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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, 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	Assiniboia	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	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Fort Whyte	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 2, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

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

Good morning, everybody. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Would you call for this morning's debate second reading of Bill 202 from 10 until 10:30, and for second reading debate Bill 200 from 10:30 to 11 a.m., please?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 202 from 10 to 10:30, followed by second reading of Bill 200 from 10:30 to 11.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 202—The Louis Riel Act

Madam Speaker: I will now call second reading of bill 2, The Louis Riel Act.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie), that Bill 202, The Louis Riel Act; Loi sur Louis Riel, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kinew: Bill 202 is a simple bill that accomplishes an important function: it gives Louis Riel the honorary title of first Premier of Manitoba.

As we all try to move forward in a spirit of truth and reconciliation with great respect for the Red River Métis—as you recently beseeched us to do in the land acknowledgement at the start of the day—I believe that it is incumbent on all members of this House to ensure the passage of this bill so that we can recognize not only the father of Manitoba, the founder of our province, but indeed somebody who is held in something close to the status of a saint amongst the Métis people of the Red River.

Now, we know that Manitoba's history has had a challenging time in contemplating Mr. Riel's legacy accurately. For far too long, the Red River Métis were not recognized in their founding role in bringing Manitoba into Confederation. However, I believe that we all recognize that now, and this bill would help us take a further step towards enshrining that true recognition of Manitoba's history here in the Legislature, but also across the province.

Now, we know that Mr. Riel did many great things in his work to usher Manitoba into Confederation. Among them, he constituted one of the first democratically elected—in the Westminster style of the British parliamentary system—governments, here in this part of the world.

I do qualify it that sense—in that sense, because I want to make clear to my colleagues across the aisle that, of course, there were many democratic governments in—since time immemorial across these lands, as Indigenous people did practise democratic governance, albeit in a different form than the British parliamentary system that we practise here today.

But Mr. Riel did convene that provisional government, which was duly elected, and he did lead it as the president. And so this is, I think, the crux of the argument as to why we should acknowledge him as the premier today.

We know that my colleague from Tuxedo is the Premier of Manitoba (Mrs. Stefanson). However, in the parlance, in the technical terminology that we use to describe the government of Manitoba, we could also refer to her as the president of the Executive Council. President of the Executive Council, First

Minister, Premier—these terms are all alike in referring to the head of the government of Manitoba.

Mr. Riel was the president of the provisional government, which was the first British-style parliamentary democracy here in Manitoba. Since he was the president, therefore the parallel to today's president of the Executive Council, it seems only fitting that we honour his place in our history by naming him the honorary title of the first Premier of Manitoba.

I'd imagine there will be some questions arising from the other side of the aisle, and so I would just say in advance that we have consulted extensively on this bill, perhaps notably—most notably—with the Manitoba Metis Federation, who are, of course, the voice of the Red River Métis and the government of those folks, in addition to being the descendants of Mr. Riel himself.

And, indeed, I believe that all of us here today as MLAs—in perhaps a metaphoric sense of the word—are descendants of Mr. Riel. We serve in this great Chamber, we are allowed to represent our constituents, we carry out our various democratic functions because of the role that Mr. Riel played in founding this province and ensuring that it would join into Confederation with the rest of Canada.

So, again, I think that this bill is relatively straightforward in what it serves to accomplish in bestowing upon Mr. Riel the honorary title of first Premier and I think that we all recognize as we move forward with truth and reconciliation that this is the sort of thing that we need to do, along with other very important acts, to advance the project of reconciliation in Manitoba and Canada.

Thank you very much. Miigwech. Merci.

Questions

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

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and through you, to the Leader of the Opposition. I'm glad to see him back in this House, and thank you for sharing your diagnosis because it shows the value of vaccines and the importance of being upfront with one's status and such.

I'd like to ask the member, what suggestions does he have to help strengthen the history of Louis Riel and the provisional government in classrooms in Manitoba as a result of this legislation?

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yes, no—I thank the member for the magnanimity of the question posed.

* (10:10)

I do think that—first, I'd like to acknowledge the important work that educators have done in implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. I think teachers and other folks who work in the educational system have done a wonderful job in ensuring that the current and future generations in our province learn more than perhaps you and I did when we went through the schooling system.

I believe that this bill—you know, if you just reflect on some of the opening comments that were made here today—would provide further opportunity to help ensure that that sort of learning and discussion and engagement with Manitoba's history can take place.

If we have young people talking about Mr. Riel's history, talking about his role in government, talking about what does president versus president of the Executive Council versus premier mean, not only will they learn about reconciliation, they'll learn about government as well.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I want to say miigwech to the Leader of the Opposition for this bill, this very important bill, which I would put on the record he has introduced several times.

And so I would ask our colleague here, why is it important to recognize Louis Riel as the first Premier of Manitoba?

Mr. Kinew: I thank my colleague for the question. You know, I think that this is part of us telling a more accurate story about Manitoba's history. And in order for us to do so, it's important that we reflect on the fact that Mr. Riel's role has, in the past, been contested and even denigrated by certain voices, particularly from outside of Manitoba.

But, today, I think we all rightly recognize Mr. Riel as a hero and as the founder of our province. And so I think bestowing this honorary title of first Premier of Manitoba on Mr. Riel reflects the reality of how we see him today, while also hinting at the fact that that legacy has sometimes been contested, or has been—sometimes been challenged by folks.

So I think it strikes a balance between allowing us to talk about the challenging, you know, stains on our collective history, while also reflecting the positive truth that we reflect on today.

Madam Speaker: Are there any questions? Like—the honourable member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward this bill.

I'm just wondering, what else could be done? I know that one of the issues around Riel is that there is virtually no recognition of the Métis in this building. It's—what more would be done? What would be the implications—if we do this, will there be official recognition within this building?

Mr. Kinew: I thank my colleague from St. Boniface.

I want to acknowledge the statue on the south side of the Legislative grounds. I want to acknowledge what I consider to be a very wonderful statue that's also in St. Boniface, that had previously been located on these grounds when I was a kid. Again, I think that this is going to be—the topic that the member raises is something that we are going to continue to grapple with.

And I do think there is more room to reflect the reality of Indigenous contributions to our province, particularly in this Chamber. I know that we pride ourselves on depicting folks who represent intellectual traditions around the world in this Chamber, but we don't see any reflections of the Indigenous intellectual traditions. And so, perhaps, the physical space that we embody is one of those areas we can look at in the future.

So I thank him for the question.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I thank the member for also mentioning both of those statues of Louis Riel. I know my friends and I will often go for what we call a Louis Riel walk, where we park here at the Legislature and we visit the statue and then we hike all the way over, past The Forks, to St. Boniface Cathedral there, and check with that statue and then return here. It's a good walk.

So my question for the member is, about this bill, I notice that he's—he has mentioned curriculum but really no mention of post-secondary educational institutions and the role that they might be able to play. And I was wondering if the member could maybe talk about that, and how he feels that that might also be something that should be included in this bill?

Mr. Kinew: I thank the member for that question.

Prior to politics, I played some part in helping to bring about an Indigenous course requirement at the University of Winnipeg, and so I fully recognize the importance of post-secondary students getting an opportunity to learn a bit of Indigenous content during the course of their studies.

We chose to implement this in such a way that it wasn't just a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, students could choose one piece of Indigenous learning that might fit within their degree program, or within their research interest, what have you.

But I think part of that comes out of the fact that we recognize that with mature students and with people who went to school prior to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, that there is a disparity in what people know about the Indigenous contributions to our province and to our society. So while we definitely have to ensure that the K-to-12 system is playing a strong role there, too, there definitely is a role for the post-secondary sector to do so as well.

Ms. Fontaine: I appreciate all of the answers that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) is putting on the record onto the importance of this bill.

And so I would ask our colleague why it's important for the PC government to finally support this bill?

Mr. Kinew: Well, I think it's important for the PC government to support this bill because we have been on a march through our province's history to more accurately reflecting the founding and important role that Mr. Riel played in delivering our province into Confederation and ensuring that we enjoy the freedoms, the respect for minority language rights, the respect for Indigenous rights, that he and the other members of the provisional government articulated in their list of rights.

And so again, while, you know, over the years various governments of various political stripes, I think, have further advanced the cause, at the historic moment that we are in right now, after the year that we have witnessed a reckoning around reconciliation in our province, I think it's time for us to take this step. And the PC government, being in power, I think should definitely support that at this time.

Madam Speaker: I'm just wondering if the honourable member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lagassé) had a question, as he's on my list.

But if not, I will go to the honourable member for McPhillips.

Mr. Martin: To the Leader of the Opposition, retroactively changing history can be fraught with concerns.

Obviously, sometimes it's the result of new information coming to light which puts historical events into context, and that—if the 'midercus'—if the member can share the title that Louis Riel and his government bestowed upon him at the time, and whether or not history is better served by retaining the title that Louis Riel and his provisional government provided to him at the time versus the proposal he's making today?

Mr. Kinew: I think that this was all anticipated in the opening comment that I gave today, but I can repeat those things. And I would also just point to the text of the bill, which I think is very clear that this is an honorary title. And so we're not talking about revisionist history, here. And let's be real, this is about reflecting the true history of Manitoba.

So again, when we talk about an honorary title, this means that we're adding an honorary designation to Mr. Riel. We're not replacing or rewriting any history at all. Rather, we're reflecting if Mr. Riel saved the—served the same function as he did in his time in our government today, what would we call him? We'd call him the president of the Executive Council. We'd call him the First Minister. We'd call him the Premier. And so therefore this is an accurate step toward rectifying the way that we talk about Manitoba's history, in the name of accuracy.

Ms. Fontaine: Can the—our colleague share with the Chamber this morning how Louis Riel actually helped to advance the rights of marginalized groups here in Manitoba?

Mr. Kinew: Well, I think Mr. Riel is rightly viewed as a freedom fighter by the Red River Métis, and his words and writing over the course of his life, I think, clearly form a huge, huge part of the inspiration for the Métis peoples' advancement of their constitutionally recognized and affirmed rights in Canada.

But let's be clear, the list of rights that Mr. Riel and other members of the provisional government articulated also stood up for francophone, minority language rights, freedom of religion, Indigenous rights and, indeed, the freedoms of all people to live in this land and pursue their full potential.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): It's always a pleasure to participate in the democratic process here in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, before I get into my comments about Bill 202, the Louis Riel day act, just remind everyone as we're entering the fourth wave to practise the fundamentals—obviously, washing one's hands and wearing a mask, keeping one's distance and, more importantly than ever with the discovery of the new Omicron variant, to ensure that not only are you vaccinated but you take that opportunity for a booster vaccine.

* (10:20)

I did hear on the news this morning as I drove in that the uptake for both children five to 11 as well as those individuals—Manitobans 18-plus getting that third booster is very, very favourable. So, again, just on that note, I wish everyone, obviously, a safe and healthy holiday.

Madam Speaker, I had an opportunity this morning over breakfast to talk to my children, and we were talking about what I was doing today. And I noted to my youngest daughter that we were talking about the Louis Riel day act. And I was very impressed, actually, that my youngest daughter knew who Louis Riel was. She actually referred to him as the Father of Confederation and the father of Manitoba.

So, you know what, here's an opportunity to directly engage, I guess, for lack of a better word, a participant in the education system and to get an understanding of their perspective of the changes in the curriculum, in terms of highlighting some of the issues that—in the history, in the tragic history, that we as a government, both provincially and nationally, have imposed on Indigenous peoples, on Métis and Inuit.

Madam Speaker, as we look forward and we look to the issue of truth and reconciliation, I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition's legislation this morning. I think it ties in quite nicely to previous legislation. I think it was passed down, going from memory here, maybe 10 years ago that the former government designated the third Monday in February as Louis Riel Day.

That was an opportunity, Madam Speaker—I've gone through the notes in the passage of that legislation. The idea then, according to the government, the provincial government, the then-NDP government, was to, obviously, highlight and use the specific day, Louis Riel Day, the third Monday of February, as a day and an opportunity to educate Manitobans about the role Louis Riel had in the foundation of Manitoba.

And so we need to ask ourselves, Madam Speaker, when we take a look at history, when we take a look at the wrongs that we have collectively made, when we take a look at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the recommendations of the commission, we need to ask ourselves, how do we affix a modern lens to some of the issues and some of the tragedies that have occurred in the past?

We've seen this, obviously, with the discovery of unmarked graves, and it's called for a reconciliation between many individuals coming to terms with our own history, whether it's a history that might be affiliated through our church, if that church was involved in the residential school program.

Also, there also may be other issues that we see, obviously, in the west coast with the Wet'suwet'en and in the land claims—in the outstanding land claims there. The activity and the interest among Canadians when it comes to Indigenous issues, when it comes to Métis issues and when it comes to Inuit issues, I think, is at a peak, Madam Speaker, and long overdue.

We do know that Indigenous peoples and Métis and Inuit have been historically marginalized, Madam Speaker, and so we need to look at opportunities to highlight successes and highlight history. And there are times when, as I noted, that history may be ugly, but we need to be prepared as citizens, as MLAs and as all individuals to look at our collective history—the good, the bad and the ugly—and we need to take stock of that and see, are there ways we can bring this history forward in a respectful manner.

So in the case of Louis Riel, as I've noted, and as the Leader of the Opposition has noted, he's spoken—he indicates he's consulted at length with the Red River Métis, Madam Speaker, which is obviously a bit of a name change—as allowed. So we do see that changing terminology and the organization of which is, obviously, promoting this legislation itself. It's just recently changed its own terminology to better reflect their history. So there is an active and a live demonstration of history being reworked and reworded to better reflect the origins of.

Now, obviously, the Red River Métis have seen a bit of a—I guess, for lack of a better word, a bit of a jurisdictional struggle. I followed with interest alleged Métis groups popping up on the east coast and such, Madam Speaker, just simply affixing the name Métis to their title in some spurious 'ancestral' ties. And this truly is unfortunate and highlights the need for a—as we already have—a Louis Riel Day and for the addition of information about the first provincial government, about the Father of Confederation into our educational curriculum.

When you can have individuals—and there was just a case, there was a professor, and her name escapes me, at the University of Saskatchewan who was recently outed—for lack of a better terminology—for faking her Aboriginal ancestry, Madam Speaker. And for the University of Saskatchewan, I do believe, she was actually an Indigenous consultant professor at the the university. And it took years and it took a number of individuals to bring forward and challenge that history of—that alleged history of that individual.

So we see it continuing today, Madam Speaker, people trying to steal: steal other peoples' credentials, steal other peoples' identities. And that is why we need to ensure, as MLAs, as parents and as educators, that we are providing the proper historical context of Manitoba, of Canada and of the world.

And yes, as the Leader of the Opposition did note, much of this building is reflective of the primary culture that built this building, and yes, things absolutely do need and will continue to change, Madam Speaker. In bringing forward legislation like Bill 202, the Louis Riel day act, I think, and it's an important component in that concept and in that journey that we have collectively towards truth and reconciliation as a government and as individuals.

And so as we began this session with the long overdue—the 151-year overdue land acknowledgment which brought in and specifically referenced the role of the Red River Métis in the—or, sorry, in the creation and as a component of our government, Madam Speaker, again, allows us to continue that journey towards reconciliation.

It will never be over. It is not for me as an MLA or as an individual to make the determination as to exactly how reconciliation looks, more importantly, as to when it will end, if ever. It is a journey, it is a process. It is incumbent upon all of us as individuals to work towards that common goal.

And so to the member and to the Leader of the Opposition, I very much thank them for bringing forward this bill, for sharing those remarks and that—for their consultation with the Red River Métis. I think part of the role of elected officials is to bring legislation forward as private members. And part of that role is to educate all of us as individuals, Madam Speaker, because we all come from different backgrounds. We may come from different provinces, we may come from different countries, and so we may not be exposed to everything that is being discussed here in the House, especially in terms of our historical context.

And so legislation and proposed legislation like Bill 202 allows us and spurs us on as MLAs to do our homework when we see these legislations; to have those conversations with our family, to have those conversations with our colleagues and to do our own research to make sure that we are being part of truth and reconciliation; that we are being accurate in terms of displaying the Father of Confederation, and whether or not the creation and existence of a singular day, Louis Riel Day, in the third February is enough, Madam Speaker.

Clearly, with the introduction of this legislation, members opposite are suggesting more needs to be done. I don't disagree. Again, as I said earlier on, Madam Speaker, the journey for truth and reconciliation is just that—a journey.

So, with those very brief comments, Madam Speaker, I thank you, I thank the member for bringing forth the legislation. I wish everyone a healthy and happy holiday season. Thank you.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I was hoping, perhaps, a member of another caucus might want to speak, but I'm happy to do so.

You know, my message, I think, for the Leader of the Opposition when I first read the bill was that we need to look at a broader perspective, perhaps. And I really do appreciate the efforts that he's made in—

* (10:30)

Madam Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 10 minutes remaining.

**Bill 200—The Orange Shirt Day
Statutory Holiday Act
(Various Acts Amended)**

Madam Speaker: As for—as announced previously, it is now 10:30 a.m. and we will be dealing now with

second reading of Bill 200, The Orange Shirt Day Statutory Holiday Act (Various Acts Amended).

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I move, seconded by the member from Fort Rouge, that Bill 200, The Orange Shirt Day Statutory Holiday Act (Various Acts Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Bushie: Orange Shirt Day is a recognition, is a symbol, is a sign of Indigenous people, and it's a sign of the history—a dark history, a dark chapter in Canadian history. When we—you hear the term Orange Shirt Day, residential schools, reconciliation, all of those are very interchangeable conversations to have amongst all of Canadians, not just Indigenous people. It's not a conversation that's exclusive to Indigenous people here in Manitoba, here in Canada. It's all-inclusive of everybody. It's an awareness that needs to be brought forward.

In order—Orange Shirt Day in 2013, it was brought to the forefront. In 2017, it was brought forth by the member from Fort Rouge, to be able to recognize that day here, as the official day, in Manitoba. Now, we are going further down that road, further down that conversation, getting more in-depth to the awareness and the reconciliation. Now we want to be able to bring forth that as a statutory holiday here in Manitoba.

And it's not just a simple holiday to have a day off of work, a day off of school. It's to now engage those conversations. It's for everybody, across all ethnic backgrounds, across all demographics here in Manitoba, here in Canada, to have those conversations. Perhaps a question coming across—we can anticipate some of the questions coming across as to why this is brought forward, why this is brought forward today. My answer to why is it brought forward today is, why was this brought forward years ago, decades ago?

Who did we consult over this? We consulted Indigenous people, we consulted Canadians and, most importantly, we consulted residential school survivors to be able to say and ask and bring those stories forward. There will come a day here in Manitoba, here in Canada, where the last attendee and the last survivor of residential school passes away, but we'll forever—forever—feel those intergenerational impacts of residential schools, of colonization, of assimilation, of extermination or attempted extermination and of that

genocide that participated in—that happened in residential schools. And we can't let that conversation end. We can't let that conversation stop. And we can't limit what that conversation entails.

So, Madam Speaker, bringing this forward as a statutory holiday will forever have that conversation survive, forever have those stories and those impacts of the residential school system survive and be told, because they need to be told.

The discovery of the mass grave in Kamloops wasn't a surprise. It wasn't a secret. It was a disclosure and it was something that residential survivors and their families knew existed. They knew it was there. So they've continued this conversation, and for decades, they had to have those conversations in shame and in secret.

So here we are today, with Indigenous issues at the forefront, reconciliation as a buzzword of the day among non-Indigenous people, here in Manitoba. So what we need to do is we need to continue that, so that's a conversation that always happens, that's a conversation that continues to happen and we continue to educate not just ourselves, not just our elders, but our generations to come on the impacts of that residential school system.

So Phyllis Jack Webstad is a symbol: her orange shirt that was taken from her as she was getting ready to attend residential school is a symbol. It's a symbol of something that was stripped away from Indigenous peoples here in Manitoba, here in Canada; a symbol of something that was just a simple thing of what she believed in. It was an article of clothing, but that was just a start. It was a symbol, then it was the clothing, then it was the culture, it was the language, it was the being able to practise who you were as a culture and what you believed in.

Most society does not truly understand what happened at residential schools. I, for one, am a family member of residential school attendees, residential school survivors, but I still can't stand here and say I totally understood what went on in residential schools because I did not attend. But those stories that come out of that residential school need to be told.

I reflect back to my own daughters who ask me those questions, who ask questions about what happened, why. That's a—to me that's a very simple question, is why, but it's a very complicated answer because then you're trying to explain to children, and explain perhaps to generations to come, as to why there was an attempted 'similation' of your own

people. And it's something that's—that just can't happen. Anywhere else in the world this is unacceptable, why is this acceptable in Canada?

So to bring forward the Orange Shirt Day statutory holiday will continue those conversations. And those conversations need to happen, and they need to happen forever—there is no end date. I've heard members in the Chamber here, across the way: get over it. And I asked in my Throne Speech response, well, what is that—what's that timeline, then? Is there a magic day where we're supposed to get over this? Because it's not there and it's never going to be there because these conversations have to continue always, so we learn from those experiences, we get better from those experiences, not just as Indigenous people but as Manitobans and Canadians as a whole.

So the TRC Calls to Action, the 94 Calls to Action, some are being acted on to a certain degree, some are not, and at the end of the day, we need to do more. We need to do more as Manitobans. We need to do more. And it doesn't just fall on Indigenous peoples to be able to address this issue. This is society as a whole that needs to be able to address that.

So, Madam Speaker, TRC call No. 62 calls on being able to educate people, to educate and empower educators to be able to bring this forth. So that's what needs to happen and it is starting to happen. It's beginning to happen in our schools and we see educators talking about it as a topic.

When I went to school, Madam Speaker, it was something that was just not discussed. It was almost like, let's put this dark, shameful history away, put it to bed, let's not talk about it again. And now, as Indigenous people, we are coming forward. We are now embedded in the education system, in the justice system, in the governments, to be able to say, this conversation has to happen.

So to bring forward this as a statutory holiday will forever bring that awareness and forever have those discussions. It's not a day off; it's not a day to go and close up your cabin for the year, to go out and, you know, go to the movies, go play golf, go to a sporting event. It's about engaging those conversations.

This past September 30th, Madam Speaker, I took that opportunity to sit there and talk with my children and be able to say, this is why we're doing this. And that's what needs to happen, and those conversations need to happen across Manitoba, across Canada. And I would encourage members opposite to support this

bill in that way and to help engage and do your part to keep those conversations going.

On September 30th, I was fortunate enough to be able to have my children sit there and have a conversation. If we were in the residential school system, my children would have been gone. My children would not have been home to have those conversations. My children were—would not have been home to experience their home community, to share with their family, to share stories, to wake up with their families, to go to bed with their families. They would have not had that opportunity if we were in the role of residential school and that system continued on.

So we're at a point now in society where now we're not over that. We're not past that because we never will be. Those intergenerational impacts will be felt for a millennium and it's important that we always continue to have that discussion.

But at the same time, Madam Speaker, we need to learn from that. We need to get back to where we are. We see those impacts reflected every day. The child-welfare system, the homelessness, the addictions—those are all intergenerational impacts of the residential school system on Indigenous people.

* (10:40)

And it's easy for members across the way or society to say, oh, you know, that's just how you are. Why don't you go out there and better yourselves? It's been driven into our elders, into our ancestors, to be able to think that we're not worth that, and we are. We're absolutely worth everything to society, everything to our culture.

And I applaud those residential school survivors. I applaud Phyllis Jack Webstad for being able to bring forth her story so that story will survive, and that symbol will survive as the resilience of Indigenous people, because that resilience is in all of us. As Indigenous people, we will be here, we will persevere.

And in the spirit of reconciliation, I do ask members across the way to support this piece of legislation to be able to bring this forward.

Miigwech.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party, this is to be followed by a rotation

between the parties, each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I want to thank the member for bringing this topic forward. I think it's important, something for us to discuss. And I appreciate how he was ending there, when he was talking about the story that gave birth to Orange Shirt Day.

So I just want to give him an opportunity—because he didn't get to it in his 10 minutes and I can understand why there's a lot to talk about—but I just want you to have the opportunity to share with this Chamber, once again, the story of Phyllis and why we call Orange Shirt Day, Orange Shirt Day—what's behind it, and what did she experience, and who—how did that relate to her life and what it meant to her?

So I just want to give the member the floor to be able to share that story with all of us once again.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): When we talk about the stories as to why things are the way they are today, those are honestly, Madam Speaker, uneducated questions, because members opposite should know some of those stories. They should be bringing those stories forward to their constituents, to their families. They should already be taking the leadership role to be able to say, this is what we want to do, this is why, this is the way it is.

We shouldn't be sitting here having to educate members opposite on what Manitoba contributed and what Canada contributed to the residential school system.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I want to thank my colleague for bringing forward this bill, a very important bill that recognizes this day as a day of educating Manitobans.

So I'm going to ask my colleague, why is it important to educate Manitobans on this day about residential schools and the history?

Mr. Bushie: I thank the member from Point Douglas, my colleague, for the question.

It's important to bring forward this piece legislation, to bring forward that awareness so that conversation continues, that conversation will always happen. And our younger generation can then carry those stories and then carry that legacy that was brought forward and instituted upon Indigenous people, to be able to bring that forward and continue that discussion so that those stories are never forgotten.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member very sincerely for bringing forward this legislation.

I'm curious if the member could talk to us a little bit about why September 30th should specifically be a statutory day and what impact this would have here in our province.

Mr. Bushie: I thank the member for the question.

September 30th, and the month of September and getting down to September 30th, is a day that most would be taken away to school. That's the month and the time of year that most would be taken away to residential schools. So it's important to be able to recognize and acknowledge when those times happened and being able to pin it down to an exact day. It almost pins down to a period of time.

But in order for—to be able to bring this and recognize this as a day, September 30th was brought about because of—that's the time of year and that's the time of the school year where most people were taken away to residential school.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I thank the honourable member for bringing this legislation forward and for making that actually profound comment that soon all the residential school survivors will be passed and it's incumbent upon us to keep their history alive.

Madam Speaker, the member made note that this, obviously—the goal here is not to have a holiday, to close one's cabin. Unfortunately, we had a situation where a Prime Minister did, in fact, take a holiday to go surfing on the west coast.

So, I'm asking the member, how do we ensure that this day doesn't become just another holiday to go surfing or to close up one's cabin? How do we ensure that the meaning that—and the education that the member is trying to share is translated through this bill?

Mr. Bushie: Well, my first response is do your part. Do your part to be able to continue to have those conversations and have that dialogue. It's important to be able to—for Manitoba as a society and for us as legislators and governing bodies and public servants here in Manitoba—to do our part to have those conversations and engage that, not only just within ourselves, within our families, in the school system, in the justice system, in society as a whole.

So I would say, do your part. I can't speak to the Prime Minister. I would say, do your part.

Mrs. Smith: Could the member tell us how important this would be for residential school survivors—and I know my colleague talked about, you know, some passing, some still here—to see this day and to see this government actually recognize this as a holiday here in Manitoba?

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

It would be about recognition. It would be about being able to say, my stories are being heard, my life matters. And that's what's important, Madam Speaker, to be able to bring forward those conversations, those discussions, to let those residential school survivors and their families know that that legacy—that shameful legacy—here in Canada and here in Manitoba will not be forgotten and forever their stories will be told and will be heard.

Mr. Teitsma: I'm not sure what to make of the member's response to my previous question.

I think it's important to share those stories and to remember them. I'm certainly familiar with it. But for the sake of everybody here, I will retell a bit of it.

That Phyllis Webstad went to mission school for one year in '73-74. She had just turned six years old and lived with her grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. They never had much money, but somehow her grandmother managed to buy her a new outfit to go to mission school.

She remembers going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny new orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, it was bright and exciting and made her excited to be going to school. When she got to school, they stripped her and took away her clothes, including the orange shirt. She could never wear it again. All the little children were crying and no one cared.

That's her story, and I think it's important—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Bushie: I guess that just goes to show the member from Radisson—that he can read a book, for one. That he can be able to bring forward that insulting way of being able to raise this awareness. Being able to not sit here and ask a proper question of what that is rather than try and stall the time to be able to say, I put words on the record.

It's being able to be able to bring forward that conversation with Phyllis Jack Webstad, have you had that conversation? That's the question maybe the

member opposite should ask himself. Did you have those conversations? Because I think not.

Mrs. Smith: I'd like the member to tell us about the intergenerational impacts that still exist around culture, language and traditions that we see here in the province, and how this bill would advance those within education and even with our colleagues.

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

To be able to bring this forward and feeling those impacts—as I mentioned in my previous comments, the intergenerational impacts are being felt, not only by residential school survivors and their families, but extended families. We can see the overrepresentation in the child-welfare system by Indigenous people, the overrepresentation in the homeless population by Indigenous people, the overrepresentation in the justice system by Indigenous people. And that's the intergenerational impacts felt by the residential school system.

So we need to be able to have those conversations so we can start working towards truthful reconciliation and meaningful reconciliation, because Indigenous people want that reconciliation, but governments and government just like this are taking advantage of the fact that Indigenous peoples will—are willing to give them that chance.

So I ask them, let's support this resolution and let's get that—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

* (10:50)

Mr. Martin: To the member, I understand the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Call to Action No. 80 was a creation of a national statutory holiday, which was fulfilled. So I'm just wondering if the member can share the conversations he may have had with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the necessity to bring in a statutory holiday on this bill.

Mr. Bushie: The answer is simple. Provincial labour laws are the ones that cover the statutory holiday, so being able to do that—again, this is a government trying to pawn off their responsibilities to the federal government. Let's get there and do our part, because we all know that within the province of Manitoba, to provincially legislate that holiday, that needs to be done at this level.

So that's what we're asking that conversation to have. We're being able to ask and say, let's do our part. Again, we can't pawn off that responsibility to the

federal government and say, let them do it, let them cover Indigenous issues. We need to deal with that in Manitoba here today.

Mrs. Smith: I'm wondering if the member can tell us about some of the recommendations from the TRC report and how this bill aligns with those recommendations.

Mr. Bushie: Of course, bill-TRC Call to Action No. 62 calls to educate the public. Bill-TRC action No. 80 helps to establish that holiday. So let's do a combination of and continue on with those conversations, and let's get there and do our part plus some. It's being able to our part and call those TRC, those 94 Calls to Action, and let's implement them here.

Let's be the leader. Let's don't be the follower. Let's be the leader in Canada, let's be the leader here in Manitoba and let's implement all those TRC Calls to Action, including orange holiday statutory today.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I'm not sure why what I said seemed to frustrate the member. It certainly wasn't my intent. And I do think that Phyllis Webstad's story is important and it's important to share—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: —and it's important to tell. I tell it to my children and—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: —as I was saying, Madam Speaker, the story of Phyllis Webstad is important, and it's important to tell and not to—I mean, to speak poorly of somebody who's telling that story. I'm not sure where the member was going with that, but I do tell that story to my children. I do take that story very much to heart.

I think that the legacy of the residential schools is not entirely behind us, and I think the member who put forward this bill would agree with me. The legacy of the residential schools is still alive in our society today. We still see its effects.

He said he'd—he's seen its effects in the criminal justice system, he's seen its effects in the distribution of wealth within our nation, and I would agree with him on that. And I think, you know, we can also see its effects in the attitudes of people who still, to this

day, attempt to prevent the transmission of cultural beliefs and values from one generation to another.

And as Murray Sinclair noted, that is something that should not happen. That is something that should not be done and nobody should be attempting to disrupt the relationship that parents have with their children in that way, that grandparents can have with their children, and that cultures within Canada can have and can continue to possess a unique identity. And core to that identity is the beliefs that go with it.

So our government, and especially under our new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), remain committed to advancing reconciliation. And we're going to do that in concrete and tangible ways, not just with words but with actions as well. Some meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples is what you'll see from this government, and that's something that I'm proud of and that's something that I call on my own government to be committed to and to make progress on, because I think it's so important.

You know, and sometimes we do things that, you know, maybe don't get the attention that they deserve. I'm a techie. Some of you may know I like IT and I've got a computer science degree. And so I see, you know, for example, the effect of access to high-speed Internet as something that can lift communities that are currently experiencing economic difficulties and get them to be able to participate globally in a meaningful way.

I think that's an action—it's concrete, and it's meaningful, and it's going to have a beneficial impact for communities across our North. And our government, after many months of effort, perhaps years—I think the Minister for Central Services can tell you some stories there—but we—we're moving forward with that, and that makes me hopeful as I look forward to the years to come and what that might mean.

I know I have lots of contacts in the software development industry in Winnipeg and actually across Canada and even in the States, and, you know, COVID-19 has kind of had an impact on that industry, and I think one that can be beneficial, where employees are realizing that they can work remotely and that they can work in the town of their choosing, the place where they want to be.

And I think when I apply that improvement to what might happen with our northern communities—with our on-reserve communities—when they have access to reliable high-speed Internet, we're going to be able to have employment opportunities blossom all

over the North, and even educational opportunities, health opportunities.

These all talk about—this all points towards what reconciliation looks like. And I think that's the point of Orange Shirt Day. That's the point of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: —is not just to talk about reconciliation, but to take concrete actions. And I think when I look at the concrete actions—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Teitsma: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

When I look at the concrete actions, that's what makes me the most hopeful. I think we've seen that federally. We've seen the opposite, where you have a Prime Minister who made a big show of passing the statutory holiday called the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. He talked a lot about it, and he wanted to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: —he wanted to be seen as recognizing what's important for reconciliation, but then when it comes to action, he's been falling short.

So, the action that he's been doing—I think about what he did on the day itself, you know, heading out to Tofino for a day with the family. And there can be good reasons for him to want to do that, but he needs to understand that he can't just do that—that he needs to show a leadership role within our country.

And that leadership role needs to be demonstrated—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma:—with action. I think about the commitment that our Prime Minister made—I think in his first election, if I recall correctly, and I've lost track of how many times he's had to go around that electoral process, but I think in his first election—he promised to put an end to boil watered advisories on Indigenous reserves across our country—and to ensure that First Nations had access to clean drinking water, something that certainly here in Winnipeg, you know, I've had ever since I was born, and that's something that we take for granted. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: And so I think it's extraordinarily important—[interjection]—it's extraordinarily important to ensure that your actions—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: —that your actions are reflective of your words. They need to be aligned with each other. They do. And you certainly want to ensure that your actions line up with your words.

And so as we talk about this day, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—

* (11:00)

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have two minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 1—Calling Upon the Provincial Government to Immediately Launch an Inquiry into Manitoba's Pandemic Response

Madam Speaker: The hour's now 11 a.m. and the time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on calling upon the provincial government to immediately launch an inquiry into Manitoba's pandemic response—[interjection]—order—brought forward by the honourable member for Union Station.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I move, seconded by the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew),

WHEREAS Manitoba had some of the worst pandemic outcomes in the country and some of the highest mortality rates among the provinces; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government made cuts to healthcare before the pandemic by slashing operating funding, firing nurses, cutting ICU beds, closing emergency rooms and clinics and privatizing air ambulance transport; and

WHEREAS frontline healthcare workers were previously sounding the alarm about unsafe staffing levels, burnout and patient safety, the situation became further exacerbated during the pandemic leading to dangerous staffing ratios in the healthcare system; and

WHEREAS fifty-seven ICU patients were sent to other provinces during the third wave as the ICU system was overwhelmed despite claims by the Provincial Government that the province had adequate ICU capacity; and

WHEREAS hundreds of seniors died during the second wave, with many suffering from neglect and isolation; and

WHEREAS the surgery and diagnostic backlog due to challenges posed by the pandemic has grown to over 136,000 people, delaying detection and treatment of illnesses and forcing thousands to live in pain and discomfort; and

WHEREAS businesses were openly critical of the Provincial Government's supports as many closed, while others took on high levels of debt; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government failed to implement a comprehensive paid sick leave program or release workplace transmission information to keep Manitobans safe and healthy; and

WHEREAS Manitobans are owed the right to examine the failures of the Provincial Government's response during the pandemic through an independent expert-led inquiry to learn from the mistakes and to make recommendations for the future of Manitoba's healthcare system.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately launch an independent, expert-led inquiry into Manitoba's pandemic response. [interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I'm very grateful for the opportunity to rise in the House today and to be able to reiterate our call for this government to launch an expert-led independent public inquiry into their handling of the pandemic response.

This is incredibly important for many reasons, but I think it's important for us to focus on one area in particular, and that is the people who have been impacted by COVID-19 in this pandemic. Throughout this pandemic, we have had, as a jurisdiction here in Manitoba, some of the worst health-care outcomes in the entire country—at times, some of the worst outcomes in North America.

Manitoba had a unique opportunity, actually, at the beginning of this pandemic, and I think that people often forget that. We saw our first presumptive case of COVID-19 much later than other jurisdictions, even other jurisdictions within our own country, and, therefore, we had the opportunity of time.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We had a chance here in Manitoba to learn from what was happening in other places in the country, across the country—sorry, in our country, across North America and the world, across the globe, to apply the lessons learned from other places to our decision making here.

Unfortunately, what we saw happening very quickly is not only did this government fail to learn from what was happening in other places and to apply those lessons here but we actually saw what many folks, many health-care experts had been warning us of happen during this pandemic, and that is that decisions made leading up to the pandemic actually impacted our ability here in Manitoba to respond.

And so when we made this call for the government to initiate this inquiry, we specifically identified that it is critical for the focus to not just be on the decisions made during this pandemic but to ensure that there is scrutiny and assessment of the decisions made leading up to it, because although Manitoba had the opportunity of time to get prepared, what we did not have was a government that treated health care, health-care workers with the attention and the investment and the respect they deserved before COVID-19 reached our borders—which is why, unfortunately, Manitoba had some of the worst outcomes across the country. Because leading up to this pandemic, we had some of the worst decisions made in health care in the country, right here in Manitoba.

So this inquiry is an opportunity for all of us to be able to learn and apply those lessons to the future of health care in Manitoba—to ensure that the people who have been most affected by this pandemic here in our own province can trust that, moving forward, we are equipped with the data, the evidence, the information to better staff our health-care system, to better prepare and equip our health-care system, so that we can respond to future issues that arise.

When we think about how important this inquiry is, we have to be able to think about some of the most unfortunate outcomes that we have seen during pandemic. Right now, every single person in this Chamber likely knows—or is impacted in some way, shape or form—by the fact that we have a surgical and diagnostic backlog of over 136,000 people waiting.

As much as this government would have people believe that because it's a global pandemic, everything that's bad that's happening is somehow not their responsibility, we know that that's false. Consistently, public health expertise have told us and informed us that different decisions could have been made—and

should have been made—at different stages during this pandemic, ahead of every single wave that we've seen so far, and that had those decisions been made differently, we wouldn't be in the position where we have 136,000-plus people waiting for surgical procedures or important diagnostic tests. We wouldn't see a nurse vacancy rate of over 2,000. We wouldn't hear from EMS across the province that that system is on the verge of collapsing. We wouldn't have had the devastating outcomes in personal-care homes that we saw in the second wave.

Time and time again, there have been opportunities for this government to listen to the voices of experts and they have failed to do so. What we're calling for with this inquiry is for the government to change their decision making, finally, and start listening to those expert voices, and allow for those voices to help inform how we move forward as a province. And I know that that's a decision that would be uncomfortable for this particular government, and for this particular Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), who was the minister of Health during a time where we sorely needed, we desperately needed decisions to be made around staffing, decisions to be made around investing in ICU capacity, in order to make sure that we could respond during this fourth wave that we knew would be coming at some point.

This is a chance for this government to show all Manitobans that they understand the importance of prioritizing the voices of experts, those folks who have been navigating this pandemic, and they understand, actually, a fundamental public health principle, which is to be able to reflect and be critical and assess decision making in a crisis during or after an incident and to apply that lens to strategy and policy making moving forward.

We certainly—we know that public health policies and decision making and strategic planning looks very different now in Manitoba than it did 50 years ago, and we need to make sure that years from now—that months from now, our planning and strategizing looks different in the way that it will help us as a province moving forward.

Ultimately, we bring this forward in the hope and in the spirit of protecting Manitobans, and in making sure that we have all the tools that we need to be able to do so. I remember at the early stages of this pandemic the former premier, Brian Pallister, making the comment that the government can't protect citizens, can't protect Manitobans—which was

interesting, given their whole slogan, Protect Manitoba.

But, you know, on this side of the House, we take a much different position. We recognize that, as elected representatives, we have a responsibility to do everything that we can in order to protect the citizens we represent. This expert-led, independent, public inquiry will ensure that we have the information to better be able to do that.

And so we are making this call. We are, you know, asking—demanding this government to follow through and to initiate this inquiry immediately, prioritize the voices of health-care workers, public health experts, all of the folks who they've refused to listen to meaningfully to this point, they can change course right now and prioritize those voices in this inquiry.

* (11:10)

And, lastly, I would say that, you know, we've heard from doctors, nurses, allied health-care professionals. We've heard from Manitobans who have lost loved ones in personal-care homes. We've heard from Manitobans who are currently waiting for important life-altering surgeries. We've heard from students. We've heard from educators, small-business owners. We've heard from Manitobans across the board: they want this inquiry to happen.

I got so many messages after our announcement was made calling for the government to make this decision—from citizens from different sectors, backgrounds, experiences—saying thank you, thank you for making that call and demand. This is what we need to see happen.

And so I ask that all members of this House support this resolution so that we can collectively move forward in this pandemic, learn from what—the decisions that were made leading up to it and during it, and immediately start making plans and working collectively to ensure that we're better equipped to respond to crisis in the future and that we can build a strong health-care system and province—stronger province—for all Manitobans.

Thank you.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 10 minutes will be held and then questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another party, any subsequent questions may—must follow a rotation

between parties, and each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answers shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I imagine that the member opposite is aware of the former NDP government's abysmal record on health care. For example, under the previous NDP government, Manitoba's average ER wait times were some of the longest in the country.

And recognizing this fact, does the member not agree that there should an inquiry into the 17 years of the NDP neglect of the health-care system in this province?

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I thank the member for that question.

I think that the member for Lagimodière, his question really reflects a deep concern that Manitobans have, and it's this government's lack of willingness and ability to focus on their own decision making, to focus on the fact that they have been in government since 2016 and that it's their decision making that has gotten us to a crisis-level point in our health-care system, and focusing on what they need to do in order to correct course.

And so I would encourage the member to start reflecting on his decisions and his party's decisions since 2016 and instill some hope and confidence in Manitobans that they're going to make decisions to make things better.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I'd like to ask the member that to—if they can identify some of the perspectives that they would like the inquiry to incorporate, both from those carrying out the inquiry and the voices they would like to hear?

MLA Asagwara: Thank my colleague from Wolseley for the question.

This inquiry is an opportunity to ensure that public health expertise can, in an independent manner, contribute their voices, their learnings from this pandemic and leading up to it, to ensuring that we have a strong plan moving forward.

To be able to reflect on what happened during this pandemic—whether it's legal expertise, public health expertise by way of doctors, nurses, allied health-care professionals—it is important that we have experts across the board, especially those from the front lines of this pandemic contributing their expertise to the inquiry.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask the member from Union Station this question: To date, the public record shows that there have been 1,321 deaths—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) that he should be wearing a sports coat or a suit coat.

Mr. Gerrard: No, my apology.

My question is this. There have been 1,321 deaths of Manitobans from COVID, according to the public record. How many of these deaths does the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) feel could have been avoided if this—there had been proper preparation and proper operation of the health-care system during the pandemic?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for River Heights for the question.

It is—it's important for all of us to reflect on the fact that each and every one of those numbers is a person; it's a family, it's a community that has been affected by this pandemic in the most devastating of ways. And, you know, despite what some members opposite, the—one of the former ministers of Health said, comments made during the second wave that deaths in personal-care homes were inevitable, we know that that statement is wrong. We know public health experts have condemned that statement, that different decisions should have been made that would have mitigated some of the devastating outcomes that we've seen in Manitoba during this pandemic.

And so, every single—

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

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): We have some construction outside my window, so I hope that's not interfering with the sound here.

Unless the member is claiming the pandemic is over and gone, can the member opposite acknowledge that we are still in the midst of a pandemic? Do they think it is appropriate to use the valuable time of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals as reference to conduct this probe?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for the question.

Absolutely, I think that it's important that this inquiry start immediately, as soon as possible. Yes, we're in a fourth wave. But there are things that we

can learn from this inquiry that can help us immediately. There's nothing to say that what information is garnered during this process can't be applied to decision making right now in our health-care system.

And there are other jurisdictions that are moving forward with their own public inquiries because they recognize the importance of doing so, in order to make sure they can make decisions that help the public as soon as possible.

Ms. Naylor: Related to the request for the inquiry, certainly one of things that we're seeing as a result of everything that's happened during the pandemic is the long surgical delays. Recently, the current Health Minister offered thoughts and prayers for people who were waiting.

I'm wondering if the member from Union Station has any more substantive suggestions?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member from Wolseley for the question.

I heard from a number of citizens after that remark was made by the Minister of Health, and they were incredibly disappointed and, quite frankly, hurt because there had been more than an abundance of suggestions and ideas brought forward by doctors and nurses and experts in our health-care system about how we can address this surgical backlog.

We only have to look west to British Columbia to see strategies that were very successful in bringing down their backlog. And so this government has no reason, no excuse, as to why they've waited so long to do anything at all to address this here in Manitoba.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): The member opposite states on a regular basis that this government has failed to properly fund and manage the provincial health-care system.

But I'm wondering if the member opposite would acknowledge that this government committed \$6.98 billion in health care this year alone, the highest ever in Manitoba history, which is approximately, by the way, \$755 million more than the previous NDP government ever did?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for the question.

The member just did something very interesting. It's something that each previous failed former minister of Health has done. It's something that the former premier, Brian Pallister, did. It's something that we're seeing from the current PC leader. It's this

propensity of making announcements that are not attached to any plans or action whatsoever.

So just announcing dollar amounts does not equate to actions taken to invest meaningfully in our health-care system or ensure there are strong plans in place to effect positive and necessary change. So it's unfortunate to see the member continue to repeat the same failed patterns that have hurt Manitobans.

Ms. Naylor: I'd like to ask the member for Wolseley if the PCs used—sorry. I'm not giving up my seat any time soon.

I'd like to ask the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), if the PCs don't call an inquiry, why will it be important that the NDP does so immediately after they form government?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) for the question.

* (11:20)

If the—if this PC government chooses not to call an inquiry, one thing, I think it will further erode public trust and confidence in their ability to do what is necessary for our health-care system to be equipped with the information needed to make the best strategies and plans moving forward for Manitobans.

We're committed to doing so because we understand the importance of learning from crises, from learning from incidents like this, and ensuring that we are equipped with the education, the research, the expertise to better plan and resource Manitoba and position our province to have a health-care system that works on behalf of all of its citizens, which is something that Manitobans want and need.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Our government's entire approach to COVID-19 has been rooted in the advice and direction of our medical professionals.

Does the member opposite doubt the expert advice and guidance our government has been provided?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for the question.

Months ago, I made very clear that the government making statements like that is essentially throwing them under the bus and not being accountable to their own decision making as a government.

This government had opportunities leading up to the pandemic to listen to expert voices, listen to nurses

who told them that there was no capacity left in our health-care system. Now, we have almost a vacancy rate of 40 per cent in some emergency rooms.

This government has a pattern of not listening to experts, which is why we're in the position that we are today. And so this narrative that they have, that they listen to folks, is completely false. It is untrue. And what we're asking for them to do today is to correct course and to centre the voices—

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

Ms. Naylor: The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and former Health minister have said to these concerns: coulda, woulda, shoulda.

Does the member for Union Station feel like that's an appropriate response to the mistakes that she made and her government made?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for Wolseley for the question.

No, those responses—the responses to date from this government, from the former minister of Health, who's now the PC leader, are wholly inadequate. And, quite frankly, Manitobans are the ones who are saying so. It is Manitobans who are asking for this inquiry to be expert-led, independent, made public and transparent and demanding that this government take this step.

They have an opportunity in front of them to correct course and to make sure that we learn from decisions made leading up to this pandemic and throughout it so that Manitoba's health-care system and our province as a whole is better positioned moving forward, and hopefully get some advice that can help us, right now, today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate is open. Any speakers?

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): Good morning, I would like to put some facts on our record regarding this proposed resolution.

But first, though, I would like to say that, since this is the last day before the end of session, I would like to thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, of course, Madam Speaker as well, for your service; to the clerks, our staff, our security team, custodial staff and everyone who helps make it possible for us MLAs to do our job safely: thank you.

I wish anyone who is celebrating—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Lagimodière (Mr. Smith), can you just tilt your mic down a little bit?

Mr. Smith: Okay, is that a little better?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, that's better. Thank you.

Mr. Smith: To everyone celebrating, I wish you a very happy Hanukkah. Tonight's the fifth of eight nights of celebration. We have a menorah set up in the front of the Legislative Building and it's a very nice addition to the Legislative grounds.

In a few short weeks it'll be Christmas and, just recently, you've seen Christmas trees set up around the building. To everyone celebrating: merry Christmas.

I'd like to thank our health-care workers, especially the front line. This has been especially challenging, and I thank you for your tireless efforts in helping to both care for COVID patients while also providing other health-care services to Manitobans.

We know that there's no playbook or a magic solution to what is going on with this pandemic. It is clear that there'll be a time when the pandemic is behind us, and I know that we all look forward to a time—or that time when, for the benefit of our health-care system, for Manitobans' physical and mental health and the well-being of all our small businesses, like in-service businesses such as restaurants and gyms.

I am proud to say that Manitoba has a new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and a new Leader of the PC Party, the member from Tuxedo, who is Manitoba's first female Premier, and under her leadership, our government will take the province in a new direction—a stark difference in leadership from premiers past and a stark difference in leadership when compared to the NDP.

While our new Premier is focused on building and is on track to keep Manitobans safe while rebuilding our economy in a post-COVID era, the NDP spend their time criticizing everything. They criticize decisions made by civil servants when they propose—and when pressed for solutions, the NDP just double down on their criticism. After all, members opposite have criticized pretty much everything without providing solutions. It's shameful that they criticize decisions made by health-care professionals. This isn't leadership, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is simply politicization of COVID.

Instead of offering solutions, the NDP leader, as an example, blatantly defied public health orders when he organized an NDP rally. I'm just curious if members opposite had anything to say about that and if they had any public comments to be made about their leader so blatantly flouting the health orders irresponsibly. I have heard nothing to this point, and I do continue to wait for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the former NDP government left our health-care system in disarray after 17 years of mismanagement leading to the longest wait times in the country. Members opposite conveniently ignore the reality of their record on health care and significant investments—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: —our PC government has made—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: —to improve the system for all Manitobans. The previous NDP government created one of the worst-managed health-care systems in Canada. In 2015, emergency department wait times in Manitoba were the worst in any province—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: —and that was without—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It's really hard to listen—to hear the speaker when he's speaking here with the noise that we have in the Chamber right now. It's gone too—got overboard, here.

Mr. Smith: Thank you for your intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was just going to say that the previous NDP government created one of the worst-managed health-care systems in Canada. In 2015, emergency department wait times in Manitoba were the worst in any province, and that was without the added pressure of a global pandemic.

Under the NDP, Manitobans were also forced to wait far too long for specialized procedures, including average wait times for hip and knee replacements ranging from 17 to 24 weeks.

Our PC government undertook system-wide initiatives and spent money fixing the broken system left by the NDP. We have made significant investments to rebuild our health-care system and ensure

Manitobans have access to high-quality and timely care.

We have invested \$90 million to develop the emergency department at St. Boniface Hospital, added 2,000 additional cataract procedures to address wait times and added 1,000 additional hip and knee procedures. We continue to recruit and train more nurses to ensure Manitobans are provided with high-quality care. We have added 400 new nursing education seats, expanded financial supports to international-educated nurses to obtain their licence in Manitoba and added 60 new ICU nursing positions across the province.

Our PC government has taken a proactive approach to manage COVID-19, including more than doubling our ICU capacity and recruiting and training more nurses. We are continuing to blunt the fourth wave through the use of sensible, balanced use of restrictions, and I do thank Manitobans for the incredible uptake in vaccinations in our province. Having over 80 per cent uptake is an incredible—actually, it's 87 per cent uptake—is an incredible outcome, and I thank Manitobans for their efforts in helping to thwart the best they can this pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our province and our government oversaw the largest vaccination campaign ever seen in Manitoba history with less than 1 per cent vaccine wastage. Over 2 million vaccinations were administered. We have helped expand vaccine eligibility to all Manitobans aged five and up. We have implemented hundreds of pop-up clinics to vaccinate Manitobans closer to home, as well as FIT teams ensuring that every personal-care home in Manitoba had the ability to vaccinate their residents. We've expanded vaccine distributions to nearly 500 doctors' offices and pharmacies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to say that our government has raised eight vaccination supersites: two in Winnipeg, in Morden, Selkirk, Steinbach, Thompson, Dauphin, and with over 3,000 staff helping vaccinate thousands of Manitobans every week.

We have partnered with five urban Indigenous community organizations in Manitoba to create Indigenous-led immunization clinics, three of which are open in Winnipeg, Brandon, Portage to help vaccinate at-risk urban populations, as well as our homeless populations.

We have worked 'coblaboratively' with 63 First Nations and 50 Northern Affairs communities, in partnership with the Manitoba First Nations COVID-19 Pandemic Response Co-ordination Team. We have prioritized the most at risk, our health-care employees, Indigenous people, PCH residents, police officers and first responders.

* (11:30)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to say that we've expanded eligibility into geographic areas of concern in Manitoba. We've partnered with North Dakota to ensure that 2,500 essential truck drivers were vaccinated, allowing Manitoba's economy to keep moving. We have launched a new partnership with the United Way's 211 Manitoba to help connect seniors and people with mobility issues to transportation services that can get them to their COVID-19 vaccination appointments.

We brought in over \$1.2 billion of COVID-19 funding in Budget 2021. We have frozen the Pharma-care deductible to help provide relief to Manitobans. I'm proud to say we have \$60 million—given \$60 million to regional health authorities to offset COVID-related costs and to protect our citizens. We have provided over \$205 million to personal-care homes, community health agencies, service delivery organizations to offset their costs. We are part of a team that introduced Manitoba's paid sick leave program, providing direct financial assistance to Manitobans having to take time off work due to COVID-19.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have partnered with Manitoba businesses and critical service to launch a COVID-19 rapid tested screening program that helps limit the spread of COVID-19 through early detection and screening. We have implemented the first pass pilot, which offers dedicated asymptomatic testing to teachers, educational support staff, licensed child-care centres, nursery schools and family group child-care homes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's clear our government has worked very diligently to help with the fourth wave preparation in this province. Like I said, we have built and strengthened our ICU capacity, we continue to recruit and train nurses, we will continue to focus on our vaccination campaign, and we will continue to 'velop' and promote Manitoba's immunization card.

We have continued to blunt the fourth wave with sensible and balanced use of public health orders and restrictions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that

restrictions are often challenging for those that are most impacted, like small business, and I know that we have to balance their needs with the needs of safety of the most vulnerable citizens in our province.

We will continue to make improvements to our patient flow, and we have continued to use the virtual COVID outpatient support program. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to say that we have, as I said before, added close to 400 new nursing education seats, and we have financially supported over 1,700 internationally educated nurse applicants to obtain their licence and start practising immediately in the province of Manitoba. We have added 60 new full-time nurse positions to ICUs in Brandon, Grace Hospital, St. Boniface, HSC as well. And since April, 2020, 137 nurses have completed their critical care orientation program to be able to support—or help support our ICUs. Our undergraduate nurse employees, we've brought in—

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

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): COVID-19 has hit Manitobans hard. It's been a pretty rough year and a half, or longer now, in this province. Many people in this Chamber and around this province have lost loved ones, and our seniors have suffered alone in personal-care homes, and we've sent some of the sickest patients out of province in their time of greatest need. We have a responsibility to take an honest look at what went wrong so that we can fix it and build a more resilient health-care system, economy and province.

An independent inquiry is the first step in doing right by all who suffered for Manitoba's inadequate pandemic response. The PC leader must call an independent inquiry into the PC government's pandemic response to get recommendations to help build our health-care system capacity and make positive, lasting changes to improve the lives of Manitobans. Manitobans expect and deserve a government that has actionable plans to address the ongoing and systemic issues within our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if anyone here is paying attention, we will know this isn't the last crisis, the last health-care crisis that's going to hit our province. The world is changing. The global crises are coming towards us.

And we know that climate crisis, for example—I mentioned this yesterday—it's impacting British Columbia with deaths and illness and hospitalizations, both from drought and heat throughout the summer,

and now from flooding. And we can expect that, sometime in the future, hopefully not in the next year, but we know that it's coming and we know that climate will bring additional public health crises to this province.

It might be climate-related, it might be another serious virus, but this isn't the last time that Manitoba's going to have to grapple with a serious health crisis; and if we can't learn from what has happened in the last year and a half, we won't be prepared.

It was clear that this government was unable to learn from the first wave in order to prepare for the second wave; they were unable to learn from the second wave to prepare for the third wave; and now from the third wave to prepare for the fourth.

So it's beyond time to start this inquiry in order to be prepared if there is a fifth wave, or for whatever health crisis comes next.

We know that intensive-care beds were shuttered, well-trained critical nurses retired or redeployed and capacity in this important area of our health system was lost. This capacity was desperately needed during the pandemic. Intensive care was overwhelmed and, at the peak of the third wave, Manitoba sent 57 ICU patients out of province.

We all have heard the story of Krystal Mousseau, a young woman who died in an attempt to transport her. Krystal's sister has questions. Lots of Manitobans have questions. Kristy asked the question, she wants to know, what sort of mistake was made, how could this have been prevented and was it a result of transport.

And you know, I think anybody who's had a family member die, whether it was an accident, whether it was illness or whether it was a mistake made by the government and the health-care system, they have questions. People want to know, but these are questions that can be examined and looked at and understood, and we owe it to Krystal, we owe it to her sister, Kristy and their family, and so many other families to answer these questions.

We need more than a technical assessment of the critical incident in question. We need to ask, how did we get to the point that so many Manitobans were placed at risk?

I remember being struck by the transports out of province, when we first heard about people going to Thunder Bay, which for—you know, a lot of us, we think about Thunder Bay practically as our

neighbours. But when I heard about transfers to Windsor, Ontario, I was so struck by that because that's where I grew up and—well, outside of that, in the rural area.

And what I know is that when you can't travel through the US, it takes almost 25 hours non-stop to drive from Winnipeg to Windsor. It's a really long way to send someone away for medical care, where their family can't be anywhere near them, to support or to know what's going on, or to communicate with the health-care staff.

I just thought about that so much during that time, how painful that was for those families and how far away it was. We need an honest assessment and an honest answer, something that this government has never provided to Manitobans: how we got there, how we got to sending people somewhere that it would take days for a family member to travel to them.

We also need an honest answer about what was happening in personal-care homes. At Parkview, healthy patients were being kept in the same room as those infected. This was happening many weeks after the first infections in this facility.

There were people in Parkview who didn't even have COVID, who were restricting how much they ate or drank. There was one man who was discovered to be dehydrated and emaciated. He was making those restrictive choices about his own intake because he knew that nobody was going to come to take him to the bathroom.

And that's criminal. It's a horrible way for any senior to be. That's only one story that I happen to personally know of. But how many more in people in Parkview had experience? How many people in the Maples had that experience? How many seniors are having that experience today in the other care homes where outbreaks are happening because this government failed to learn from the previous wave? We need answers to this.

* (11:40)

At Maples Personal Care Home we saw some of the worst outcomes. First responders had to provide just the most basic care as the facility broke down under the pressure of a COVID outbreak. And shortly afterwards, the PC government performed a review but it never answered any of the most important questions.

Why did the for-profit company misrepresent their staffing levels to the public? And why were

calls—actually, I'm going to say, why did they lie? I know I'm not allowed to say that the government lied, but I can say: they lied. They lied—I knew they were lying when I saw the press release on TV because I had friends who are paramedics who were in the building. And it was shocking to watch, and it was shocking that it took so long for that to get called out and then covered.

So what else has been hidden that we need to know about and learn about, when we go—you know, that we'll discover through this process? In fact the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind the person—the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) that you considered lying and stuff. I just want to know what you were talking about, to clarify.

Ms. Naylor: Oh yes, the private-care home that ran that lied to the government and lied on television.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, carry on.

Ms. Naylor: Yes, so a private company lied. And that was—the government did uncover that, I'm so grateful for that, that the government explained they had been lied to. But without a proper review, how will we know what other kinds of lies were hidden in the private-care system. In fact, the person doing the review, Dr. Lynn Stevenson, explained on the release of her report that she doesn't know why needed capacity was not provided and that still deserves an answer. That's not a complete report.

An inquest is obviously needed to answer these basic questions we raised because there needs to be accountability to move forward. Our goal is, of course, to build a better health-care system. And an independent inquiry will help answer additional, important questions. Such as, what levels of staffing are needed in health care? With specific recommendations for ICUs, ERs and long-term care. This is an opportunity for us to prepare, as a province, for the next health-care crisis, for the next climate-change crisis.

The Pallister government, and now the Stefanson government, have been guided by the recommendations of accountants who have said that the government can squeeze the nurse-to-patient ratio and made do with less care by the bedside. It is time for an inquiry led by health-care professionals. The assumption that KPMG has made seems to me to be fatally flawed. We need this advice of an independent inquiry, to help guide us as to how to build and maintain appropriate capacity in important areas of our health system.

How do we shift our health system and indeed, our society, to focus on the determinants of health? We know that COVID-19 disproportionately impacted Black and Indigenous Manitobans and people of colour in Manitoba. We know that poverty impacted—

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

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): First of all, I will start by thanking our health-care workers for their dedication throughout this pandemic. It has certainly been difficult for them to do their jobs, to maintain some semblance of family life. I have talked to a number of them who have tried to balance this—dealing with COVID patients and then also trying to have some semblance of a family life for them at home, and while taking care of their family and ensuring the health and safety of their family.

Certainly, our thanks go to our health-care professionals for their guidance to the government, and their guidance and advice to the government for the—during this pandemic. And it even extends, you know, to our Leg. staff here. We're able to participate—because of the pandemic now we're able to participate in the session virtually and I, you know, certainly thank all the staff that have put in countless hours to be able to set up the technology that we're able to now participate virtually.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will not be taking any advice from the opposition. The former NDP government left our health-care system in disarray after 17 years of mismanagement leading to the longest wait times in the country. It's unfortunate they've—they have chosen to criticize security—the NDP has chosen to criticize security staff, now they're criticizing the health-care professionals that have guided us through this pandemic.

The NDP now want to politicize a pandemic and there's enough strain on the health-care system—both here in Manitoba, across the country and around the world. The mental health of Manitobans have been affected by this and now here in the middle of a fourth wave the NDP is trying to score political points at the expense of all Manitobans.

The previous NDP government created one of the worst managed health-care systems in Canada. In 2015 emergency department wait times in Manitoba were the worst of any province and that was without the added pressure of a global pandemic. And now they seem to have all the answers.

Our PC government undertook system-wide initiatives and spent more money 'fixing' the broken system left by the NDP. We've made significant investments to rebuild our health-care system to ensure Manitobans have access to high quality and timely care close to home.

In terms of the pandemic and response to COVID-19 pandemic, our government has worked very closely with our health-care professionals. They are the ones who have provided advice in terms of the restrictions that we've implemented, in terms of getting our—helping getting our vaccination protocol in place. A year ago there was only talk about vaccination or vaccines being available and then when it became available Manitoba now has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country at 87—just over 87 per cent for first doses and almost 85 per cent to be fully vaccinated.

And we'll continue to prioritize getting vaccines into arms. That includes my own family and our seven-year-old granddaughter who was proudly telling us here last weekend about getting her shot. And we asked her, did it hurt? And she very stoically replied, no. She was good to go. And you know it's very inspirational when you see the uptake from families with the five-to-11-year-olds now getting vaccinated. We—Manitoba is certainly doing well in this regard.

We've led—Manitoba has led the country in developing its provincial QR-code-based immunization card which has provided an incentive to get vaccinated. It's allowed businesses and services to stay open to a vaccinated clientele. It gives some assurance to the staff when customers come in that they are indeed vaccinated and there is—they've set up a protocol for doing that, and that's—it's working very well. And many neighbouring provinces are looking towards the Manitoba model for their cards. We have set the pace on this.

Also we—our government has listened to our health-care experts all along here in terms of what restrictions we should have and what we don't need to do. We've seen other provinces who chose to drop their restrictions during the beginning of the summer, for instance, of summer, and then being overwhelmed on the third and fourth waves coming through. Our government chose the harder and more responsible route with effective and consistent restrictions and the use of our immunization cards, and because of that we are now in a much better position to deal with the

fourth wave, as we see other provinces have struggled with this.

* (11:50)

We're actively working to see that patients see the right level of care at the right time and the right place. We've freed up hospital beds by expediting placement into available PCH beds for hundreds of patients. I'll also always taken the time, right now, to mention the new Boyne Care Holdings personal-care home that's opened in Carman. It's a leading design, and there's pods of nine-to-10 residents with their own bedrooms and their own bathrooms, with a common area in there, and it is really nice. And we have talked to some of the residents who are really enjoying their new digs, in their homes. And they're treated as residents, as their own residents, and it's very encouraging to see that.

We have implemented a virtual COVID outpatient support program which enables stable COVID patients to be cared for at home. And this program has saved over 1,000 in-patient days. We have also led the country in working in partnership with our First Nations communities, and their First Nations leadership, in helping vaccinate their communities. Over these last 18 months, nearly 200,000 vaccine doses have been administered to First Nations in Manitoba, and over 82 per cent of those on reserve are now fully vaccinated. And it is only through continuing to work with our health-care professionals and the First Nation leadership that that became even possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's—there is lots still happening on the COVID file, and the NDP with their added—politicizing this is really unfortunate at this time. We have—our government has put in record amounts of money into our facilities and health-care funding across Manitoba, \$6.98-billion budget on there. Key investments include \$812 million in capital commitments for rural and northern health care under the five-year clinical and preventative services plan, which is triple our original commitment of \$270 million; \$50 million to speed up wait times for surgeries and services; an extra \$23 million for cancer treatment coverage; \$2.7 million to expand dialysis treatments for nearly 200 more patients; \$9 million to add more than 120 personal-care-home beds; and the list just continues to go on.

Health care is not something that you solve over night, obviously, because over 17 years the NDP continued to fail at solving the health-care challenges that we have in this province. Our government will

continue to lead on this file. We will continue to ask the advice and seek the advice of health-care professionals. The last thing we need to do now is to have a political sideshow orchestrated by the NDP and take our eye off the ball.

The eye—there needs to remain on keeping Manitobans healthy and that includes being vaccinated. We're leading the country in vaccine campaign successes because we're listening to the professionals. And there is over 2.1 million vaccinations have been administered, with less than one per cent—

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Dr. Jillian Horton, a physician who works in Manitoba's health-care system, wrote the following in her recently published book, *We Are All Perfectly Fine*. She says, and I quote: I work in a place where I can't compensate for chaos; where there are holes in the plaster wall in patient rooms; where people in stretchers are often parked out in front of the nursing desk, the way you might leave an idling car; where monitors beep, alarms sound, call bells ring, patients holler, and families line the hallways and sob; where there is no order, only ongoing pandemonium, constant chaos. End of quote.

Manitoba Liberals support this resolution calling on the government to immediately launch an inquiry into Manitoba's pandemic response. Indeed, we called for such an inquiry on October 22nd, 2020, more than a year ago when it was clear that Manitoba was woefully unprepared for the pandemic's second wave. By that time, there was already chaos in several personal-care homes and it was very apparent that there should've been much better preparation for the second wave.

We badly need this inquiry. To us, it is important that it be a balanced inquiry, led independently. It would be a disservice to Manitobans to have a one-sided report like we had from Brad Wall on Manitoba Hydro. It's equally important not to have an NPD-led inquiry, which would be one-sided.

It is as important that the inquiry look at worked well as what did not work well. It is as important to look at long-term-care homes with no deaths to learn what was done right, as it is to study long-term-care home facilities where many people died to find out the wrong way to manage the situation. We can learn from both.

It is important to criticize and know where the problems were. It's also important to praise those who did well and those who spoke out about needed improvements. There were clear inflection points in the pandemic.

On March 2, 2020, Manitoba Liberals called on the Province to have a plan for the pandemic which focused on personal-care homes because these homes had our elders in congregate living. Five days after we made this call was the first identified case of COVID in a personal-care home in Canada in BC.

In early April 2020, we went further. We called on full testing of all staff and residents when a single case was found in a personal-care home. If our recommendation had been followed, it is likely—as the report from BC shows—that more outbreaks would've been better contained and better limited. The reason, as we pointed out in April 2020, was that about half of COVID cases are asymptomatic and that in the majority of personal-care home outbreaks—76 per cent in BC—the first case is in a staff member.

In May 2020, we pushed the government to have a rapid response team to go into personal-care homes with outbreaks, recognizing when an outbreak occurs, many staff have to quarantine or isolate so the home is short of staff at the very time they have to deal with an outbreak crisis. Many months later, in the middle of bad outbreaks at Parkview and the Maples, the government finally realized it needed such a rapid response team.

In June 2021, we presented clear scientific evidence that addressing ventilation in schools was essential to decreasing spread of COVID. We called on the government to act quickly in the summer of 2021 to improve ventilation in schools. The government waited and waited and only recently has taken some action, though not nearly enough to address ventilation issues in schools.

In June 2021, Health Canada approved the use of two monoclonal antibodies, colloquially called mAbs, with the specific names 'casirivimab' and imdevimab. These have been shown in rigorous scientific work to be very effective when given early in the course of a COVID infection in a person who is

not vaccinated. They released the need for hospitalization and for ICU care. The results are very impressive with as much as a 70 per cent reduction in some cases.

I wrote on October 11 and again on October 22nd to the Minister of Health to urge her to approve the use of these mAbs and then asked in QP last week. Ontario, BC and Alberta have already been using them for some time, including in Sioux Lookout in rural Ontario. But in Winnipeg, a hub of expertise in infectious diseases, we still can't use them. Ouch. I dread to consider how many people in Manitoba have died when they could of these—been saved if these agents had been approved here much more quickly, as they were in Ontario.

Just because some in Manitoba have not got vaccinated doesn't mean they shouldn't be helped. These people may be misinformed but they are not bad people. They should be helped. They should not die when we can prevent it. I could review many more times when we called for quick action and it didn't happen. The pandemic in Manitoba didn't need to have the higher case fatality rate of 1.9 per hundred than in Saskatchewan with 1.2 per hundred. Manitoba should've done better.

Manitoba should've been better prepared with good surge capacity going into the pandemic. Manitoba was not. Manitoba should've done better in managing human resources and in early training in treating staff with dignity. There's so much more. Manitoba's long-term-care facilities should've been better staffed with better training going into the pandemic. Manitoba should've managed surgeries and diagnostic procedures better so they are not the incredibly bad—long backlogs and wait times we have today.

It is important that is emphasize what was done well and there were good things. Understanding what worked is essential—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) has four minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 2, 2021

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