoba

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., the resolution before this House is resolution 12, calling on the provincial government to resolve issues affecting—afflicting northern Manitoba, brought forward by the honourable member for Flin Flon.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I move, seconded by the member from The Pas-Kameesak,

WHEREAS northern Manitobans are subject to situations that are acceptable nowhere else in the province specifically regarding healthcare and infrastructure; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government's cuts to healthcare in northern Manitoba have worsened these situations and put thousands at risk; and

WHEREAS in the last few years the Provincial Government has cut nurses, ordered millions in cuts to the Northern Regional Health Authority while cutting the Northern Patient Transfer Program and more than tripled its use of private health care agencies in the north rather than address chronic staff vacancies; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has shut down health care facilities in the north for extended periods leaving northerners to travel hundreds of kilometers over poorly maintained roads to access basic healthcare needs; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has displayed a lack of urgency regarding health care facilities in Thompson by cutting its Foot Care Clinic and not fixing the hot water at the Thompson Hospital, which has been on and off for months on end; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government closed the obstetrics unit in Flin Flon forcing expectant mothers to travel hundreds of kilometres away to give birth while ignoring a staffing crisis in The Pas; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has shut down the operating room in Flin Flon; and

WHEREAS the province has underspent infrastructure every year since taking office including leaving \$166 million unspent on highways while freezing maintenance and repair programs all while having no plan for good jobs in the north; and

WHEREAS over 5,300 Manitobans have called for upgrades to Highway 6 to improve safety and reduce accidents for people who travel in the north; and

WHEREAS northern Manitobans rely on highway infrastructure such as Highway 6, 60, 10, 391 and 394 to travel to and from critical health care services; and

WHEREAS the province has left many positions unfilled in highway maintenance operations such as snowplow operators.

THEREFORE be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba condemn the provincial government for cutting and failing to invest in health care and infrastructure in northern Manitoba these past six years.

* (11:00)

Motion presented.

MLA Lindsey: It saddens me, actually, to have to stand up and pass a resolution like this to discuss all the damage that this government has done to northern Manitoba in the six years that they have actually been left to be in charge of the Province.

Let's start by talking about health care. We've heard this government talk many times about care closer to home and pay attention to our plan for the North. Mr. Deputy Speaker, care closer to home does not mean shutting services down in local hospitals, forcing northern Manitobans to drive hundreds of kilometres to seek medical care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 2018, this government shut down the obstetrics unit in Flin Flon, forcing expectant mothers and their partners to drive, at best,

to The Pas—sometimes multiple times because things don't always go according to plan when it comes to births.

People have been forced to pay exorbitant amounts of money to drive back and forth, to stay in hotels, with this government failing to adequately compensate them through the northern patient transportation thing.

Now, that's on a good day, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On a bad day, due to staffing shortages, which we've talked about so many times in this House, the obstetrics unit in The Pas may or may not have sufficient nursing resources available, which then forces expectant mothers to drive to Thompson—maybe—because guess what, there's also staffing shortages there, in which case I've seen families make the heartbreaking decision to drive to somewhere else where they may have family: maybe it's Dauphin, maybe it's Brandon, maybe it's Winnipeg.

Sometimes the expectant mother goes there by herself because the partner has to work and can't afford to be gone for days or possibly weeks, meaning that the father misses the birth of that child. And that is very simply because of how this government has mismanaged health care in the North.

We've talked any number of times about these staffing shortages that really started from the time this government came into power in 2016, but really showed its ugly head during the pandemic where they decided to just shut health-care centres down, whether it was the health centre in Leaf Rapids that was down for weeks because they reassigned the agency nurses to go somewhere else because northern Manitobans quite simply just didn't matter to them, whether it was Gillam that saw their health centre shut down because there was no staff available.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Mr. Deputy—Acting Assistant Deputy Speaker, those cuts, those situations had been brought about simply because of this government. And the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) said any number of times here that she's just fine with paying more money to private agency nurses rather than supporting nurses in the system.

And I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that those nurses may be fine people, but they don't have the community connection. They're here today, gone tomorrow.

Every day that someone's in the hospital, particularly in the North—and I know this from first-hand experience with family members that were in the hospital prior to the pandemic—that every day saw a different doctor; every day saw a different nurse. Every day had to take it upon themselves, or their family had to take it upon themselves, to update the medical professional that was coming to see them because there was no continuity of service.

And there wasn't enough staff to do their jobs adequately, so the family members were left to try and be the caregivers, to navigate, say, no, no, this person can't have that, this person is on a restricted diet, this person just got switched to this drug in the hospital yesterday. Because the caregivers, the ones that are paid to be nurses, doctors, health-care aides, quite simply were so short-staffed they couldn't keep up. And that was prior to the pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, we know that it doesn't matter which health centre we talk about in northern Manitoba, they're short-staffed, and some of them are probably in danger of shutting down permanently. We've seen Flin Flon General Hospital, for example, not just lose its obstetrics unit, but also lose its operating system.

And the government, the ministers—the parade of Health ministers—have made the excuse, well, we just can't attract people there. It's little wonder. It's little wonder they can't attract people there, because they do everything in their power to deter people from going to work in the Northern Health Region.

Let's talk a little bit about infrastructure. We know that there's a petition with over 5,000 names on it demanding that this government do some upgrades to Highway 6 so that there's passing lanes, so that the shoulders are wider. Because right now there are no shoulders and the pavement's broke up on the edges of the—where the shoulder should be, so big trucks hog the centre line or sometimes over the centre line, because if they catch one of those places where the pavement is missing, they're going in the ditch. And we've seen that any number of times on highways—39, for example, where it goes to Snow Lake—there's been any number of big truck accidents simply because of the road conditions.

We know that the last snowplow operator retired in Thompson last fall, and we've yet to hear from the Minister of Infrastructure, has anybody been hired to take their place. We know that there was multiple positions empty for snowplow operators, equipment operators, throughout northern Manitoba, but also

throughout Manitoba as a whole. So who's left to plow snow? Who's left to maintain those highways in a safe manner? And there's very few people that are expected to cover longer and longer and longer stretches of highway, which means that they quite simply can't do it in a timely fashion, which means this government can't live up to their own standards of how soon highways are supposed to be clear.

We know that this government has frozen funding for municipalities while saying they've given them basket funding so that they know what kind of funding they're going to get. And they do know what kind of funding they're going to get: the same funding they were getting in 2016.

We know that the cost of living is going up and, certainly, the cost of fuel for those municipalities is through the roof, but this government doesn't recognize that, doesn't increase the amount that they give to municipalities, which then means they are either forced to put taxes up locally—while this government claims to cut taxes, they force the next level down to put taxes up because of their way they don't fund municipalities properly. We see that they—local municipalities have to buy into this government's mentality of cutting services because they simply can't afford to do things the way that they should be done.

Everything that this government has touched in northern Manitoba, they've cut. We've sent any number of letters, phone calls, emails, whatever, to the ministers—the various ministers—saying that the northern patient transportation is woefully inadequate to cover the cost for northern Manitoba's, but during their government's failed pandemic response, they started sending people from the south to the North and actually paid family members some amount to be there with their loved ones. But they don't do that for people in the North that have to come to Winnipeg for care.

* (11:10)

What's the difference? Why is the North so badly misrepresented by this government? Everything—education, transportation—doesn't matter what we talk about, it's—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

The honourable member—[interjection]—Oh, sorry, yes.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): 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 honourable minister of—[interjection]—okay, the honourable member for Swan River.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I'm really happy to put a few words and ask a few questions, because as I listen to the member from Flin Flon, does he realize over—the total NDP spending on agency nurses over the last six years under their power was \$46,000,977 and—or, yes, 977 dollars—and their northern agency nurse spending in 2014, \$2 million, and in 2015, \$2.2 million?

What's the member opposite's plan for attracting and retaining health-care professionals in Manitoba's northern region?

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Well, I thank the member from Swan River for, once again, pointing out the failures of his own government.

While he talks about how much money the NDP spent on agency nurses over six years, this government spent that amount in one year on agency nurses, because they've done absolutely nothing to attract nurses, not just in the North but anywhere in the province.

So there's any number of things that need to be done to address attraction of people to work in the health-care system, people to work in the infrastructure system. It does involve properly negotiating collective agreements so that people like nurses know that—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, I want to thank the member for Flin Flon for bringing these important issues forward.

I had an opportunity to travel up to Thompson, to drive Highway 6, to come over through No. 10 and get a good look at some of the conditions on the highways up there. I know he's just been an absolutely tireless advocate.

I just wanted to ask him, how will this PMR hopefully urge this government to actually take some action when it comes to our northern highways and roadways?

MLA Lindsey: Well, thank you, and I thank the member from Concordia for that question, and I thank him for driving to Thompson when he had to go there, rather than flying over the problem.

There's no doubt that any time we get to shine a light on what's happening in northern Manitoba it will hopefully help this government realize that they need to change their attitude towards the people of the North, so that they're making proper investments in infrastructure—particularly, Highway 6, but also Highway 60, Highway 10, Highway 391, Highway 394.

Pick one in the North, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they need to have attention. They need to have this government fixing them so that they're maintained in a safe state of travel.

We look at the increase—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable member's time has expired.

The honourable member for—oh—for Dauphin.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): I can understand the NDP northern caucus members being angry and frustrated and ignored—I understand that—by their southern cousins. And I know the NDP doesn't have a plan and they have never had a plan to help northern Manitoba, never. I know that.

But the NDP northern caucus should be assured that this government does have a plan—\$27.1 million for Flin Flon General Hospital and \$25 million for Dauphin's regional emergency. Those are real investments.

Is the member opposite opposed to the investments the government of Manitoba has made in the Flin Flon health centre?

MLA Lindsey: I want to thank the member for Dauphin from once again pointing out the failures of this government.

Because while they did build a new emergency room that was slated on the books when we were in government, what they failed to do is supply doctors, nurses. What they've done is shut down the operating room with no excuse, no reason for it. What they've done is shut down obstetrics with no acceptable reason for that.

So, while they built a building, they won't hire people to make the building function as it should.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the member from Flin Flon has to do with mining.

And there have been issues about mining and lack of attention to mining over the last several years, and I just would offer the MLA for Flin Flon an opportunity to expand?

MLA Lindsey: Well, I thank the member from River Heights for that very important question.

You know, when we were in government, we were ranked one or two for the best mining jurisdictions in Canada, and I believe—in the world. We're now ranked at No. 36. So while this government talks about all the wonderful things they do, that's all it is, is talk. They haven't actually carried through with those investments.

How many new mines have opened in northern Manitoba? We know that the mine in Flin Flon is shutting down in June and the government has done absolutely nothing to help the citizens of Flin Flon or the community of Flin Flon. We know that Snow Lake is the big deal in mining for HudBay Minerals at the moment, but what about—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Hello.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable member for St. Johns.

An Honourable Member: That's very rude.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, it's my turn.

An Honourable Member: Fine, but you're being rude, addressing the Speaker.

Ms. Fontaine: You're being rude right now by interrupting.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Order.

The honourable member for St. Johns.

Ms. Fontaine: I do want to just say miigwech to the member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey) and to all of our northern caucus members who day in and day out 'tirelessly' advocate and work on behalf of northern Manitobans and hands-down do the best job for any member that we have in this House for bringing forth issues that need to be addressed on an expeditious issue time frame right now.

I would ask the member, what needs to be done to fix the chronic staffing shortages in the North?

MLA Lindsey: Thank you for that question, and it's a very important question.

There's a bunch of things that need to be addressed within the Northern Health Region. Several doctors, nurses, other health-care professionals that have left have talked to me—off the record, because they don't want to spoil their chances of ever getting a job again—and talked about the poisoned workplace that they're leaving. Some of them bought out their contracts because they couldn't stand being there anymore.

So I guess that's the first thing that, when we're in government, we need to investigate is why that feeling is there amongst people that work there. We need to make sure that programs are in place like the doctor retention program that this government cut—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): I understand the member from Flin Flon has some concerns about the North. He seems to be very angry and very upset and continues to put misleading facts on the record here.

But he still hasn't answered the question. I'm confused why the member voted against budget '22.

* (11:20)

If the member is so concerned about the highways in the North, why did the member vote no against budget '22 that would have put historical investments in Manitoba's highways and infrastructure, making life safer and better for those in the North?

MLA Lindsey: Well, I thank the member, and I appreciate the fact that he's a new member, so I'll forgive him for not truly understanding what takes place outside the Perimeter of Manitoba or, more importantly, what doesn't take place.

We drive Highway 6—the member for The Pas-Kameesak and myself—drive Highway 6 constantly. We know that when this government says they're going to invest in highways—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Order.

MLA Lindsey: —they do not invest in that highway. They do not invest in Highway 60.

So, the member wants to know why sometimes I—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Order.

MLA Lindsey: —be angry, it's because this government constantly says one thing but does the complete opposite. They don't live up to their promises, constantly. The infrastructure budget has been underspent every year—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I'm not sure what title.

I just want to put on record that, as an MLA, we access Highway 6 all the time. And, for the new member across to actually have the—to actually say that he truly understands what life in the North is all about is absolutely ridiculous. I recommend that he come and visit, maybe come and join a whole bunch of his colleagues when they come up for special occasions only in the North, right.

Okay, so my question is, due to this government's health-care cuts, northern Manitobans are always being sent to travel to Winnipeg to access health-care services—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak on that very important question.

It impacts northern Manitobans constantly when they have to leave their families, sometimes even for basic health care. The northern patient transportation system does not come close to adequately ensuring that family members can go with them. In fact, if a person comes to Winnipeg for health care and doesn't bring an escort, highway—or hotel costs aren't even covered for that person, even though they may be here for a week, a month, longer.

So, those are very important questions, and I wish I had so much more time to say what all—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

Time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The floor is now open for debate.

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to put a few words here

on the record when it comes to the resolution that the—brought forward by the member from Flin Flon.

And I just want to say to the member from Flin Flon, you know, when it comes to, you know, 17 years of the NDP government, they had a lot of opportunities to put money into highways, invest in highways. They actually overspent in almost in every department except for Infrastructure. They would take money from Infrastructure for everything else under the sun when it came to spending, mismanagement, overspending, the spendy NDP, they were called in the day before their—before his time.

And, you know, he just has to look back at history—how much money they actually underspent when it came to infrastructure. They had so much opportunity to spend the money into—and they actually mostly spent it in their ridings. In the southwest corner, where I represent, they did not even look at that area. We—they actually took oil money from my—the old—the constituency of Arthur-Virden.

And I remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before the last—the election that they actually lost government was in 2016, they came up with a financial update and said, you know, instead of a \$300-million deficit, there—it's actually going to be more like \$700-million deficit. And the reason for that, they said, and get this, they said it—because the oil price went down.

So that just means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the NDP government took and took and took money from resources, especially oil resources, royalties that they got as a Province, and basically spent it on everything else under the sun except for infrastructure, especially the infrastructure in my neck of the woods. When I ran for the by-election in 2014, that was one of the biggest issues. And that issue came up was the underspending of infrastructure.

So if this member from Flin Flon is going to give us a lesson of what we should be doing in investing in infrastructure, we don't need to take any lessons from the NDP here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And when it comes to our investment, our budget, these—this member from Flin Flon did not vote for our budget, where we're going to be investing record amounts of money in infrastructure, more than \$1.5 billion for the next three years.

And we actually made a three-year budget now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that contractors who fail to do some of the jobs that they've got tender for and actually got awarded last year, have to now know that that they have to get ready for the next three years that

are coming, so that the infrastructure will actually be actually invested and actually done in our highways.

And it's not only just in southern Manitoba. We are going to be investing, this year alone, \$9 million on Highway 6, going to Thompson. And we're going to be spending close to \$51 million in the next couple years on Highway 6 to make sure that whenever we do a stretch of highway there, we're going to create shoulders for safety for Manitoba drivers going up north to Thompson. We're also going to make sure that we have—Highway 6, getting closer to Winnipeg, that we start dividing the highway of Highway 6.

So we're going to be investing lots of money when it comes to infrastructure of the North, and we will continue investing 'ree' across this province. And we're not going to have favourites, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to 'dispertse' this infrastructure throughout the province of Manitoba, including the North.

And if the member does not want to vote for the bill, it's his problem. He can go back to his residents to show that we are investing more money than their government ever did in the last—in the 17 years that they were in power.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to say that this member doesn't—should not take any lessons. And when it comes to health care, we're investing many dollars, including the expansion of the hospital in the facility in Ashern, which is on the Highway 6, to make sure that when there's emergencies on Highway 6, that there's going to be adequate hospitals and emergency rooms for individuals to be looked after.

We're expanding in Thompson. We're going to be expanding health care throughout the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we're going to have—make sure that we have health care closer to home. And that is what we are going to do as a government.

So I just want to also say that I'm really looking forward to have the opportunity to go and drive the Highway 6 this summer. I'm looking forward to that. I'm planning to take a look at all these different highways that are up north.

I'm looking forward to the drive to Thompson, also probably including, on the way around, is looking at—going to some First Nation communities to make sure that their infrastructure—and I want to see for myself the ferries that are in the—on—that go to First Nation communities, to make sure that the infrastructure that we're investing is—will continue with our First Nation communities.

And I'm looking forward to the tour that I'm going to do some time in June, and making sure that I'm aware of what the Highway 6 that people are talking about, I want to see it for myself, what we can do as a department, as a government, and making sure that we're here for Manitobans.

And we also want to look at, too, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the biggest thing, though, how we pay for all this infrastructure, is investing in our highways, but also, at the same time, economic development. And our government right now is creating an economic development committee.

And we're going to make sure that our number of—my colleague that's sit in front of me, the Minister for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, is also in that—on that committee, that we're going to make sure that we do economic development up north, to make sure that our First Nation individuals will have opportunities of new—good jobs, good opportunities in the North.

We're also going to look at opportunities of mineral, natural resources. Minister of—for—Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development (Mr. Fielding) is also going to be on that committee to make sure that we don't keep it in the ground like the Leader of the Opposition wants us to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a great opportunity for mining up in northern Manitoba, and we want to continue to do explorations and actually attract mining companies to make sure that they come and invest in our province, just much like the agribusiness that has done, like Roquette and McCain, you know, that invested in southern Manitoba.

We're looking at mining throughout even possibly Russell, Manitoba, for potash. We want to see stuff like that happening.

And here's the east side—we have so many opportunities in Manitoba when it comes to natural resources. And we're going to continue to invest and explore and making sure that we create good jobs, good sustainable jobs in northern Manitoba, so that our—for people, and for tax revenue, so that we invest in our highways, and there's more people driving on those highways.

* (11:30)

We want to make sure that we're going to keep our highways safe for all drivers who are coming from Thompson, from the northern areas to come to Winnipeg for services, for tourism, recreation. We

want to make sure we also have our tourism to go up to north Manitoba for tourism opportunities too.

So we want to really look at northern Manitoba as an opportunity for economic development, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'm going to leave that at that and I'll pass it on to the next speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Thank goodness I'm on—thank goodness, I'm next on the list to truly—truly—educate the members opposite in how it is to be a northerner.

I'm a Manitoban who lives with—most of my life with have-nots: a lot of my community members, my family, everyone. I come from northern Manitoba from Opaskwayak Cree Nation. That's where my ancestors come from, from Treaty 5. As an MLA and, before that, as a young woman, travelling back and forth, up and down those highways just to access health-care services, to access education opportunities, to address justice services as well.

We have to leave our communities for many, many reasons, and we have to travel those highways which can be dangerous at times. So I don't appreciate the members opposite telling us—or me, especially—that they truly understand what it is to put your life at risk whenever I step on that highway and leave my family to come here to report for work.

Now, I truly, truly support this resolution, because it talks about our lives as politicians here—and the members opposite too—regarding their highway conditions. In particular, in the North, it's worse. Has anyone here ever been on Highway 60? That is the most worst—I don't even let my daughter drive on that highway until she gets more experience, okay.

So, right here, it says here with this resolution: the provincial government has shut down health-care facilities in the North for extended periods, leaving northerners to travel hundreds of kilometres of poorly maintained roads to access basic health-care services.

So, again, we deal with have not—we deal with a lot of have-nots, okay. I just expressed about how we don't have a basic—an eye doctor to look at diabetic eyes. You know how many diabetics are in northern Manitoba? And thousands travel on those highways to come see doctors here in Winnipeg.

Now, imagine if we had a doctor or two based in the North, we can provide services closer to home. So when the member says closer to home, I have to strongly disagree with that. Because we don't have

access to health-care services, a lot of our diabetics go blind. A lot of our people will have no choice but to neglect their health because they cannot afford to travel to Winnipeg.

The NPTP program is a horrible program. Even though there's an announcement made here and there—then why is it still so bad? The N-P-T program does not do us any favours. In fact, it intimidates. There's poverty issues. We have folks who can't even leave their communities—no vehicle.

Even with medevac, that's a huge issue. For example, last night, I got a phone call from a mother regarding her daughter who gave birth. They separated mom and baby without even telling mom. She was sleeping and put baby on a plane to be medevac'd out to the North without even the decency or the respect of waking up her mother.

Would they have done that to a mother here in the south? I don't think so. There'd be no separation of anything such as that. So with—she couldn't even travel with baby on the plane. There was no room because of the incubator. So, as of this morning, she was told to take a bus. So since she gave birth to her baby, she has not been able to breastfeed her baby. Her baby's heartbeat is not even beside mom's heartbeat as well.

So we need to fix this. We need to have better—we need to—not—just closer access. Why can't you invest into northern Manitoba? Why can't you invest in these highways that are our lifelines? They're our lifelines, including mine when I have to travel here for my medical appointments. I have many relatives who cannot afford—and then, guess what. They let their health be neglected because of this.

Now, I wanted to talk about the snowplows.

An Honourable Member: What, snowplows?

Ms. Lathlin: Yes, exactly.

When I'm on Highway 60 and the northern part of Highway 6, you rarely see our snowplows. But yet, when I head down further, down the southern part of Highway 6, I seen three scraping the cement, pushing slush, when they should have been on Highway 60 and further up north, where the actual snow and ice-packed roads are.

I had to do some casework in regards to snowplowing near Grand Rapids—a staff member in that area admittedly saying, there's hardly any people to operate these snowplows. So, when I hear the minister say, we're doing all this, we're doing—we're

doing more than what the NDP did, I beg to differ. I beg to differ. I travel those roads; it's deplorable.

And with the recent death of my friend, Danielle Adams, her—don't get me wrong, I'm not using her name or politicizing her death. I'm just putting on fact that the Thompson Citizen did an editorial about the conditions of this Highway 6, which is the only road from Thompson to Winnipeg and the other communities, as well.

What really struck me about that editorial is that it took her death—a young woman, 38 years old, a brand new politician—to die on that road for people to open up their eyes and go, holy smokes, it is dangerous; we do put our lives just to get on that road to access health service—health-care services or even just to go to work. And that was really profound, that it took somebody like my friend, a public figure, to die on that road to make it understandable that that road is an urgent need.

Now, there's a petition going around that has wonderful, wonderful ideas, and, of course, they're going to cost money, but it's an investment. Here's what some of the petition says. Listen up. There's some excellent ideas here for the minister. Over 5,300 Manitobans have signed a petition calling for upgrades to Highway 6 to improve safety and reduce accidents.

Highway 6—this is what it says, quote: Highway 6 should have been widened and improved when double-length trailers were approved years ago to travel on that highway. The cost of human life can be equated with lower freight-cost savings. What—oh, I'm reading the wrong thing.

Okay, the petition calls for improvements including passing lanes installed every 50 kilometres. Those passing lanes stop, I believe, at Moosehorn. After that, you're on your own. Good luck trying to pass; when a semi passes you, you get disorientated.

The other recommendations are wider shoulders. Highway 60 has no shoulders. It's very rigid; like, if a new driver happened to hit it, it'll be a single rollover because they will panic. Even I don't even let my daughter drive on that highway just yet, until she has more experience. Rumble strips in highway strips—rumble strips on highway stripes on road lines only exist here in southern Manitoba. More rest areas—there's none; no washroom areas as well—none; and a plan for faster emergency response times.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I truly hope that I would never get onto an—get into an accident on that highway

because it'd be hours and hours of hours until one receives medical attention. So with this petition, I would like to see our members have a good read at it, sign it, have some good ideas for the budget to improve this road that my family and I travel on a weekly basis.

* (11:40)

So with this, I truly support this resolution because it affects my family's life and my community's life.

Ekosi.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to put a few words on the record. You know, contrary to every day where the opposition spends much of their time putting false information on the record, I look forward to putting many facts on the record.

You know, just even in health care, you know, we've talked about over a billion dollars. That's a thousand million dollar—a million dollars a thousand times over in extra spending that our government is going to put to address the health care.

And every one—every one—of those members across the floor voted against Budget 2022 because that is telling us they don't want to see these changes.

You know, when the member from The Pas-Kameesak, that I have the utmost respect for, she mentioned about the slush on the highway. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will never forget 50 years ago coming from Winnipeg via Ste. Rose on a curve where there was slush on the highway where there was a head-on collision. And I had to drive through those wire—between those cars where those dead bodies were, seeing those people as they were, and that was a horrifying experience. So slush on highways is important to get off.

Our government cares about the North and we work with the people to improve education, health care, infrastructure and the many services that we are doing. Just this past February, I joined seven of my colleagues and we travelled to The Pas and met the wonderful people in The Pas.

And they were so happy to see such a large contingent of government personnel come and listen to them, and come and hear a lot of their needs. And that's what's led to Budget 2022. You know, hearing those needs, getting out there. They're very appreciative, you know, and they're showing us their facilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on numerous occasions, despite being in a different constituency, I assisted numerous people in The Pas, Flin Flon, Grand Rapids in addressing some of their concerns. People in the North and rural Manitoba work hard in community centres and groups work hard to make it a better place.

And that's why my fellow colleague from Lac du Bonnet was so very upset when the member from Transcona mocked his constituency and used sarcasm, making fun of names and people in rural Manitoba. We take this serious in looking after—it doesn't matter what colours a particular constituency have, we want to help. We're there to serve all Manitobans.

And I look forward today—because after reminiscing and thinking a little bit, I would hope the member from Transcona has the courage today to stand up in the House and to apologize to the people of Lac du Bonnet, because that was a low blow. I know my colleague took these comments to heart and he's still very upset.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I get into the facts, I also want to commend our Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development (Mr. Fielding) on his work he's doing in the North to work with the forestry and mining industry. You know, this is crucial for economic development and for the North to prosper. Working with industry and Indigenous communities is a win-win for everyone.

The member from Flin Flon proclaims to be—support the industry, but yet, like every one of his colleagues, voted against budget '22. Not only that, but I think he supports his leader and his motto: leave it in the ground. You know, and this is just ridiculous. We've got to start extracting some of those minerals and we want to see the North prosper. So leaving it in the ground is not going to lead to prosperity in the North. What would—I wonder what his community would think if they actually knew that he supports leaving it in the ground.

As our Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) mentioned yesterday, they want one thing, you know, over another thing and they keep coming up with different ideas because they have no plan. This is typical when you don't have a plan, like a pickerel flip-flopping on a dock, you know, hoping to get back in the water to see another day.

Madam—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this lack of vision by the members opposite is something Manitobans don't want. They don't want to go back to the dark days of the NDP, where small business is ignored, physical—or, fiscal responsibility is out of

control, increased taxes looms on the horizon. Now, that's the facts for the living at having the NDP govern.

Our government has given \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at the University College of the North. This is part of our plan to add close to 400 new nursing education seats. And Swan River will benefit from this; I know that we have an LPN program for 20 nurses every two years, this is going to be increased to 20 nurses every year. So that is going to have a huge impact in—on recovering in our health-care systems and fulfilling some of the shortages that exist.

In 2022, our government committed \$812 million—the largest single health-care commitment in Manitoba's history—to improve rural and northern health care. A significant portion of the \$812 million will be used in creation of new intermediate health-care hubs in northern Manitoba. And again, they voted against this budget. They don't want to see this happen. We do, as a PC government. Currently, teams are engaged with Indigenous leadership and stakeholders to help lead the co-plan of these projects.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're excited to be working with our northern partners to reduce the need to travel to Winnipeg. That is a huge hindrance and that is asking a lot, because northern travel is tough, and especially in winters like we had this year. And we are going to allow for better care, closer to home.

Unfortunate—well, thank God we had a majority so we are able to pass 2022 budget, because the members opposite didn't want to see these things come about. Initiatives under the clinical and preventative services set a great foundation for moving our system ahead, especially in northern areas.

This historic investment will build and expand 38 health-care facilities across rural and northern Manitoba, improve access, quality and reliability of care, reduce wait—our wait times, increase our nursing staff, improve diagnostics, emergency medical services and patient transport, create new hospital beds and personal-care homes, use an 'indigenous'—Indigenous partnership strategy that'll be collaborative and co-designed with Indigenous leadership, reduce the need for Manitobans to travel long distances for care by providing more services closer to home.

Our government has doubled the NDP funding of the northern patient transport program, from

\$7.9 million to \$18.1 million. Nearly 20,000 patients a year rely on this program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we always hear the members opposite criticizing about agency nurses—their track record on addressing shortages in the system was dismal. Looking back over their last six years, \$46,977,618 while they were in power. The NDP northern agency nurse spending: 2014, \$2 million, 2015, \$2.2 million. There is challenges, and they encountered them too, but they don't have a solution. They can criticize, they can put false information, we are taking action in 2022 budget.

I want to acknowledge the monumental work done by Manitoba chiefs, councils and the Manitoba First Nations paramedic response team in keeping their communities safe over the course of the 'pandem-demic.' Over the last two years, over 300,000 vaccine doses have been administered to First Nations in Manitoba; 89 per cent are fully vaccinated in our 63 First Nation communities.

It's important to our government that First Nation leadership and health 'professionals' have a direct role in developing and implementing health-care plans that 'prioritize' First Nation people on and off reserve, as well as northern and remote communities.

And in our health system, again, \$7.2 billion total for health-care budget in 2022, something that the members opposite voted against. This is one of the most significant health-care investments in the history of our province; \$1 billion more than the previous government ever invested; \$3.1 million for pandemic supports to protect the lives of Manitobans, and this goes on.

* (11:50)

When you look at Budget 2022, there are so many things that are going to make things so much better in the North. They're going to bring out prosperity, you know, and we heard the Minister of Infrastructure share so many of those things. There's stuff happening in Thompson, and it goes on and on.

And I know there's other people that are going to talk to this, too, but I just want to say, Budget 2022 is the start to getting Manitoba back on track. Our plan on infrastructure is going to address roads—are—\$1.5 billion—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable member's time has expired.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a few comments on this resolution.

There's no question that the current government has largely neglected some of the critical needs of the North, and many of these needs have already been discussed. There is a clear need to really take a fresh look at how health care is delivered in the North. We've got too many people, as has already been raised, who are flying in and out. We haven't done the job that we need to do in Manitoba in developing the local health-care providers. Some communities have done better than others, but there clearly is a significant way to go.

The supports for the North have too often relied primarily on transporting people south. The situation in The Pas at OCN, where they have developed a program for diabetes and, because of the improved nature of that program, have actually been able to deliver much more care in the North and have dramatically reduced the number of flights going south because of diabetes. That's the sort of thing that we need to be doing, which is providing more and better care locally all over northern Manitoba.

When it comes to mining, I asked a question earlier on. There's no doubt that Manitoba has fallen behind in—as a position or as a location for mining activity. I travelled with my colleague, the MLA for St. Boniface, to Thompson before the pandemic and, at that point, when we talked with leaders in the community, they were pointing out that one of the major problems was that the current government had laid off critical people important to the mining industry in northern Manitoba, and this was making and contributing to the problems of improving the situation for mining in northern Manitoba.

So, the government can and should be doing much more in the area of mining. I am pleased to have some money in this year's budget for addressing orphan mine sites. It should be accompanied by a program based at the University College of the North to develop and expand approaches for northern Manitoba for remediating mine sites and returning them to healthy environments.

When it comes to highways, we're all too conscious of the sad and tragic death of Danielle Adams on Highway 6, and yet, we haven't heard a plan yet from this government to address these problematic, difficult conditions on Highway 6 and to make sure that similar accidents don't occur under similar circumstances again.

The member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey) has talked about highways 6, 60, 10, 391 and 394. But there are many other highways, as well, in northern

Manitoba which are omitted and which need attention: Highway 280 to Gillam; Highway 290 north of Gillam; Highway 394 north of Lynn Lake; Highway 396 to Fox Mine; highways 397 and 399 near Lynn Lake; Highway 493 to South Indian Lake; Highway 291 near Flin Flon; Highway 375 to Paint Lake; Highway 283, which goes from The Pas to the Saskatchewan border—that's an important highway which has been neglected for too many years; highways 382, 385, 389—sorry—282, 285, 289 near The Pas; Highway 39, a major road between Flin Flon and Thompson; the Highway 384 to Moose Lake—First Nations communities should not be omitted or forgotten; highways 392, 395, 393 near to and near Snow Lake; Highway 77 to Burrows; Highway 483 to Pelican Rapids; Highway 373 to Norway House; Highway 374 to Cross Lake; Highway 327 to Chemawawin community.

There are a lot more highways that should not have been omitted in this resolution, and, of course, there are also many, many winter roads.

So I see—and I have travelled many times in the North—I see the lack of attention, adequate attention, to highways in the North and, particularly, curiously, to First Nations communities. And there needs to be, oh, I would suggest, a clear 10-year plan on how these are going to be addressed and improved. But we haven't seen that, and we haven't seen it presented in a way that people could have input, people from the North, on what their priorities are.

And I suggest to the minister of highways that he look at working with people in the North when he goes north this summer and developing approach that their input can be taken in moving forward and improving the northern highways and improving the safety of the northern highways.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will end my remarks here. There is lots more I could have said, but I'll give the chance to others.

Thank you.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): Thanks very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak to this resolution.

You know, I'm—simply just not going to agree with the language of this resolution—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Dauphin will have 10 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 28, 2022

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