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DEBATES
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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, Hon.	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	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	Woleseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon	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
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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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Piwniuk): 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 in which is in accordance with Thy will, that we 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.

Please be seated. Good morning, everyone.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Deputy Government House Leader): Good morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This morning I call for debate Bill 233, The Filipino Heritage Month Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) that we're going to—on to second reading of Bill 233, The Filipino Heritage Month Act, in the name of the honourable member for Waverley.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 233—The Filipino Heritage Month Act

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): I'm very grateful for the opportunity—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. I just want to remind the member from Waverley that he has to introduce it and then second by another member.

Oh, now, the member from Waverley, if you can unmute? Yes.

Mr. Reyes: I move, seconded by the member from Notre Dame, that Bill 233 be brought forward for second reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Waverley, seconded by the

honourable member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino), that Bill 233, The Filipino Heritage Month Act, be now read a second time and referred to the committee of this House.

Mr. Reyes: I apologize—a bit sluggish: was up late, like many of us, cheering our Jets. So, go, Jets, go.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very grateful for the opportunity for bringing this bill forward, Bill 233, The Filipino Heritage Month Act; Loi sur le Mois patrimoine philippin, which will recognize the month of June each year in Manitoba as Filipino Heritage Month.

And some may wonder why the month of June. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, June 12th is Philippine Independence Day. As a child, I vividly remember fellow Filipinos celebrating this day in Winnipeg, traditionally at Assiniboine Park, which is organized by the Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba.

I remember the one year they did not have it at Assiniboine Park in 1991, which was held nearly 30 years ago. It was actually held at Crescent Park. So how do I remember this, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because it was the first time I met my wife, Cynthia.

So June is a special month for Filipinos around the world and just as important—and especially right here in the province of our friendly Manitoba.

As one of my colleagues told me last week, there are Filipinos everywhere, touching every corner of the province. As of the 2016 Canadian census, 851,000 people of Filipino descent lived in Canada, mostly in urbanized areas. This number has been growing yearly.

Between the 2011 census and the 2016 census, the Filipino community in Canada grew from 662,000 to 851,000, a growth of about 27 per cent compared to the rest of Canada, which grew only by 5 per cent during the same time period.

Manitoba has the most Filipinos on a per capita basis, with Filipinos comprising 6.5 per cent of the provincial population. Winnipeg is a metropolitan area with the most Filipinos on a per capita basis, nearly 10 per cent in all of Canada.

So what makes the community influential? Other than the growing population that Manitoba has had,

immigrants from the Philippines and to this date is still one of the largest source countries for immigrants.

What makes the community part of a province's social, economic, political and cultural fabric? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can name many factors and the many contributions of Manitoba's Filipino community, which I am proud to be part of.

As I stated in the beginning, and according to the book, *The First Filipino Immigrants in Manitoba*, written by Ms. Gemma Dalayoan, Mrs. Leah Envarga-Magsino and the late Ms. Leoni [*phonetic*] Bailon, it was the 1950s when the first recorded Filipino immigrants in Canada arrived in Manitoba. Mostly nurses, doctors, teachers, medical technologists and other professionals were part of this first wave of Filipino immigrants arriving from 1959 to 1965.

Many of them came from the United States on either an exchange scholarship or work program as temporary residents on visitor or work permit visas. However, some of these Filipino immigrants decided to stay in Manitoba, as many of them received job offers. They found Winnipeg to be peaceful, friendly and a safe place to live despite the extreme differences in climate compared to the Philippines.

From the late 1950s, I've mentioned the occupations of nurses, doctors, teachers, which, to this day, we all know, whether you are in rural Manitoba or right here in the city of Winnipeg, Steinbach or the town of Virden, many of these occupations are filled by individuals of Filipino descent. And I can proudly say my wife, who I met at that Philippine heritage day picnic three years ago, is a nurse herself.

In the late 1960s 'til around 1975, the second wave of immigrants consisted of garment factory workers, which included sewers, cutters, sewing machine repairmen and other workers. My father was one of them. So one may ask: how did Manitoba actively recruit so many Filipinos from the garment industry?

Well, there was a need for these types of workers, and not only was this group skilled and experienced but also knew how to speak English. At the time, the Philippines was ranked No. 3 in largest English-speaking countries in the world, only behind the United States and the United Kingdom.

And since we touch on language, or in this case, languages, the Filipino language has become one of the most commonly spoken languages in Manitoba. Not to mention, many of the Filipino immigrants who

reside in Manitoba also probably speak one of the—over 100 dialects in the Philippines, including Ilocano, Cebuano, to name a few.

Historically, many Filipinos, like most immigrants, came here through the province's need of a hard-working and loyal workforce, as we see in the HyLife pork processing plant in Neepawa; Friesens Corporation, the book, yearbook and packaging manufacturer in Altona; StandardAero; and New Flyer Industries here in Winnipeg. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am just scratching the surface.

Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program has benefitted and continues to benefit from the many Filipino applicants who now call Manitoba home. The overall growth of the Filipino population in Manitoba from back then and the multi-generations coming from these pioneers and current immigrants have also resulted in these individuals going into their own small business.

When going into business for yourself, you can figure out a need or demand. One of these types of businesses is the restaurant business. And we all know part of culture is the food. As we all know, there are a number of Filipino restaurants and small grocery stores throughout our province. Who can resist the spring rolls which we call lumpia, or pancit, Filipino noodles? And I'm sure many here have tried the wide variety of Filipino dishes and desserts.

I applaud the many Filipinos that have contributed to our economy through small business. I also applaud the larger corporations who have seen the Filipino population grow to open up their business in Manitoba. Most of you have heard of Jollibee, the bustling network of over 1,000 restaurants worldwide. From the Philippines, it has branched out to countries including Brunei, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Italy, the UK and the USA.

*(10:10)

After 38 years since its founding, Jollibee opened its first store in Canada in 2016. Winnipeg, Manitoba, having the most Filipinos on a per capita basis for major cities in Canada, was the site of Jollibee's first restaurant in Canada: not Toronto, not Vancouver, not Calgary, but right here in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. And Jollibee is set to open its third location in Winnipeg soon.

Another Filipino-influenced iconic grocery chain, Seafood City, saw what Jollibee saw. Canada's face of immigration has changed from predominately European to predominantly Asian, with Filipinos

making up a significant part of it. No wonder the community support for Seafood City was so great, prompting more store openings, one after the other, including right here in Manitoba. Even the major grocery chains are carrying Filipino food products.

I applaud the many Filipinos from the past supporting fellow Filipino immigrants as they arrived. And we continue to see many Filipinos working alongside immigrants from other countries, supporting the transitions of new immigrants coming to Manitoba.

Many of my colleagues from all sides of the House miss the public and private gatherings, and I am sure many here have experienced attending a Filipino gathering, including a wedding, a birthday party, a christening at a church. And on the subject of churches, St. Dominic's Roman Catholic Church, in particular, in Neepawa, its congregation has been, in recent years, filled up with many Filipino immigrants, who now have a Filipino choir.

And the town of Neepawa celebrates a Filipino street festival of their own. Steinbach has their celebrations, and the Brandon Filipino community Facebook page is over 600 members strong.

I have met many kababayans in Swan River, Russell, Morden, Minnedosa. Kababayan is a Filipino word for compatriots, by the way, all who I've been—who have been welcoming, warm, hospitable, friendly and are proud that they have immigrated to Manitoba.

The Filipino community is everywhere and has become part of Manitoba's cultural mosaic, actually a fixture. Filipino newspapers include the Filipino Journal, the Pilipino Express, Ang Peryodiko. CKJS radio broadcasts a weekly program, Good Morning Philippines. As well, the many social media pages based in Manitoba, which connect many Filipinos in and out of the province; the performing arts from Magdaragat Philippines, who have been performing at Folklorama since 1982.

Sikaran arnis, a Filipino martial art, is taught and practised at many martial art clubs here in the province. Basketball leagues organized by Filipinos, whether be here in Winnipeg, Steinbach, the surrounding Westman area or Neepawa, and we just had one of our own members from the Filipino community inducted into the Manitoba Basketball Hall of Fame, Mr. Manny Aranez. There are so many contributions and activities the Filipino community is involved in.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a Filipino Canadian, I am very proud to see that our province has produced the

most number of elected officials and at every level: in 1981 the first Filipino Canadian MLA; in 1988 the first Filipino Canadian MP; in 2007 the first female MLA of Filipino descent; a total of six MLAs and a Winnipeg city councillor, who also served as deputy mayor.

So we, the Filipino community, have been very proud of having political representation, and regardless of political stripe, when I was younger, I was proud to see this and those who came before me. It inspired me to serve and go into politics.

As Manitobans, we should be proud of those who have embraced and integrated into the Canadian way of life and contributions of this community, the Filipino community. There is no question my colleagues will agree: this deserved recognition is long overdue and I hope we can honour Manitoba's Filipino community, particularly in the month of June, as it says in the act, with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly in Manitoba, that the month of June in each year will be known throughout Manitoba as Filipino Heritage Month Act, through the passing of this bill—

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

Before we go on to question period, I just want to remind the member, if the member from Waverley can read that moving and seconded and read the last part of that script so that we can get that all on Hansard.

So if he can move it again, just so it's on Hansard.

Mr. Reyes: I move, seconded by the member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino), that Bill 233, The Filipino heritage act, be now read for a second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, it has to go: read for the second time and be brought to the committee of this House. So if you could read the whole script that was provided to you, from the moving right to the end, so that we all have it on Hansard.

Mr. Reyes: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Notre Dame, that Bill 233 be now read for a second time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, no, you got to—it's actually the bill title too, along with the secondary—be read a second time and—

Mr. Reyes: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologize.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Notre Dame, that Bill 233, The Filipino Heritage Month Act; Loi sur le Mois du patrimoine philippin,

be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 10 minutes will be held, and questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question be asked by a member from another party, any subsequent questions may follow a rotation between parties and each independent member may ask one question. And no questions or answers shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Deputy Speaker, I just want to take a moment this morning in respect of our debate today to acknowledge the labour of our colleague, the member for Notre Dame.

As is often the case, women do the vast majority of labour to bring ideas and issues and resolution and recognition to the Chamber with little celebration. And so I want to take this moment, on behalf of our caucus, to acknowledge our member from Notre Dame and all of the phenomenal work that she is doing in the Filipino community to acknowledge the Filipino community and to acknowledge the profound and phenomenal work that they are doing.

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

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): I, too, would like to add that I also want to recognize my colleague from Notre Dame and also to the many women who are involved in labour, including my wife Cynthia. I also want to acknowledge the first Filipino MLA of Filipino descent, the mother of the colleague from Notre Dame. So thank you very much to all the Filipinas in our province.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I appreciate the member for work on bringing this bill forward. Just ask the member, how will he celebrate Filipino Heritage Month once it's safe to do so?

Mr. Reyes: Thank you for the question, to my good friend from Lagimodière.

Usually how I would celebrate, if we were not going through what we're going through now, is I would definitely partake in all of the celebrations that the many organizations in this large Filipino community have organized in the past Filipino heritage week-month, and I hope to visit the other places in rural Manitoba as soon as—I've been invited to

Brandon for Philippine Independence Day—so many celebrations.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Thank you to the member for Waverley for bringing forth this important bill for our Filipino community.

I was just wondering if the member for Waverley could speak to some of the sacrifices that the Filipino community is currently experiencing due to COVID.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, thank you very much for that question from my colleague from Notre Dame from the Filipino community herself.

As we all know that many—as I mentioned in the past and in the present—many of the occupations that Filipinos are in is health care and in education. And they have taken a lot in terms of the workload but have been very, you know, adapting and adapting to the changes that have been made.

And as a government as well, we've made that easier for them in terms of, you know, providing interpretative languages services so that people can understand. And I thank them very much to all those who are in health care and in the education community.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for Waverley for bringing forward this bill this morning, and similar to the question from the member for Southdale (Ms. Gordon), I was just wondering if the member for Waverley could share with us some recommendations, some ideas in ways that people can, in fact, still celebrate even virtually this year.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, you know, you can simply actually contact myself and I can point you to the right direction in ways to celebrate. Even yourself, the member from Tyndall Park, I know we have a lot of connections, all of us, not just those who have predominantly have many Filipinos in their ridings, but there are many organizations such as the Filipino–Philippine Heritage Council who have a lot of virtual events, not just during the month of June but throughout the whole year.

* (10:20)

So I suggest you go on to their Facebook so that you can be aware of all the events that they're going to be having.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Wondering if the member could share some of his favourite

memories about growing up in the Filipino community in Manitoba. I know, since one of our family members married a Filipino, we've learned and enjoyed many cultural events.

I'm wondering if the member could share some of his own favourite memories about being part of that community growing up?

Mr. Reyes: Thank you for the question.

Well, as a child growing up and even right now I miss the family gatherings. As I mentioned, we celebrate first birthdays, seventh birthdays, christenings, debuts—which is an 18th birthday party for a female—weddings, Philippine Heritage Ball, the Independence Day picnic. I miss them all.

And I think about the food. I guess maybe I didn't have breakfast today, but I just think about the lumpia, the pancit and just the festive and cultural celebrations and that sense of belonging and family values that we have as a community. That's what I miss.

Ms. Marcelino: I was just wondering if the member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes) could speak a little bit about COVID infection rates and how that's disproportionately affected the Filipino community?

Mr. Reyes: Yes, thank you for that question.

Actually, when I was doing consultation with some of the members from our Filipino community who I hadn't spoken to a while, that he had contracted COVID and that he had been off work for a while, but he's very thankful that Health Links was checking on him on a daily basis. And, you know, I know that Shared Health and all those involved have been working very hard, diligently, with those members from our community who have been affected and to Manitobans overall.

So I thank you for the question.

Mr. Smith: I know the member from Waverley had mentioned a number of prominent, or at least referenced some prominent folks in the Filipino community, but I was wondering, during this time of celebration, would there be anybody in particular or any group of people in particular that he would like to highlight, to celebrate Filipino Heritage Month.

Mr. Reyes: Well, first and foremost, I'd like to recognize all those Filipinos who are involved on the front lines, whether it be health care or education, the grocery stores. But I also want to acknowledge the first Filipino Member of Parliament, Dr. Rey

Pagtakhan, who I see as mentor, regardless of the political stripes you have.

But I also want to mention my father because if it wasn't for my father immigrating here, my family members had told me that they would have never come to Manitoba, to immigrate here. So I want to thank my father for immigrating here to Manitoba. So, there are just so many to mention, but I want to note my father.

Ms. Marcelino: I was wondering if the member for Waverley could also speak a little bit about how job loss has been—how Filipinos have been affected by job loss due to COVID.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, you know what, during a pandemic those are the unfortunate situations that are going to happen but, as a government, there are support systems in place, whether you are a working Manitoban or a Manitoban in business.

So there have been those supports and we will continue to listen to the community and the community at large to ensure that we provide the proper services for them.

Mr. Micklefield: I'm wondering if the member could explain to us the significance of June, if there is a significance in that particular month and his reasons for wanting to make June, and not another month, the month to honour Filipino heritage.

Mr. Reyes: Thank you very much for that question.

Yes, June. June because Philippine Independence Day is on June 12th. And again, as I said, as a child I vividly remember fellow Filipinos celebrating at the park—Assiniboine Park—Philippine Independence Day. I always looked forward to seeing Filipinos from across the city, whether they lived in the south end or the North End, and I guess one of the reasons why I'm now in the south end is because, you know, my wife is from that area and that's where I met her at the Philippine Independence Day picnic.

So June 12th is Philippine Independence Day and that's why we celebrate it in June.

Ms. Marcelino: I was wondering if the member for Waverley could speak a little bit to the barriers to credential recognition that many Filipinos in this province face.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, I want to thank the member for that question.

In my role as special envoy for military affairs, it's almost similar to spouses that are transitioning

from province to province with credential recognition. I think it's very important that, you know, we have the regulatory bodies from each province communicate each other so that we can make these transitions easier, especially when it comes to immigrants from the Philippines and other countries.

So there's a lot of work to be done there and I've had those conversations in the past and will continue to do so that we can ensure that those foreign credentials can finally get recognized.

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

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate is open.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): A heartfelt thank you, as well, to the member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes) for bringing forth this really, really important bill.

This bill will recognize June as Filipino Heritage Month. As the member has already explained, June is an important month because it's traditionally a month where we as Filipinos celebrate Philippine Independence Day. So—and as the member did speak about, there is a lot of celebrations, whether it's traditional folk dances to, you know, everybody wearing, you know, traditional Filipino garments or all the different kinds of balls and even street festivals. So this is the—this is a very, very important contribution that the member is making, and I thank him for letting me second his bill.

You know, I thought that maybe this was not going to go so well because, initially, when I did bring—try to bring forth a private member's resolution regarding Philippine quinquennial celebrations last year, it was the member himself that spoke this out. And so I thought that, you know, this was going to be some kind of a partisan thing where we wouldn't be able to come together as a community to, you know, right here in this Legislature to do what's best for the greater Filipino community.

And so with this action, now that this member for Waverley, you know, asking me to second this bill, it really made me feel so much better that we could be doing something together, you know, in the benefit of the community—of the whole community here in Manitoba, for the Filipino community here in Manitoba and, you know, put aside partisan, you know, wrangling and just do something together for

the community. So again, I thank the member for Waverley for allowing me to second this bill.

You know, just off the top of my head, you know, I didn't know that this bill was going to be debated this morning, so just from the top of my head, when I think about celebrating, you know, June and heritage month, I don't really feel like celebrating right now because of all the different things that are happening to the Filipino community during this pandemic.

I understand that celebrating Filipino Heritage Month is an important thing because for many different communities to be uplifted to the level of this Legislature, it's really, really something. So I understand that this would be a wonderful recognition for our community and I will wholeheartedly support the member for Waverley's bill in doing so.

But like I was saying earlier, you know, celebrating, it doesn't really come to me right away because—I guess because of all the different kinds of texts and all the different kinds of communications that I've been getting from members of the Filipino community who are most definitely not celebrating at this time due to COVID.

* (10:30)

I just got a text recently from this health-care aide who works at the Grace Hospital. She's been in communication with me. She's a Filipino health-care aide. Many health-care aides are Filipino due to issues with, you know, barriers to credential recognition. You know, there are nurses in the Philippines and then, you know, due to lots of issues, especially relating to all the various credential recognition, they just become health-care aides eventually and don't go all the way to becoming nurses.

Anyway, so this lady, she texted me. She's been texting me since last year about the problems at the Grace Hospital, and she just said she doesn't know if she can take it anymore. She had two back-to-back shifts that were mandated because there were lack of people working there at the Grace and she had to have a ratio of one-of-her to 18 patients.

She said the most that she could probably do—this is in a COVID ward where many patients are very, very sick and they can't like, you know, even sit up by themselves or eat by themselves or go to the wash-room by themselves—she said the most that she could probably do is do one to—one-of-her to maybe eight patients. And to do—to have to take care of 18 very, very sick patients, she just can't handle this anymore.

You know, when I take a look at what these health-care aides have to do, what home-care workers have to do, it's almost unbelievable what they are being required to do with how little they get paid and the kinds of work that they have to do. So this, I think, is something that I hope that we can also work together across the aisle, regarding these kinds of working conditions for these Filipino health-care aides, for these—and for these racialized women that are mostly doing the work as home-care workers and as health-care aides.

We know that COVID infection has really, really hit the Filipino community hard. The member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes) alluded to it. It's actually 12 per cent of all folks that got COVID so far have been of Filipino descent and women being slightly more infected than Filipino men.

And, again, this COVID infection, it's a disproportionate amount of Filipino women that are getting COVID. This is from the March 1st race-based data analysis and workplace analysis that was released by the Province. This was, you know, anecdotally evident to us because—and to me because of the amount of communication that I have with the different members in the community, but when we actually saw the race-based data there, it's really striking. And so out of everybody in the province, it's Filipino women that would most disproportionately be getting infected by COVID.

And then, you know, it didn't stop there because again it was Filipino women in this province that were disproportionately affected by COVID job loss. You know, it speaks to long-standing underlying issues like—that I mentioned earlier, about credential recognition barriers. And so a lot of these women and racialized women are instead, you know, taking jobs in the service sector and the hospitality sector, again, that were overrepresented due to COVID job loss.

So—and I just think that again, you know, in addition to celebrating June and heritage month that these are the top-of-mind issues for many Filipino families across the province. So, again, I would hope that the member for Waverley and the rest of this Legislature would understand that Filipinos are disproportionately getting affected—infected and, you know, losing their jobs due to COVID.

You know, that rate—that statistic was from actually a CBC article, September 2020, that said that 42 per cent of Filipino Canadians have reported job loss and cut hours compared to 34 per cent of other Canadians. And, again, that's the Filipino Canadian

labour participation rate for Filipinos, 15 years and older, has declined by 7.5 percentage points this year, and it was also confirmed by Tyler Markowsky, which is a City of Winnipeg economist.

So, you know, it's not just out of nowhere that these things are happening. There are systemic, long-standing, underlying issues that policy and community leaders that—like us, need to respond to. You know, I could speak a little bit about the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner. You know, in 2020, she said that only 16 per cent of internationally educated professionals get full accreditation and work in their field of study and experience within four years. That's only one sixth: 16 per cent.

So there's a lot of struggle that has to happen. That's multiple jobs that people are taking in order to do that. And there is a lot more that this government can do to address the internationally educated professionals to help them get their full accreditation and work so that they don't have to struggle in these types of jobs and they can be full participants in the Manitoba economy.

We could also talk a little bit about the MPNP program. You know, there is that head tax—it's a \$500 head tax—that many Filipinos have to pay. On this side of the House, we'd definitely like to see that removed because it is an unfair burden to many Filipino families.

And secondly, you know, there's just—with the MPNP program, ever since it was 2015, we've seen that the overseas skilled worker stream, they have stopped accepting certain types of skilled work like nurses and teachers and engineers, and instead we're seeing more reliance on the strategic initiative stream, which is employer-directed type of immigration into this country.

So when you don't have that skilled overseas stream, what you're doing is, we're not being able to sponsor our friends and our relatives, which has made that MPNP program very, very successful in retaining the numbers of immigrants that come here. And we're seeing again that—and I think it's related that in that time—

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

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): Good morning and mabuhay [*Live*]. It is truly an honour to speak to this bill put forward by the member from Waverley. I want to thank the member for taking the time to introduce this bill today. I also understand it's his

birthday, so happy birthday to the member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes).

I also commend him on bringing forward this bill and having a member of the opposition second the bill. This demonstrates, as was mentioned earlier, the non-partisan nature of this bill and the willingness to serve the community.

Manitoba has long been a beacon of hope for many people for—over the province's 150-year history. Whether it's fleeing from persecution from war, famine or simply looking for a great place to raise their family, Manitoba has become home to people from almost every continent in the world. Not only do they come here to build a better life for themselves, they also help build a better life for all Manitobans.

Our province has been inhabited first by Indigenous people, followed by early settlers from Europe and later from Asia and most recently from Africa and other parts of the world. My grandparents themselves were among the relatively recent European immigrants who fled their country during the Second World War, having to come to Canada to provide a future for their family. Despite the country of origin, I know that their story is not very different from the stories of many who came to this province and continue to come to Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, most of us—most of our families, at least—have immigrated to this province at one time or another. People from Asia have been immigrating to Manitoba for quite some time, as evidenced by the first arrival of Indo-Manitobans approximately 100 years ago. However, it was during more recent times that we saw a larger influx of immigration from Asia, including the good folks from the Filipino community.

The first wave of Filipino migration to Manitoba began in the 1950s with—a number of nurses arrived in Manitoba from Minneapolis to work at the Misericordia General Hospital. This paved the way for further migration, from both the United States and the Philippines, of teachers, nurses, doctors and domestic workers.

It was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that we saw an influx arriving to Canada due to recruitment efforts of garment companies supported by the federal and provincial governments. Once established, many of these new arrivals paved the way for their families to enter Canada.

For the Filipino community, Winnipeg has long been a destination for possible immigration destination. Due to the history of immigration in Canada and Winnipeg specifically, our province became a place chock-full of established social support networks and communities for folks from Asian communities, especially the Filipino community.

In the early days of Filipino migration, it must have been hard to imagine the full impact that the community would have on our province, but today, however, it's difficult not to notice the great contributions made by the Filipino community.

Here are some interesting facts about the Filipino community for the benefit of the House: Tagalog is the second-most spoken language in Winnipeg. Winnipeg's high Filipino population—nearly 10 per cent—has given rise to significance and voice of the Filipino culture where it is not in larger centres.

The Filipino influence stretches beyond Winnipeg and approximately 20 per cent of Filipinos who have immigrated to Manitoba since 1999 have settled outside the Perimeter. Filipino immigrants have truly helped rural communities not just survive but thrive.

* (10:40)

Manitoba is home to almost 10 per cent of all Filipinos living in Canada and approximately 83,500 people, according the 2016 census. The Philippines has consistently fallen within Manitoba's top immigrant source country over the last 10 years, and Filipino permanent residents make up to 13.7 per cent of the province's total immigration, with 71 per cent arriving through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. And today, the Winnipeg Filipino community is the second-fastest growing community in our great city.

And those are just some of the amazing facts surrounding the Filipino community. And after all these years of immigrating to Winnipeg, today the Filipino community is the second-fastest growing community in the city. That reinforces the importance of Bill 233.

We, on this side of this House, believe that remembering and embracing Filipino heritage will be key for communities to integrate, flourish and bettering our great city, Winnipeg, and our province of Manitoba.

The story of Filipino history and migration to Canada is key to understanding and appreciating the heritage. It's central to making Winnipeg and Manitoba home that was ensuring that communities remain connected to a Filipino diaspora. Economic opportunities aside, having an established Filipino community in Manitoba makes our province that much more attractive to those thinking about immigrating to our great province.

Bill 233 gives Manitoba the opportunity to celebrate the valuable contributions of the Filipino people and the social, economic, political and cultural fabric of Manitoba. Not only does it celebrate the culture but it also invites others to appreciate, to learn and connect with the Filipino community.

The Filipino community has played a large part in broadening Winnipeg and Manitoba's culture. The efforts of leaders in the Filipino community have shaped Winnipeg into the great city we know today. Throughout their entire history in Manitoba, the Filipino community has been an integral part of our workforce. As health-care providers, garment workers, to business owners, doctors, lawyers, elected officials and everything in between, the Filipino community has been major contributors to the success of our province.

And that's why I am so glad to see so much support in the Chamber today for this bill. Celebrating the success and incredible contributions by the Filipino community to our province is key to maintaining the cultural and crucial to strengthening the connection between Filipino and non-Filipino Manitobans.

There may have not been a time so long ago when we took for granted the ability to celebrate things like Filipino heritage week, to gather in crowds and the ability to enjoy all these experiences. After COVID, I think we can all reflect on just how important it has been to celebrate the finer things in life, and once COVID is in the rear-view mirror, I look forward to getting back to the normal activities and events, that I look forward to joining my colleagues in celebrating Filipino Heritage Month and all the events that will come with it.

I, like many of my colleagues, have attended events with the community over the years, as there are many. However, I just want to highlight a few of the events that stand out most to me. The first was the Philippine Independence Ball. I had the opportunity to watch a swearing-in ceremony for the Knights of

Rizal, which is a very interesting organization and a very interesting ceremony unto itself.

The Manitoba Filipino Street Festival; of course, Folklorama; the 'bebek' celebration and the flag raising at PCCM, or the Philippine-Canadian Centre of Manitoba, for celebrating of Philippine Heritage Week; and these are just some of the many Filipino events around Winnipeg, and with the growing Filipino population across the rest of the province, I know that there'll be more events, activities and opportunities to celebrate this amazing community.

Although there's so much more I could put on the record, I will cede the floor another member so they can speak to this great bill.

Thank you so much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Thanks for the opportunity to put a few words on record on this important bill, Bill 233, the Filipino heritage month.

As we all know that the Filipino community is an important part of population of Manitoba, I was just thinking a few minutes back, that let's imagine how we would have handled this pandemic in Manitoba if there were no Filipino workers here. How would our transit work if there were no Filipinos in Manitoba? How would our schools work if there would be no Filipino immigrants in Manitoba? How would our Legislature's Chamber work if there were no Filipino MLAs?

So first of all, I want to say thank you, thank you, thank you to all Filipino people in Manitoba to make this province a better place to live. There are so many people contributing to various walks of life that we cannot even thank enough.

We know that there are some towns in Manitoba, for example, Neepawa, that host so many Filipino families. It's adding not only to the diversity of our biggest city, Winnipeg, but it's also contributing to diversify the rural Manitoba. And today, if we have this bill on the floor, that's also because we have Filipino voters, we have Filipino elected representatives. And when we look back, I can relate that once the MLA Burrows was Filipino. So this is how we contribute to the diversity of a country that we call home when we grow up, or our second home where we are not born.

I had an opportunity to connect with the Filipino community during the election process in 2019, and I have discovered a lot about this community. I have

learned a few words about this community. These people are so humble and respectful to others.

Whenever you go to a Filipino person, they would offer you food first. I have had experiences when I wanted to talk to somebody and they would say, eat first. That's how they respect you. And that's something similar to my culture. If somebody comes to a Punjabi home, they would be offered a tea, coffee or food before they even start talking.

And about the relationships, how they treat people. Rather than addressing them by their first name, they would address them by a relationship. For example, I've even seen official communications in Manitoba where a lady is addressing—a Filipino lady is addressing a Filipino male who's older than her age in an email, she would write, *kuya*, which means elder brother.

Similarly, when you talk to somebody, a male or a female who is older than you, maybe your parents' age, you would use the words *tito* or *tita*. So *tito* is a word equivalent to uncle. So that's a way of paying respect to people because they want to be humble. They want to offer their love and respect to other people.

I had Filipino colleagues in Manitoba Agriculture when I worked there. I have Filipino staff in my office right now. I had Filipino volunteers in my election campaign. So I have seen these people, I have interacted with these people closely, and it was always a great, pleasant experience.

* (10:50)

And sometimes I relate. For example, there are people who are coming from the Philippines and before coming to Manitoba or Canada, they have served at very high positions in their departments. I've seen examples where people have worked as senior scientists in agriculture department in Philippines and they start here from very, very small positions: entry level workers. So that's the struggle. We need to recognize that struggle. We need to recognize the people working in the hospitality industry. We need to recognize their sacrifices.

This bill is a very good effort to recognize but this is not just enough. We need to go a few steps forward. We need to recognize the people, not only from Philippines, all people who are working on front lines or minimum wages. We need to recognize them with their wages enhanced.

Recently, we have seen this government—they say that they're increasing minimum wage by 5 cents. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 5 cents for a minimum wage worker, that adds up to \$8 a month. That doesn't even buy a large pizza for them.

And also, I want to appreciate the member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes) for bringing this bill forward and by rising above the party level to involve the member from Notre Dame to second his bill.

And I would also want to say this to our Premier (Mr. Pallister): if our honourable Premier is listening right now, to learn something from his own member because in 2019 when we, as an opposition party, requested our Premier to involve us to second a resolution against bill 21—Quebec's bill 21—he simply refused.

So sometimes we learn from our juniors. So, Mr. Premier, please learn from member of Waverley, to rise above partisan politics when it's about people, when it's about recognizing the efforts of hard-working Manitobans.

And one thing about Filipino community I appreciate is that they love their language. Look at their social media discussions. Sometimes it feels that, hey, I cannot understand what they're writing and what they're communicating but at the same time, I'm so happy that they are so proud of their language that they prefer to communicate in their language on social media. And sometimes I also request a few of my staff members to translate my Facebook posts into Tagalog so that we can communicate better.

There's a lot that could be said about the importance of diversity and importance of this bill, but due to lack of time, I would conclude here and I would like to indicate that MPNP is a great program that brings in so many diverse immigrants to our province. It needs to be strengthened.

I want to appreciate the Filipino church in my constituency, who, on top of their religious services, they're also training the next generation in theatre. That's a wonderful effort and once again, I want to thank the—all the health-care workers and front-line workers for their sacrifices.

Salamat po [Thank you], Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

The honourable member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield).

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Sorry, no. Sorry. We've—the honourable member for Tyndall Park is next. Sorry, Liberal—we have an independent. Sorry.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I want to thank my kuya, my colleague from Waverley and also my fellow Spartan, for introducing this legislation.

It's an honour to be able to speak to it virtually here today, and I'm not going to speak long and keep my eyes on the clock so that we can make sure this legislation passes.

Also, happy birthday, member from Waverley.

Now, I'm exceptionally grateful for our Filipino community, and this is why I think it's critical we take this time to honour and celebrate Filipino heritage, and I've grown up within the community and I'm so grateful for how welcoming they have been to my entire family.

Even the member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes), prior to us both being in politics, we went to many—we attended many events together. We've had many conversations with our fathers, with each other's fathers, and we've both have this immense amount of respect towards Dr. Rey Pagtakhan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm condensing a lot of my thoughts here just so I can share as much as I can within a few minutes, but I really want to say how cool it is that the member from Notre Dame, the member from Waverley and myself—all from three different political stripes—were sort of held together as Spartans. We all attended Sisler, and this has given us so much ground to be able to bond on and be able to work together now on.

And it is things like this that make me so excited about our Filipino Canadian heritage as well as politics, at both a federal and provincial level. And speaking here in this—in these legislative Chambers, even virtually, causes us to think about the political side of things, and I'm reminded of how lucky Manitoba has been with the Provincial Nominee Program. It's through this program that the Filipino Canadian pride has been able to ripple all across Manitoba.

And I did just want to share a couple of words about my Tita Linda and Tito Henry Celones. Tito Henry is like a godfather to me. He's like a second uncle. He's been my father's best friend for my entire

life and he's always been one of my biggest protectors and biggest encouragers.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker—his late wife, Tita Linda, she passed away a couple of years ago, and I'm sure all members in this House know of Tita Linda. She was the hardest-working woman that I know, and that stands to this day. And to my core—and this is why I bring these individuals up—I truly believe that Tita Linda is the reason the Filipino community has grown and settled here in Manitoba the way that it has.

Tita Linda invested so many of her efforts into making life better for anyone that she could, and I attribute Manitoba's Filipino population to her, and I will forever be grateful for her efforts in growing our Filipino community here in Manitoba.

So with these few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was only given about four or five minutes to speak and I do want to make sure we go to a vote. I just want to thank the member for Waverley for bringing forward this bill. I think it's extremely important and a wonderful opportunity to be able to celebrate. We know the importance of celebrating right now throughout a pandemic even more than ever.

And encourage all my fellow MLAs to go to the Philippines, because Filipino culture is now a part of our culture here in Manitoba. It's part of our identity so we, Manitobans, we need to experience it as first-hand.

So thank you so much for the opportunity to speak.

Salamat po [*Thank you*], Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Micklefield: Obviously, I want to speak in support of the bill. The Liberals have indicated the same. I believe the official opposition have said kind words. It'd be wonderful if we could pass this unanimously, and so I'd like to see if it's the will of the House to call for a vote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call for a vote?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hear a no? All in favour of the—oh, I said no. Right.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill, this very exciting bill. I'm very happy that it's being brought to the House for debate today. I'm glad that the way that it was also

brought forward, in a bipartisan nature between the member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes) and the member from Notre Dame to work collaboratively.

I know they have both strong connections with the Filipino community in Manitoba, and I'm very happy to see that there's some collaboration in this House and that the work that they're doing is working to put the community ahead of any political, you know, political differences. And I think that's commendable, that the, you know, Filipino community can look forward to having, you know, a month that will recognize the celebrations in June that they're already doing and have been doing for years.

We know that the Filipino community is very strong in Manitoba, and I think that's a pride of our province to have—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 11 o'clock, we're now concluding private members' bill business.

* (11:00)

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 26—Recognizing the Provincial Government's Addictions Strategy

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we're going to the resolution on the—put—brought forward by the honourable member for Dawson Trail, the Resolution 26, Recognizing the Provincial Government's Addictions Strategy.

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson),

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has created additional pressures and struggles for Manitobans and has seen a record increase in opioid use and deaths; and

WHEREAS mental health is an important component of the overall health of Manitobans; and

WHEREAS in spring of 2018, this Provincial Government commissioned the VIRGO report to evaluate Manitoba's mental health and addictions strategy; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government has invested nearly \$50.2 million in 30 initiatives in order to provide better mental health services at the right place and right time; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government is working with over 40 northern, rural, and urban organizations and agencies across the province to ensure services are available to all Manitobans no matter where they may reside; and

WHEREAS the issue of addictions is intersectional as it is related to other critical issues such as homelessness, mental health, and isolation, and on a larger scale, a symptom of issues surrounding gender, sex, race, and ability; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government has invested in programs that reach Manitobans of all ages, race, gender, and ability; and

WHEREAS key areas of focus have included investing in women shelters, northern resources, and education and resources for youth; and

WHEREAS the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre is set to open in 2021, increasing capacity to alleviate pressures on existing residential treatment services, allowing for the focus to shift to other critical levels of service; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government recognizes the importance of cultural connection, safety and prevention when it comes to addressing mental health and addictions issues.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the provincial government has committed to protecting the mental health of Manitobans.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lagassé: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to address this resolution in the House today. I used to watch a program called Dead Like Me and one of the main characters, George Lass, once said: We lead our lives and when they end, sometimes we leave a little of ourselves behind. Sometimes we leave money, a painting. Sometimes we leave a kind word, and sometimes we leave an empty space.

For whatever reason, one I cannot fully explain, this line stuck with me and made me want to work towards being a better person so that when I left the world, I would leave an empty space: a space that was filled with love for others and a genuine care for all people. That line reminds me also that I am worth something to someone and that I am worthy of love and one day, when I'm gone, that person or persons will feel like they were loved by myself.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I grew up feeling completely alone and not loved. Looking back, I can

say my mental health problems started as a child. I grew up in an era where we did not talk about our feelings nor was it something that society acknowledged back then. It was taboo, in a way.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I'm very thankful that this is no longer the case. As I've shared before, I was diagnosed with ADHD as a child and this caused me to already stand out and I became the target of many a bully growing up. I became a child who spent a lot of time alone and with plenty of time in self-reflection with thoughts of self-doubt and wondering what was wrong with me.

At school, I often would find myself in trouble for things I did not do. I became an easy target for others to blame, as I was so high-energy and all over the place. I distinctly remember a teacher telling me that I would never amount to anything in grade school and spending the better of those years seated in the hall at my desk. This only added to the reasons for other children to pick on me and contributed to my doubts of self-worth I later—which later led to a self-harm attempt in my teens.

I have come a long way since those days and with the help of loved ones and therapy, I have become a stronger person. I still have rough days at times but I am reminded that my story is not over yet and I want to remind others at this time that every one of us, whether we are suffering from addictions or mental health issues, are important in someone's life.

That is why I'm pleased to bring forward—sorry. Excuse me.

That is why I'm pleased to bring forward this resolution for all Manitobans. It is crucial that we commit the time to it as the Legislature and give it our full attention as a government. We need to be aiming for results and not just trying to score some political points.

Though addiction is not new and started long before this pandemic we are facing, it has indeed brought on a new height of problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has created many pressures and struggles for Manitobans, which has brought on a record increase in opioid uses and deaths in Manitoba.

The pandemic has had a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of Manitobans. The pandemic has created social isolation as a result of necessary public health measures; loss of incomes; and limited access to some services.

The evidence in Manitoba is apparent. Manitoba has shown leadership in addressing the fight on addictions. Our government has taken many initiatives to fight the growing concerns of addictions in Manitoba. Our government has made commitments to take steps that have resulted in progress in addressing addictions in Manitoba.

We will continue to work collaboratively with all partners in Manitoba and Canada to focus on immediate and long-term solutions for addictions in Manitoba. We continue to support and work with service providers and groups, working to fight addictions. We will continue to work and support enforcement agencies and other governments to combat drug dealers, addictions and deaths occurring from it.

Let's not forget that it could be someone close to you that is struggling with addictions and mental health. A family member, a co-worker, friend or a neighbour; addictions and mental health can affect everyone.

In spring 2018, the Manitoba government commissioned the VIRGO report to evaluate Manitoba's mental health and addictions strategy. Our government believes in the advice of top medical professionals. This is why our addictions strategy has been based on the findings of the VIRGO report. This report acts as a guide to determine what processes and strategies would be established to assist on the fight against addictions in Manitoba.

Our government is investing in initiatives and services that will connect Manitobans struggling with addictions and mental health with supports they need to preserve their health and safety. In 2018, the RAAM clinics aligned with the 2018 VIRGO report, Improving Access and Coordination of Mental Health and Addiction Services: A Provincial Strategy for all Manitobans. I'm pleased to report that since the opening of these clinics, more than 2,000 Manitobans suffering from addictions have accessed help for their addictions through these facilities.

Our government listens to Manitobans. To date, we have RAAM clinics in Winnipeg, Selkirk, Thompson, Brandon and Portage la Prairie. These clinics provide immediate counselling, prescription-appropriate addictions medications, including opioid agonist treatments. They are able to provide those seeking help to beat their addictions with a community resource and programmings.

Our government has invested nearly \$50.2 million into 30 initiatives in order to provide better 'medital' health services to those battling with addictions. We are working with over 40 northern, rural and urban organization agencies across the province to ensure the services are widely available to allow Manitobans, no matter where they reside, access to help.

Issues of addictions is an intersectional and is related to other critical issues, such as homelessness, mental health and isolation. And on larger scale is some time—of issues surrounding gender, sex, race and ability.

Our government has just invested over \$2 million and 100 supportive recovery housing beds to help Manitobans who have received addictions treatment successfully transition back to the community: 70 in Winnipeg, 40 coming online at Riverwood House, 20 at Siloam Mission, 30 at Tamarack, 12 in Thompson and 9 in Brandon.

Some of these recovery houses will go directly to support women. As stated in the VIRGO report, they were a priority group for the VIRGO recommendations. And we're also pleased to have the opportunity to provide investments to support this amazing work that is being done.

The Addictions Foundation of Manitoba offers 30 'sobrarity'-based transitional housing units at River Point and also 'bruke' oak recovery centre, which will be coming online this year, offering 15 new beds.

Our government has invested in programs that will reach all Manitobans, no matter what gender, race and ability. Our government recognizes the importance of cultural connections, safety prevention when it comes to addressing addiction issues.

Some key areas of focus have also included investing in women's shelters, northern resources and educational resources for youth. As of January 2021, there were 136 authorized Suboxone prescribers for opioid use disorder in Manitoba and 124 authorized Methadone prescribers for opioid disorders as well.

* (11:10)

We will support opioid replacement therapy in an effort to address significant opioid—the significant opioid situation in Manitoba and the unintended impacts of COVID-19. Our government recognizes the stress caused by COVID-19 and is aware that it has resulted in an increase in mental health issues in all demographic areas of Manitoba. These mental

health issues range from anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, increased substance abuse and reliance on substances to help individuals cope in their daily lives.

Communities all over Manitoba continue to be impacted by the illicit drug use and mental health diseases and addictions. We continue to experience the loss of community members and we continue to try to provide a necessary support for those suffering with addictions.

We are not alone in this challenge. Mental health disease and drug addiction problems—

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

Questions

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

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I want to thank the member for Dawson Trail for having the courage to share his story. I'm sure that it'll, you know, help others who are struggling, as well, possibly share their stories and seek help so that they're not in the same situation that the member found himself in when he was younger.

I do have a question, though. Does the member support the creation of a safe consumption site?

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): I'd like to thank the member for Point Douglas for those words of support and the acknowledgement of my past struggles.

We will continue as a government to focus on what the experts are recommending. So when it comes to safe consumption sites, we'll continue to listen to their advice and their direction.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I, too, want to, you know, acknowledge that sometimes it is difficult to reach out and share your thoughts on mental health and addictions, and I applaud the member and my friend from Dawson Trail for doing just that.

I know when we bring forward resolutions, there are often times that we look at timeliness of bringing these forward, and I'm wondering if the member from Dawson Trail could tell us what the timeliness of this resolution is?

Mr. Lagassé: I'd like to thank the member from Brandon East for that question.

And I'm trying to avoid becoming incredibly partisan but I know last week we had heard from members opposite on how they felt that we were just not doing anything. And I—and part of me felt that this just isn't the truth and I—the timeliness of this is that it—during this pandemic, we are actually working to improve mental health and address the addictions of individuals that are suffering through this pandemic.

So its timeliness is a hundred per cent perfect, as we need to put something positive on the record as to what our government is doing.

Mrs. Smith: I just want to go back to my first question about a safe consumption site because the member did speak about experts and, you know, seeking the guidance from experts.

Does the member know that the VIRGO report was—the safe consumption site was included in the VIRGO report and that his government chose to remove that, and that was an expert that actually brought that forward and said that that would help save and change lives here in Manitoba?

You know, as an MLA, I went—as the addictions MLA, I went out to a couple of different provinces and toured their safe consumption sites and actually seen the work that they do to help save lives and connect people with the resources that they need.

So, again, I'll go back to that question.

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

Mr. Lagassé: Once again, I'd like to thank the member for her question regarding safe consumption sites and their value.

Again, our government is following the advice of the mental health experts and the—if it was brought up in the VIRGO report and was removed, well, that would be a whole other issue in of itself. But as far as I know we are following the advice of the mental health experts.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question really relates to this: does the member agree that somebody who has an addiction need to be helped the moment that they come for help?

And the reason that I ask this is that I had recent experience—not myself, but that I've heard about from a RAAM clinic, and this is from an individual who desperately wanted and was ready to get help and get

treatment. And the first time he went there he was told that he had only been off the opioids that he was on for 18 hours so they could do nothing, and they sent him away. The—

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

Mr. Lagassé: I'd like to thank the member for that question. I'm not sure he got all the way through where he was going with that point, so I can only say that I'm proud of our government for investing in RAAM clinics, and if there is a larger issue around the service delivery I would encourage that individual to address it with the local MLA for the area.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): I also want to thank my member from Dawson Trail for bringing forward this resolution and for sharing his comments.

I'd also like to ask the member what the government has done by way of offering mental health and supports during COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr. Lagassé: I'd like to thank the member for that question. As mentioned before, we've been investing and expanding broadband use and all kinds of stuff so that people can access the services online and—where they are. And we all know that in a lot of northern and rural communities, a lot of people are isolated and we want to ensure that they can either learn at home or they can receive services at home.

So that's why I'm proud actually to be part of a government that's going to be investing more in broadband, and I was proud to hear about the contract in order for Xplornet so that they can expand these services—

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

Mrs. Smith: Could the member explain why his government hasn't provided publicly reported overdose data in the last three years, and does the member support the idea of providing more timely and detailed information on overdoses?

Mr. Lagassé: So I'd like to thank the member of Point Douglas for that question. I'm going to have to ask for a little bit of forgiveness there. I actually—this little bit of my component of ADHD, literally I got distracted by something, so I haven't quite fully caught the question.

And it's—I don't know if the member would like to ask it again? As you can hear in the background there's

some dogs barking and stuff, so I didn't quite hear properly.

An Honourable Member: Leave to ask the question again?

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Could the member from Point Douglas repeat the question, please?

Mrs. Smith: Could the member explain why his government hasn't provided publicly reported overdose data in the last three years, and does the member support the idea of providing more timely and detailed information on overdoses?

Mr. Lagassé: Thank you to the member for that question. I heard it this time.

Literally, I would suggest that maybe this is some discussion she could have with the Minister of Health. I know that we have discussed this matter in the House before and our position has been put on the record, as government, as to the importance of these issues and the way we are handling it.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): To my colleague, I thank him for bringing this resolution up today, and you know, the dogs barking reminded me of the importance of pets, in terms of helping individuals with their mental health issues.

* (11:20)

I'm wondering if the member can share perhaps a little more of a background as to why he is hoping this resolution will be passed this morning by all parties.

Mr. Lagassé: I'd like to thank the member for McPhillips for this question.

I think it's important that we just simply put some positive things on the record every once in a while, and this is a very positive solution as to exactly what our government's been doing. I've found that, living through a pandemic, we've—hear a lot of negative. I've even had to stop listening to the news as a result of how much negative there is all the time, and it's time for a little bit of positive. And this resolution speaks to the positive things our government is doing.

Mrs. Smith: Why has your—why has this government failed to implement all of the recommendations from the VIRGO report? And the member spoke about listening to the experts. The experts put the actual information into this report and specifically asked for 9 per cent of the health-care budget to be allocated to mental health and addictions.

So why hasn't his government listened to the experts and allocated the 9 per cent to mental health and addictions?

Mr. Lagassé: I'd like to thank the member for the question and I would suggest that we actually are investing in working towards implementing the full report.

We've got multiple investments and, as the member knows, not everything happens overnight. We do move in a direction that, you know, benefits all of Manitobans and we also have to work within the constraints of time and literally, that's about the best answer I can give at this time.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The time for questions has expired.

Debate

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

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I want to thank the MLA for Dawson Trail for shedding some light on this extremely important issue of mental health and addictions and services, and I know that it's coming from a genuine place. And I just wish that he could convey this to his government so that they would also, you know, see the urgency of this public health crisis that we're in today and that there's people dying in our province.

Mr. Acting Speaker, 372 Manitobans lost their lives in one year. That's an 87 per cent increase, and families are struggling. Families are grieving. These were mothers. These were fathers. These were daughters, you know, these were friends. These were community members, people who, you know, might have started with a mental health issue that didn't get the support that they needed because it wasn't there, and then turned to addictions to, you know, help with the mental health struggles that they were having and ended up losing their lives.

And this government continues to fail after fail after failure, and the failure is resulting in Manitobans losing their lives. And, you know, we have 372 families just in one year that are grieving the loss of their loved one. This—you know, these aren't just numbers. These are people. These are humans.

These are people who have contributed to our community of Manitoba here and, you know, for our government to pat themselves on the back and say that they're doing, you know, an amazing job at addressing the mental health and addictions crisis that we're in

today, is simply shameful. It's—you know, talk to the families. Talk to those 372 families and tell them what they're doing—what you're doing and ask them if they're doing enough. Because you're not doing enough and that's what they'll tell you.

Their loved one would not have died. These were preventable deaths. This government would only listen to the experts, as they say they're doing, and I know the member from Dawson Trail says that it takes some time, but this government has had three years since the VIRGO report came out—three years that they could have been making—implementing the recommendations. And the recommendation recommends 9 per cent of the health budget be allocated to mental health and addictions, and this government is nowhere near that.

And what has it resulted in? It's resulted in people struggling with their mental health and not being able to get the support that they need, and especially locally. You know, this government likes to boast about investments that they're making. They're not even investing locally here.

You have, you know, a multi-million-dollar company, Morneau and Shepell, that's getting \$4.5 million to provide mental health supports, a call line—a call line to call someone who probably doesn't live in our province, probably doesn't know about the resources or what people are struggling with in our province.

Every province is different right across this country, and it's not a blanketed, you know, kind of thing that we need to be doing. We can't just apply the same thing from Saskatchewan that we're applying here in Manitoba or in BC.

Things are different and people have different struggles, and this government needs to recognize that and start investing locally. There's people that are in our province—we have, you know, competent counsellors, psychologists, you know, people that are willing to do the work, and this Province—or this government hasn't invested in them and, you know, it's a shame.

So I just want to say to the member from Dawson Trail that, you know, I know you're coming from a genuine place but you need to advocate with your government, and you've said that we should be advocating with our local MLAs. Well, I can tell you that members that have come to me that aren't even my constituents have gone out to their local MLAs, and their local MLAs have not been a voice for them.

We've had to be their voice, which is shameful because we're all elected to represent Manitobans and represent the constituents that live in our constituency, and members opposite are failing to do that because of their ideology and the ideology of their boss.

And, you know, they've put a lot of stigmatism on mental health and addictions where people don't even want to seek the help that they need because this government has made it seem like it's a failure on their part, that because they're struggling, that because they have to turn to addictions, because they have to turn to maybe a pill to help them get through a day, that that is a failure on their part. And it isn't. It's not a failure.

You know, people do what they need to do to survive and get through the day but they need supports. They need supports from this government, and this government continues to, you know, underfund, make cuts to places where they need investments.

And, you know, the Seneca Warm Line out of Sara Riel Incorporated is just one example: \$113,000, Assistant Deputy Speaker. That's all that they were asking for. They serviced over 11,000 Manitobans in one year. The Morneau and Shepell only serviced 4,000 Manitobans in that same year, and they're getting paid \$4.5 million while Morneau and Shepell only asked for \$113,000.

Well, thankfully, the federal government stepped up and other organizations in our community that saw the value in this, in servicing Manitobans right in their community from people who actually understand what's going on in our community invested, and they're able to continue to service Manitobans. And what does this government do? They didn't even provide that \$113,000. How shameful is that? Local making a difference; 11,000 versus 4,000, and this government couldn't even provide \$113,000. Like, that is so shameful.

You know, I want to go back to some of my notes here because I've got off track because I just, you know, listening to the questions that were asked and, you know, what was said, and that this government is doing enough to address this simply isn't true. And it's frustrating and, you know, it's a real shame, you know, to hear members of this government claim that they have in their words committed to protecting the mental health of Manitobans.

The only thing that this government is committed to is protecting wealthy landlords and big corporations. If they were committed to protecting the mental health of Manitobans, they'd actually be listening to mental health professionals. If they were actually committed, they'd actually be listening to organizations like Overdose Awareness Manitoba, Westman Families of Addicts.

And I know that the member from Brandon East, you know, seconded this bill and overdose—or Westman Families of Addicts is out in that constituency, and never once has that MLA met with that group. And they've asked to meet with that group because they have a real issue in Brandon with addictions and mental health, but yet there's been no supports put into that community to help those families that are struggling to keep their loved ones alive, and even aftercare for those families that have lost their loved one. There's nothing for them, nothing at all. It's forced these families to start their own groups so that they can support each other.

* (11:30)

But I can tell you, Deputy Speaker, that—or, Assistant Deputy Speaker, that takes a toll on families. Been listening to families and, you know, sharing their stories and having new people come into their circle. It's traumatizing. Over and over again, you're telling your story. You're hearing stories from other people that are similar to your own story, and yet there's no resources being put into place that can stop that from happening, that could, you know, save lives in Manitoba.

You know, being an addict is not a failure. Being an addict, you know, is a struggle and we should all be, as, you know, legislators, standing up, standing up and saying that we need to treat this as a real health crisis and actually put some funds to addressing it in a real meaningful way.

And that includes increasing detox beds. Just because we had a pandemic doesn't mean that we decrease those beds, and that's exactly what this government has forced organizations to do. All they had to do is provide them with extra funding so that they could expand their space, provide them with extra funding so that they can hire some more staff, but what did this government do? No, told them that they couldn't do that, that they had to decrease and work with the space that they had and the staff that they had.

I look at AFM. You know, they had to decrease their circles as well, their support. And this government, again, could have just expanded the space. They could have given them extra funding and ensure that people who are struggling to stay sober got—continued to get the support that they needed. But this government again told them, no, sorry, we're not going to give you any more funding. You can work with the space that you have. You know, you'll just have to have less people coming in.

Well, that forced organizations to pick and choose who it was that would come in and get the support that they need, and organizations should never have to be put in that position. And, you know, I think about Arlene Last-Kolb of Overdose Awareness Manitoba. You know, her son, Jessie, he died of a preventable fentanyl overdose. And I know in this House we've pushed for 'naloxolone' to be unscheduled, but now we want to even go further and push for 'naloxolone' nasal spray to be unscheduled.

So this government has a lot of work to do and we will not be supporting—

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

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): It's certainly interesting when you get an opportunity to speak after a speech that we just heard.

Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I really encourage the member from Point Douglas to get her head out of the sand, to start looking at reality. I am positive that the member from Point Douglas would find a \$100 bill on the ground and complain that it was not a \$1,000 bill.

Some of the comments this—and I—I'm going to apologize upfront, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, because some of the comments this member has made are just 'ludicrous,' but I will say one thing that this member is good at, and that's words. She's good at slanting words, no matter what comes to the floor. It doesn't matter what anybody else does, it is just not good enough for that member.

I wasn't going to say a lot about the comments from the previous member, but let's talk about the Westman Families of Addicts. I have had numerous conversations with that group. I have had numerous conversations with Kim Longstreet and her group. There is a committee out there that Kim Longstreet has put together. Unfortunately, we are sitting in Winnipeg right now, so I have my assistant is attending those meetings—or has been attending the

meetings, along with the mayor, and we have work to do.

Absolutely, we have work to do. But to sit back and say that we're doing failure after failure after failure, again, is just unbelievable, and I am so pleased that that is recorded on Hansard because I am sure that is going to come back to bite that member somewhere.

So again, we talk about many things, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, and I do again want to acknowledge the member from Dawson Trail to bring this forward with passion, to bring this forward with experience, and a lot of us take that experience for granted.

I worked, as you know, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I worked in health care for 21 years. I have never ever proclaimed to be a professional in mental health—and definitely not in addictions. I'm fortunate—and I understand, you know, that people do become addicted to—whether it's drugs or alcohol or gambling—there's a number of things that people become addicted to, and I'm never ever going to blame anybody that's become addicted and neither is this government.

I have never once heard anybody in this government, since I've been here since 2016 that has said anything to that contrary—to that statement. It's just an absolute ridiculous statement to make.

But, again, we looked at—our government recognizes that we do have a need for more mental health and addictions, and that's exactly what we're doing. And one of the biggest things that we've done—and the member from Point Douglas can say we're not investing at all, but she can say that as many times as she wants, but everybody out there that watches these or reads Hansard knows that that is absolutely false.

Look at the investment we've made, being the first government to—or the first time Manitoba's implemented a Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery (Ms. Gordon). There's an investment in itself, and the reason we do that is because we understand and we see the need to be more dedicated in the area of mental health and addictions.

I have sat down with the minister and her staff, and we have had a conversation about what is happening in Brandon—and I won't say just Brandon East but all of Brandon—we've had that conversation. We have some ideas of what needs to be done, and giving money—and I know the NDP has been very famous at just throwing money at issues hoping they'll go away—and our government has spent millions since 2016, but again we understand it's not just about

the money. It's about getting things done. It's about building a—really, a comprehensive recovery-orientated system of care that will lift up Manitobans.

And I say this with confidence. We've invested more than \$50 million—and again it's not just the dollars. It's about having the right people on the ground and giving credit where credit is due.

And when I look at that, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about a really good friend of mine—used to be an employee, we became friends, we stay friends today Rob Shinske. He is a counsellor at the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba at the Parkwood Centre in Brandon. He does some tremendous work for those that are dealing with addictions in gambling. And I've had many conversations with the folks at Parkwood in regards to addictions.

We've already heard about the Seventh Street Health Access Centre in the RAAM clinic, and with RAAM clinics all around Manitoba—I mean since 2018—more than 4,000 individuals have received services at a RAAM clinic in Manitoba, and not just in Brandon. Yes, I represent the great constituents of Brandon East, but we have RAAM clinics—obviously—we have—I think we have two here in Winnipeg, Selkirk, Thompson and Portage la Prairie.

Lots of help is out there. Do we have a golden answer? No, we don't. We rely on professionals—as the member from Dawson Trail mentioned—we rely on these health-care professionals, and let's talk—we even have a gentleman in Brandon. He's the retired chief of the police—the Brandon Police Service—Ian Grant. Ian, a number of years ago when he was the chief of police, he brought to Brandon a community mobilization hub.

And I know this hub is—and the member from Thompson is well aware of the hub because they're trialing it I believe up in Thompson as well. Maybe the trial's over and it's implemented—but when I was on city council and I had the pleasure of being the vice-chair of the Brandon Police Board, we worked closely with Mr. Grant.

And the work that they're doing at this mobilization hub is tremendous, and it's the community coming together to help those that are, you know, whether they've—they're getting into crime because of an addiction issue or family issues—they all work together to sort out the root of the issue and then work with the individual by offering them services and—really—an ear to lean on, so that, you know, there is that avenue on a way up.

I do want to briefly talk to—and I know the member from Point Douglas says that we need to start investing locally, because we're not doing that—well, I want to bring your attention, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, to a place in Brandon called the Joshua Jacks Centre.

* (11:40)

And I remember just—I believe it was a year go, maybe two years ago, that—and I apologize, COVID restrictions in place have really kind of set the timelines off a little bit. But Joshua Jacks Mennie was a 30-year old individual who died of an overdose on December the 19th, 2016. He spent many years dealing with alcohol addiction, and then it eventually led into a drug addiction. Unfortunately and sadly, a crystal meth overdose took his life.

Now, Glen Kruck is the regional manager at Community Health and Housing Association in Brandon, and I remember being out there with a couple of ministers a few years ago, as he was opening up the construction site so that we could have a look at his intention, and that is to build nine long-term transitional housing suites so that when folks come out of their 21- or 30-day detox, they have a place to go and they can be in that place, receiving support from staff.

My conversation with Mr. Kruck really does not set a timeline on it. Some places you can go and you have 18 days or maybe 30 days, maybe even 18 months. This place here, it will be there for as long as people need.

And I know I've only got a minute left, but, again, I want to dispel some of the rumours that the member from Point Douglas put on record when she says that we're not spending, and I just want to say: \$1.5 million expanded the distribution of Thrival Kits; \$823,000 to northwest youth hub; \$621,000, expanding Project 11; the Métis CART Program, \$1.9 million; \$2.4 million for the Klinik Community Health Centre and Laurel Centre; \$1.6 million for Community Schools Program, \$1.12 million for StreetReach Winnipeg, and Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre; \$1.12 million in partnership with Indigenous organizations; \$3.8 million for expanding the 'necheepewams' Winnipeg facility.

I can't finish it all in 12 seconds, Acting Deputy Speaker, but I want to say let's set aside that the wrong words that the opposite member used and let's praise our government for the work we are doing.

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

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I'm grateful for the opportunity to put a few words on the record. I want to thank the member for Dawson for bringing this resolution forward. It is really important that whenever we can, we talk about the realities related to problematic substance use, addictions and, unfortunately, you know, some of the outcomes that we've seen, especially during this pandemic.

As my colleague from Point Douglas has already identified, here in Manitoba, we have seen an astronomical increase in deaths related to substance use and addictions: 327 lives lost to addictions, to overdose, and, quite frankly, you know, a significant number of those—I want to be able to say that they're all preventable loss of life, actually, because if we have the mechanisms in place that are needed, if we address adverse childhood experiences, childhood trauma, if we address the fact that many folks have mental health needs that need to be addressed and as early a stage as possible, then we will see better outcomes.

And I want to make sure that I address some of the comments made by the member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson). You know, this member has, on previous occasions, expressed his frustration with my colleague, the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), putting on the record that this government continues to fail Manitoba families who are navigating addictions, mental health issues, et cetera.

And I think that this member needs to really check himself. He really does. The member for Point Douglas is in daily communication with families, with organizations, with those on the front lines providing resources, with peers who are providing resources to those in our communities to keep people alive.

I think it's incredibly disrespectful of him, quite frankly, to speak about our colleague that way, to minimize what she's bringing forward. Her concerns come from a completely legitimate place. It's backed by evidence, and I'm grateful for the fact that, you know, my colleague does a fantastic job of not only presenting the anecdotal information, the qualitative information that should inform our decision-making as legislators, but also that my colleague does provide evidence.

She uses the data that is available to us. Quite—I need to say, the data that isn't as readily available as

it should be. She uses the very little data, the not transparently provided data that exists and asks for greater transparency and information to be brought forward so that, in fact, the government can do a better job.

I think it's disappointing that the member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson), any member of this House, would suggest, by being so critical of that ask, that less access to that information somehow is a good thing. You know, the member needs to recognize that you can't fix what you don't measure. You can't fix what you don't understand, and in order to understand something, we need the information.

And that's one of the asks that the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), in her capacity, has brought forward to this House in every which way possible, at every opportunity, and she does it on behalf of families; she does it on behalf of Manitobans. And that is exactly what we're elected to do.

And so I commend her for that and I encourage the member for Brandon East to, instead of being so critical because he doesn't like what he's hearing, which are facts, maybe have a meeting with the member from Point Douglas and learn a few things and advocate within his own caucus, with his Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery (Ms. Gordon) to make that information available, to make sure that Manitobans have that data so that they can strategically plan, in an informed way, to save lives.

You know, it's interesting because this government, since taking office, has done a terrible job of funding public health. Now we see, during this pandemic, the consequences of that. The fact that public health is underfunded in this province has affected the ability of public health workers, nurses to respond to areas related to that, including substance use and addictions, including the relationship between substance use and addictions, mental health and also STBBIs.

You know, we see here in Winnipeg, here in Manitoba, totally preventable congenital syphilis skyrocketing in this province. I don't see the member for Brandon East outraged about that. I don't see the member for Brandon East outraged that babies in Manitoba are being born with an entirely preventable congenital disease.

Where's the outrage for that? Does he think that's acceptable? He thinks it's okay to put \$1.1 million—

3.1—we've appointed a new minister. He thinks that's an adequate defence for babies being born with a disease that's entirely preventable?

When we first saw the first cases of that rearing their head again in Manitoba, people were shocked, jaw-dropped, understandably so. It was in the media: What's going on in Manitoba? What's going on in Winnipeg? This resolution recognizing the provincial government's addictions strategy, in the title alone, implies something that we haven't even seen from this government. What strategy? Where is it? What does it look like? Is it time sensitive? What are the goals? How is it being measured? Who's informing it?

We have a number of incredible organizations right here in our own city, in our own province. I know they don't get an audience with this government. I know because I talk to them regularly. There are a number of folks in our communities who are providing peer-to-peer support—invaluable work not compensated, not recognized.

Are they informing this addictions strategy that's at the top of this resolution, which, again, I commend the member for Dawson for bringing this forward because it's important that we're not only discussing this, but we're taking meaningful action to address these things. But you can't call something a strategy when nobody's actually—what is it? No one's seen it.

You know, it's disappointing because, you know, the member also talked about the fact that, you know, nobody on his side of the House—or blame, would blame, rather—I think that's the language that he used—blame folks for their addictions, when in reality, on multiple occasions, we have seen this Premier (Mr. Pallister) speak poorly of those who are struggling with addictions and problematic substance use in the media.

I think I've mentioned this before in the House, but somebody that I know who used to struggle with an addiction to meth and overcame that addiction and, you know, is thriving and doing so well in their life today, called me one morning because the Premier had made comments in the media as something along the lines of—and I don't have the direct quote, I apologize, in front of me—but that they are taking measures to ensure that when folks access services in hospitals, that they are protecting those who don't use substances from those who've made the decision to—something along those lines, protecting those from those who are struggling with addictions.

* (11:50)

That construction, ascribing that to people who are struggling with addictions, is stigmatizing. That is damaging. That person called me so upset, so hurt by that, that the person who is at the top of the political ladder in Manitoba as the leader of this province would make such harmful, damaging statements about people who are struggling to get their needs met, to get their mental health needs met, their physical needs met.

That's just one of many examples I could provide. I could talk about how once in this Chamber, actually, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) made a comment about—actually referenced people who are involved with the justice system as thugs. I was shocked, sitting in this House, hearing that.

Good example of stigmatizing those who disproportionately are affected by trauma, navigating substance use issues sometimes, have unmet needs; stigmatizing people in a way that creates a wall—a barrier to them; being able to see the help and the resources that exist on the other side.

I would encourage that member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) to not be defensive and to instead reflect on the rightful criticisms that people have for this government. Understand that these criticisms are coming from citizens who are losing their loved ones on a daily basis.

The last thing that I would say is that we need to ensure that as we move forward through this pandemic, we don't leave people behind. And we all have seen that those who have been marginalized before this pandemic are increasingly marginalized during it, so I hope that with this resolution in mind, the member for Dawson encourages his members to—

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to address a number of issues related to addictions and treatment in reference to this private members' resolution.

One of the most critical aspects of helping somebody with an addiction is that the help is there at the critical time when they recognize that they want help and they need help. And I give an example of an individual who went three times to RAAM clinics seeking help and was turned away three times.

The first time, he was turned away because he was only off opioids for 18 hours and not longer. The second time, after a tremendous effort and struggle, he

got off opioids for 24 hours. He got there. He was in the line-up, things were going well, but then when he got to the front of the line, the clinic closed for the day and that was it.

He had to recuperate, figure out what was next, get himself psyched up once again to go, and the third time he went he was in time. He was off opioids for 18 hours after a tremendous—for 24 hours after a tremendous struggle and a lot of pain, but then he was turned away because there were no RAAM detox beds available at the Main Street Project. I am told that there were other beds at the Main Street Project but because there were no RAAM-designated beds, he could not go there.

This is an example of the current system—this was not very long ago—not working, and so there remain many areas which critically need to be addressed. It is vital that individuals who have addictions have somewhere to go that they will get help. And if it is not immediately detox, then it needs to be harm reduction, whether at a safe injection site or to somewhere where they can get maintenance opioids if they're on opioids as a step toward getting off and getting treatment.

But there needs to be this path so that somebody is not turned away because that, for somebody with an addiction, is terrible and is one of the reasons why we have seen a lot of increase in opioid deaths. People need to be able to get in to detox when they are ready and when they need it.

Second, that once somebody gets initially—treatment and gets through detox, there needs to be a seamless transition so that they go right away from their initial help to a second-step treatment and, following that, to supportive housing. Currently the resources are not nearly as well organized as they should be so that this process is often not very 'seamless' and people fall through the gaps at one place or another.

There could be navigators to help people, and there should be navigators, there should be a single website with all these many resources available with the list of what there are in terms open beds and spaces so that people can find what is needed, and so that people can immediately transition seamlessly from one step to another.

Third, there needs to be accountability. We need to be measuring results. We are measuring some results slower than we might want, but—for example, in opioid overdose deaths the number has dramatically

increased. So, for whatever reason, we are going in the wrong direction under this government. We need to have those results, figure out what's not working, and fix it instead of just going ahead and saying oh, what we're doing is fine.

We've got an increased number of sexually transmitted diseases increase. Syphilis is going up. Again, we have an objective endpoint, it's going in the wrong direction. The government needs to be on top of this instead of just saying, oh, it's all good.

We need to know numbers, how many people came for help actually got it, we need to know for those who came for help their status at one month, two months, six months, one year, two years, so that we can adequately assess how well programs are working and how they are not. We don't have this information now. We should have it and we should know what is happening.

There is clearly an aspect of this which is important to mention, and that is that things were not going all that well under the NDP either. They did not succeed all that well in dealing with mental health and addictions. And so the Progressive Conservative government have had some problems to address, but in considering that the system was broken, they've actually made it worse from what we can see so far in terms in results.

We wait for better results. We hope that better results will come, but right now the results have been going in the wrong direction. And so, until we start to

see results going in the right direction, then we're not going to feel very positively about the current system of helping people with addictions and mental illness.

So those, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are my comments for today. There is much work to do. It's not to say that there isn't any good work being done, that's not true, there is a lot of people working very hard but many people are frustrated because all the system is not together and there are too many gaps and too many people falling through the cracks and too many people dying because of overdoses and too many people getting sexually transmitted diseases and other consequences of addictions instead of being helped.

So thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield)? No? Okay.

The member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte).

An Honourable Member: Question. I'm calling for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): It's been—the member for Seine River. *[interjection]*

The hour being 12 a.m.—or 12 noon, the debate will remain opened. The hour being 12 p.m., this House is—okay, the member for Seine River with 10 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

CONTENTS

ORDERS OF THE DAY		Resolutions	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS		Res. 26–Recognizing the Provincial Government's Addictions Strategy	
Second Readings–Public Bills		Lagassé	3420
Bill 233–The Filipino Heritage Month Act		Questions	
Reyes	3409	B. Smith	3422
Questions		Lagassé	3422
Fontaine	3412	Isleifson	3422
Reyes	3412	Gerrard	3423
A. Smith	3412	Morley-Lecomte	3423
Marcelino	3412	Martin	3424
Lamoureux	3412	Debate	
Micklefield	3412	B. Smith	3424
Debate		Isleifson	3426
Marcelino	3414	Asagwara	3428
A. Smith	3415	Gerrard	3430
Brar	3417		
Lamoureux	3419		
Micklefield	3419		
Moses	3419		

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