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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, 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	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	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	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.
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LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
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MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
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PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
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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

Thursday, October 29, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Good morning, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to call Bill 203 for debate this morning, but also, Madam Speaker, I'd like to see if there's leave of the House to have the vote on Bill 203 this morning before resolutions.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will deal with Bill 203, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act—second reading of Bill 203, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act, referendum before privatization.

And there is also a leave request to see if there is leave of the House to call the vote on this bill before the 11 o'clock break on this bill. Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 203—The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act (Referendum Before Privatization of Subsidiary)

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I move, seconded by the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), that The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act now be read for a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for St. James, seconded by the honourable member for Union Station, that Bill 203, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act (Referendum Before Privatization of Subsidiary), be now read a

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

Mr. Sala: It gives me great pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to the importance of this bill, Bill 203, and I'm very pleased to speak about why it's needed right now and to have an opportunity to encourage this government to support it.

This bill would ensure that no subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro could ever be privatized without giving the people of Manitoba a say in the referendum first. We need this bill now more than ever because we have a government that's proven its willingness to take public wealth and to transfer that wealth into private hands.

As much as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet like to suggest that we're just crying wolf about privatization, the facts and the actions of this government tell a very different story.

We have every reason to believe that this government is setting the stage to sell off more of our Hydro assets, and we see those indications and hear those indications from many places—journalists' work that they're doing, FIPPAs—and it's becoming increasingly clear what the intentions of this government are.

You know, in some cases, we're also seeing direct preparations for the selling off of publicly owned Manitoba Hydro assets and in others we're seeing clear evidence of them using backdoor approaches to privatization, divesting small portions of Hydro using RFPs to substitute a public function for a private one. Increasingly, we're seeing a growing role of private business, and the role of public—the public organizations, their footprint is shrinking.

Because all of Hydro's subsidiaries are money-making entities, privatizing any of these assets simply means less profit flowing to Manitoba Hydro and, by extension, to all of us as Manitobans. This creates one thing, Madam Speaker: it creates increased rate pressures and, ultimately, greater costs of energy for all Manitobans.

And that goes for folks who own seven-car garages right down to everyday, working Manitobans. And I think we know, Madam Speaker, that the impact of increasing energy costs are born mostly by those

who are lower income and who are struggling to get by.

The privatization of Teshmont Consultants, in which we were all partial owners, was not a decision that was in the best interest of this province. That company made millions of dollars in profits every single year, and many of those profits were made doing work in partnership with Manitoba Hydro.

The sale of Teshmont to Stantec means lower profits for Manitoba Hydro, but it also means that our economy shrinks. It means that good-paying, high-tech engineering jobs—the kind of jobs that we want to have stay in our province, the kind of jobs that allow families to want to make a life here in Manitoba instead of taking their families to Toronto or to Vancouver or to Calgary—is threatened.

And much of the benefits that companies like Teshmont and innovative tech-focused companies can create for this province are being put at risk here by this government and we're risking losing so much and those profits that Teshmont once made are now simply going to be siphoned out of our province.

So it's—while it's not too late to regain that—while it's too late to regain that public ownership stake in Teshmont, it's not too late for this government to take action to protect the remainder of Hydro's subsidiaries by supporting this bill.

You know, Madam Speaker, but—the interference in Manitoba Hydro affairs and specifically, their interference in the affairs of Manitoba Hydro International and in Manitoba Hydro Telecom, offer some pretty clear indications of what this government's intentions are.

And if I might briefly talk about Manitoba Hydro International, we should reflect on how incredibly valuable of an asset that is and that's currently wholly owned by Manitobans. You know, Manitoba Hydro International, which is currently under threat of privatization by this government, has essentially figured out how to take expertise that we've developed in hydro development, in long-distance high voltage transmission, through many, many years of Manitobans investing in those technologies, and we figured out how to bottle that expertise and sell it around the world.

It's incredible. It really is incredible, Madam Speaker, that we've found a way to take that expertise and market that around the globe, and it's worth reflecting on the success of that company for a minute, because I think it speaks to some of the best that

Manitoba has to offer the world. It speaks to the core expertise we've developed as a province and it speaks to the ability of governments to innovate and to act in an entrepreneurial fashion to create huge gains for citizens.

* (10:10)

It's literally the best of what we have to offer and yet, even though MHI is literally a golden goose for this province, this government is currently in the process of engineering its collapse by issuing a stop-sell notice that is literally killing that business as we speak.

Employees at MHI are terrified and, of course, we've heard this in media. There are huge questions about the future of the wholly-owned subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro that produces huge profits for Manitoba Hydro that, again, correlate to reduced rates for Manitoba ratepayers.

And we have very strong reason to believe that just like Teshmont ended up on the chopping block only a couple of months back, that now Manitoba Hydro International is very much at threat of being sold off by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet.

To repeat, the government is forcing Manitoba Hydro International to stop selling any and all services, which is causing them to halt of all their business activity. Why would they do this, other than to prepare Manitoba Hydro International for sale on the market. What other possible reasons could exist for allowing this valuable Manitoba-owned business to fail? It just does not make any sense at all, and the only possible explanation is that this valuable publicly owned business is about to go on the chopping block.

And I know we have many reasons to believe that decisions relating to the future of Manitoba Hydro International have been delayed as a result of political concern, I'm sure, that this government had about the outcome to that. And we can all wait with bated breath, I think, for January when we understand there will be discussions relating to the future of that Crown corporation's wholly-owned subsidiary.

I'm sure what I'm saying is making some of my colleagues on the other side of the House a little bit nervous because I think this information is cutting a little close to the bone for some of them, and I think many of them know the direction that things are headed and they should be nervous.

We all should have reason to be nervous because this Premier is very clearly moving to cut Manitoba

Hydro International, to sell it off to the highest bidder, and as a result Manitobans will lose those profits and very—be very much at risk of increased Manitoba Hydro rates.

Madam Speaker, we need confidence that this won't happen, and this bill can help to offer us confidence. I even suspect that some of the government MLAs agree with me and I'd argue that this is a great opportunity for them to support Manitoba Hydro. It's a great opportunity for them to do something that's actually in the best interest of Manitobans.

I think many of them are embarrassed about the regressive vision of this Premier. I think many of them are embarrassed about this government's work in shrinking, in reducing, in cutting, in atrophying our economy, and I think they're embarrassed about the fact that this government likes to take publicly generated wealth and to hand that over to private hands. And this bill is an opportunity for them to take a stand in support of regular Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, our concern doesn't just end with Manitoba Hydro International. We're also concerned about their interference in Manitoba Hydro Telecom, which is another incredibly valuable subsidiary that creates profits for Manitobans. And we know that this government is interfering there too, and they're shutting down Manitoba Hydro Telecom and preventing them from doing business.

They're kicking them out of the business of managing access to our fibre-optic line. They're handing over the keys to big business. They're using what's called a concession model to allow private business to make profits off of our fibre-optic line while Manitobans lose out on that key opportunity. And every indication is that they're going to be handing over control of that fibre-optic line to a major large pan-Canadian telecommunications company and Manitobans will lose out.

The writing is on the wall for Manitoba Hydro International, and it's on the wall for Manitoba Hydro Telecom. And we cannot allow this government to privatize those subsidiaries. We need to protect Manitoba Hydro. We need to protect these subsidiaries. This bill is an opportunity for this government to do that, and I recommend all of them come out in support of this bill today.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed

to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party, this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties, each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The honourable member for Radisson—oh, the honourable member for Radisson will have to move to the podium.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): My question for the member is: Does the member for St. James believe that a referendum should be required for Manitoba Hydro to acquire an ownership stake in a private corporation?

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, I think that what's important here is that we protect the assets of Manitoba Hydro, that we work to protect the subsidiaries which have been put under threat by this government. And we don't have to look far into the past to see that this government is interested in one thing and one thing alone, and that's breaking up our most valuable Crown corporation and taking Manitoba Hydro-owned assets like Teshmont, which was producing profits for Manitobans, and putting it on the chopping block and selling that off to the highest bidder.

We have every indication, again, that with Manitoba Hydro International, with the stop-sell order that they've enforced upon them, putting hundreds—100 jobs at risk—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I'm wondering if the member from St. James can explain why it's so important to protect Hydro and its subsidiaries from privatization.

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

This bill is incredibly important because we're currently facing a government that is pursuing the privatization of many of our publicly owned assets and, as we can see, again, with the recent sale of Teshmont and everything we're seeing with the preparations for the selling off of Manitoba Hydro International, with the interference that we've seen from this government in RFPs for access to our fibre optic line, where we're moving Manitoba Hydro Telecom to the side to make room for big private business—all of these things are seriously concerning. And we need to ensure that we protect those assets, and this bill will help to do that.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma)? Oh, the honourable member for—who was there?

Oh, the information I have is that I will now go to the honourable member for Assiniboia.

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): My question is regards to money markets—pardon me?

Can you hear me, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: We can.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, my question is in regards to the—Hydro is so crucial to money markets of Manitoba and the financing of this Province.

It concerns me that this bill interferes with the management of Hydro, and has this member given any consideration to the detrimental effects that interference with Hydro has on our credit rating?

Mr. Sala: You know, it's interesting to hear any member of this government talk about concerns about interference in our Crown corporation. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) and members of his Cabinet and others have made themselves experts in interfering in Manitoba Hydro and have demonstrated over and over again their willingness to get into the operations of Manitoba Hydro's day-to-day business to essentially pursue political vendettas.

So, we need to ensure that we stop interfering in Manitoba Hydro's business and that we need to ensure that we protect those assets from not just this government, but any future government that might seek to interfere in Manitoba Hydro and specifically—

* (10:20)

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wasyliv: Why do you think the Pallister government sold off Teshmont when it made a profit and kept world-renowned expertise in control of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Sala: Thanks for the question.

You know, it's clear that this government is interested in one thing and one thing alone, and that is taking publicly owned assets and moving them into private hands. This government is all about shrinking, they're about reducing, they're about cutting and, ultimately, they're about making their friends in the private sector wealthier.

So there's really no other explanation that any of us can find that would create rationale for why would

we want to—why we might want to divest of an incredibly valuable company like Teshmont. So I can see no other reason other than this government's desire to move wealth from public into private hands.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This is a referendum-related question. I know that a member recently just asked whether it's—whether there should be a referendum on buying private assets.

Do you think that there should be a referendum on whether government cuts taxes?

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the interesting question.

I'm not going to comment on whether or not I do believe that the government should host a referendum related to cutting taxes, but I do think, as the bill states really clearly, that we need a referendum to protect subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro. Madam Speaker, they are more at risk than ever before.

We have hundred employees at Manitoba Hydro International who are terrified about their future. They have every reason to believe that it's on the chopping block. This is about a referendum for Manitoba Hydro subsidiaries, ensuring that the people of Manitoba get a say in any future exploration of a sale of assets that we own.

Mr. Wasyliv: Manitoba Hydro International is world-renowned.

What would we lose if the Pallister government were to carve it up and sell it off?

Mr. Sala: Yes, that's a great question. Thank you.

Manitoba Hydro International, as the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) has stated, is a world-wide brand. People in many countries across the world, when they see MHI, they think energy security, they think reliability.

We are losing, with the potential sale of MHI, an incredibly valuable brand that we as Manitobans are currently the owners of. And most importantly, a brand that is making millions of dollars for Manitobans. We cannot afford to lose that subsidiary. We need to protect it, and we need to vote in support of Bill 203 to ensure that happens.

Mr. Teitsma: I think by my—by the response such as it was to the first question that I asked regarding the need for—potential need for a referendum to acquire private enterprise, it seems that the member is only in favour of ever growing and making larger Crown corporations, larger government.

Can he confirm that?

Mr. Sala: I'd like to thank the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) for teeing that one up for me.

Yes, in fact, our government—our party is in favour of growing our economy in Manitoba. We are in favour of creating a better economy that works for everyone.

We are in favour of ensuring that all Manitobans can benefit from Manitoba Hydro, and that means ensuring that profit-making entities that we all own continue to produce profits for us and that we don't move to jettison, get rid of, cut subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro that, frankly, could form the future of our economy here in the province.

Instead of cutting, reducing, shrinking as this government likes to do, we do stand for a bigger economy that works for everyone.

Mr. Wasyliv: The Pallister government tried to commission or create a commission of inquiry by Gordon Campbell and now Brad Wall.

Why is this so unusual? Aren't such commissions usually led by non-political people?

Mr. Sala: Yes, thanks. That's a great question.

And absolutely, typically these types of commissions are led by experts in their field or judges or non-partisan individuals with expertise in an area. The fact that we have a review being led by not one, but by two ex-Conservative premiers should be concerning to all Manitobans. It's highly unusual to approach a commission of this nature using highly partisan actors, as they have.

And I think it's pretty clear that when the report does come out, that Manitobans won't really have much reason to put stock in that, especially given that it's being led by somebody who is a massive champion of coal, and who, frankly, has a record of terrible fiscal management in Saskatchewan, with huge numbers of projects that had massive cost overruns. So we're not interested in learning from Mr. Wall and, frankly—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The time for this question period has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): It certainly is a privilege and a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 203.

And certainly in my opening comments, I certainly reject the last 10 or 20 minutes of the NDP—in particular, the member from St. James—putting a number of falsehoods on the record. And, certainly, I'm pleased to be able to spend, unfortunately, the next nine and a half minutes—I wish I had an hour, Madam Speaker—to talk about some of the areas that were—the NDP and former government has left Manitoba Hydro in a situation, and generations of Manitobans to continue to pay for their record on Manitoba Hydro.

So our government has made it clear that Manitoba Hydro belongs to Manitobans, and will continue to be owned by Manitobans. That's been made very clear many times, both not only by our Premier (Mr. Pallister), but by myself. And we are on record multiple times saying that Manitoba Hydro will remain public and will—and Manitobans own Manitoba Hydro.

You know, the opposition—again, the introduction of this Bill 203 is essentially senseless when the government has clearly stated repeatedly that we have no intention to privatize Manitoba Hydro, and Manitobans ultimately have the final say. We already know that, Madam Speaker. The members opposite know that. So again, you know, they're continuing to put falsehoods on the record, and it's actually shameful.

We—let's speak a moment about the NDP's time in government. It's our government's job to clean up the mess left by the NDP in respect to Manitoba Hydro and, of course, again, in many areas of our—of government—and public-owned assets, Madam Speaker, the NDP had made a mess with.

Manitoba Hydro projects were completed grossly over budget, leaving Manitoba Hydro and Manitobans with massive debt recovery. And I'd like to read into the record today some of those areas that are going to affect generations of Manitobans to come, including my five grandkids and likely their kids because of the gross mismanagement by the NDP with Manitoba Hydro.

Madam Speaker, under the NDP government, Manitoba Hydro debt grew exponentially. Manitoba Hydro projects were completely grossly over budget, leaving Manitoba Hydro and Manitobans with massive debt to recover from.

Proposed approved budgets and final amounts on these capital projects—and I'll list them below for the record, Madam Speaker, and I'm sure the NDP will be

interested to know where—the damage they've done to Manitoba Hydro and continue to when they were in government.

Keeyask capital project: initial approved budget \$3.7 billion in 2008. Final budget—and again, we're not sure if that's final, but to date: \$8.7 billion—Madam Speaker, \$5 billion over budget just with Keeyask alone. Bipole III initial approved budget: \$1.8 billion in 2005. Final control budget: \$4.6 billion—\$2.8 billion over budget.

Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Project, initial original budget—*[interjection]*—And certainly, at another time I'd love to table the document for the member from Concordia if he needs to read it more, but certainly, I'll continue to try to put this on the record for him and his benefit: \$205 million for Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Project was the initial budget; landed at \$490 million—\$285 million over budget. Wuskwatim: \$900-million project, initial budget; final budget \$1.7 billion—\$800 million over budget.

* (10:30)

Madam Speaker, this totals over \$9 billion over budget. Imagine where that money could be going right now, especially during a pandemic. We were left with a billion-dollar deficit by the NDP. Hydro is going to surpass core government's total debt in the next year to two. It's shameful, under the NDP government.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba Hydro projects, including Keeyask and Bipole III, again, over \$9 billion over budget. Clearly the NDP had a blatant disregard for money and Manitobans. The damage done to Manitoba Hydro by the NDP cannot be ignored or repeated.

Madam Speaker, as I see I have five minutes left, I would love to be able to speak again to this, and I think I will hopefully get a question on it this afternoon, but our PC government will get Manitoba back on track—Manitoba Hydro back on track—back on the right track. We will continue to restore Manitoba Hydro back to the crown jewel it once was. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: We will not take lessons from members opposite, nor the member from Concordia, Madam Speaker, on matters related to Manitoba Hydro or any other matter.

While the NDP's vision for Hydro focused on their political interests ahead of the interests of Manitobans, Madam Speaker, our government will be—our government will have the best interests of the owners of Manitoba Hydro in mind: Manitobans.

The NDP make the shame—same baseless accusations every now and then. They're out of ideas, Madam Speaker, and it seems the only tool they have at their disposal is fear and fiction. The opposition clearly wants to distract Manitobans from their party's gross mismanagement of Manitoba Hydro, and on that point I'd also like to enter into the record, again, some of the areas that were recently quoted in an article in a local newspaper.

And last week, and I'll quote, the last week—few weeks, the NDP have been screaming about privatization of Manitoba Hydro to anybody that would listen, but it would seem they do not quite understand what that is. NDP leader, Wab Kinew, went on—NDP leader—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order please.

Just a caution to the member, that—and I think he realizes what he just did, but we are not to be using the names of members in the House, only their positions. And while I'm at it, I'm also going to indicate to the member that the use of the word falsehood is also unparliamentary and not to be used in the House either.

Mr. Wharton: I do apologize, I was reading a quote and I apologize, so that—and I also apologize for the word—using that word in the House, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

And again, the Leader of the Opposition went on to call it a very dark day for the province before declaring, Madam Speaker, and I quote, here is the doomsday scenario we were concerned about.

An additional quote from the article, Madam Speaker: Their smoking gun is without ammunition. Boy, there's nothing more true than that. Yes, no, absolutely. In another quote that was quoted in that particular Winnipeg article regarding Teshmont—and it's obvious and more apparent every time the members opposite get up and speak about Teshmont that they are truly out of touch with exactly what Teshmont was and is and continues to be, which is a privately owned firm.

Since 1966, Madam Speaker, Teshmont has been in business, serving in an engineering capacity

throughout Manitoba and other jurisdictions throughout the world. Back during the Doer government, in 2003, 40 per cent stakeholder was—stake was bought in Teshmont by the NDP for one purpose and one purpose only, and that was the purpose of getting engineering advice, untendered, through the building of Keeyask and Bipole III.

So, well, Madam Speaker—[*interjection*—and for the member barking across the way there, I can tell that member that, quite frankly, if they did their research they would have the same information that I'm presenting to the record today and to this House.

Additional quotes again, Madam Speaker, are simply this: This flawed campaign of alarm bells over the fear of privatization of Crown corporations that the NDP so poorly mismanaged while they were in power is laughable. That's correct—laughable.

Additional quote from the article, Madam Speaker We're at the—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: —point where the NDP is throwing whatever half-truths they can at the wall to stir up the bees' nest.

Madam Speaker, another 'exampler'—another example, clear example, of the NDP's culture of creating fear with Manitobans. Shameful.

The direction to build Bipole III and Keeyask without Public Utilities Board scrutiny created multi-billion-dollar debt, Madam Speaker, that ratepayers of Manitoba—our children and grandchildren—are now stuck with for generations. And that is absolutely shameful.

Transition to an article, Madam Speaker, that I read in *The Globe and Mail* lately, and I'll be very quick: The past decade, Canadians—Canada's politically owned hydroelectric utilities have cost billions of dollars for Manitobans and other jurisdictions throughout Canada.

Thank you. I wish I had more time.

Madam Speaker: Are there further members speaking on debate?

The honourable member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin)—oh, we do have somebody at the podium, so I will turn it over to the honourable member for Radisson.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I thank you, and I can tell that there's eagerness on this side of the

House to speak to this bill, but mysteriously, not so much on the other side of the House. I'm quite surprised, honestly, because we would expect them to be at least united on one thing, but it would not appear to be so since no one on that side of the House is even willing to stand in support of this bill. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: I think when members are standing in the House, they like to be heard.

An Honourable Member: We all do.

Madam Speaker: Exactly. And when the Speaker is standing, comments shouldn't be coming from anybody in the House. That's very, very disrespectful.

So, I'm going to ask everybody, please, there is somebody that wishes to debate. If other members, instead of heckling would actually stand and like to speak to this bill, I would be more than happy to recognize them. So if somebody wants to speak after this member, I would encourage them to please stand in the House and do it properly.

Mr. Teitsma: I thank you so much, Madam Speaker, for your efforts to maintain decorum and good order in this House this morning.

And I—as I was noting, nobody from the other side would apparently stand in support of the member for St. James (Mr. Sala).

Now this is a not a surprising thing, I suppose. I was chatting with someone the other day who said that it's not so much that somebody's steering the NDP ship, it's more like they're just a bunch of rowboats with one person to each, and they can't decide which way to row. They might be strapped together with some orange twine—I don't know what's holding them together—but clearly they're not really going anywhere.

And so, that being said, I'm happy to speak, and also as we noticed, you know, the member for McPhillips was happy to—also to speak, and I hope he gets a chance this morning to speak as well, because this is something that we need to talk about.

Now, the members opposite seemed to think there's a lot of doom and gloom in Manitoba. They seem to think that the high-tech sector is somehow extraordinarily vulnerable. And last time I was speaking at this 'podium' just—podium just a couple of days ago, you know, I'd listed off some of the vital members of Winnipeg's high-tech sector, including a company that I had started.

Now, I'll list them again for the members: New Flyer, Permission Click, Varian, North Forge, Conquest, Ubisoft, Magellan, RAPID RTC, Momentum Healthware, StandardAero and even Stantec, and the list goes on and on. And I would call the members opposite to attention because if they may have noticed that long and vibrant list of companies, oh, there isn't a single publicly owned one on the list, is there?

* (10:40)

And that's because high-tech—the high-tech sector does well in a private environment. It prospers in a private environment. And when I asked the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) about how concerned he was about Hydro acquiring companies, he seems to be very concerned about them divesting themselves of their interest but he seemed completely unconcerned about them acquiring companies, and that's because for them it is a one-way road. A one-way road to larger Crown corporations, a one-way road to larger government.

And you can see that this is the—they even called it—I think he called it economic growth to have larger government. But I don't think the members understand how an economy actually grows, because the economy needs to be funded by actual wealth generation and not by the actions of government. And you can tell by their history.

Over those 17 years of NDP government that began this century here in Manitoba, we all got to witness what the priorities of the NDP, when they were in government, really were. The priorities of that government were growing government, increasing taxes, higher taxes, larger government, bigger deficits. This is what was the consequence and the result of their attitudes that they still seem to have today towards running government.

Now, they seem to think that somehow they did good also on other—some—on some other fronts. Instead of just growing the—growing government and growing deficits and raising taxes—no, let's—we also know and the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) remembers very fondly, I'm sure, my discussion two days ago when I highlighted to her that not only did those things grow, but the number of kids in care grew, the length of time that they stayed in care grew. Poverty rates expanded under the NDP government. That's their record, Madam Speaker.

Now, as I mentioned, nobody seems to be steering this NDP ship. They seem to be rowing—and madly,

often—any which direction. They're looking for something, anything, to sow fear among Manitobans, to sow misinformation. You even heard it from the member for St. James when he spoke about where he went to for information about this issue. And where did he go? He went to media opinion pieces; he went to his own partisan policies. Did he actually try at all to reference the truth, to reference facts? No, he didn't.

Now, I just want to explain to the members opposite how businesses work, because it seems to be something that they don't really have a good grasp on. And when a business generates profits, that's a good thing. You can—you can flow profits up. And I think Teshmont was able to do that, to some degree, that when they were profitable they were able to provide some benefits—small, perhaps, to the owners of Manitoba Hydro, namely the people of Manitoba.

However, let's examine what would happen if we sold that share, which, in fact, is exactly what happened. We had shares in Teshmont and we sold them. Does that provide value to Manitobans? Absolutely it does. I can tell you that it does. And I know hundreds and hundreds of Winnipeggers who walk around today—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

I'm have incredible difficulty trying to hear the member. And I would urge all members—and I don't know how many times I have to ask for members to please show respect to the person that is trying to debate. If people want to stand up and debate, everybody can stand up and debate this issue. Please wait your turn. You don't need to heckle. That doesn't get us very far in this debate. And if people are so passionate about it then stand up and speak on debate.

And I would just like to also indicate to the member that with the words he used about trying to reference the truth is getting very close to being unparliamentary language. So I would urge caution to the member on that.

The honourable member for Radisson.

Mr. Teitsma: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker, and certainly the contrast there was between facts and opinion, and those are the words that I intended to use, so please accept my apology.

Now, as to the attitude of the members opposite, I'm not sure they respect even each other. So I hope that they can show respect, even though I don't expect them to actually give it.

In any case, where was I? I was talking about how—what the result of selling an ownership share in a private corporation can do. Well, I can tell you what it can do. It can generate a tremendous amount of wealth, a tremendous amount of income for the person doing the selling, okay? Because what has happened is that in this case Stantec, they're taking on Teshmont, they're going to have a greater role in the ownership of Teshmont and they're going to have to continue to operate it.

But for Manitoba Hydro, and our bottom line this year, what are we going to see? We're going to see the sale of an asset and a significant amount of capital associated with that money—or, with that sale—coming into the hands of the owners of Manitoba Hydro. And who are those owners? Those owners are the people of Manitoba.

So, indeed there has been a tremendous benefit being shown by the sale of Teshmont. And I myself can tell you that, in many cases—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: —in many cases, it's actually more profitable to sell a business than to continue to operate it. And in fact, this is the pattern of behaviour followed by so, so, so many, so, so many.

Now, the members opposite seem to be thinking that somehow I'm suggesting that you could sell Hydro. And we all know that that's not the case. We all know that there's a commitment from this government not to do so. We know that there's laws in the books that prevent that from happening. And we also know that there are cases—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Thank you, and thank goodness, Madam Speaker.

I—we are very much in favour of this bill. It's clear that this government has privatized many other public services. Manitoba Hydro should be protected as well. I do want to address some of the substance of the debate that's happened.

I do want to—I do hope that the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) will accept this as a friendly correction: When he said that there is a possibility that they're selling off parts of Hydro to the highest bidder, I actually doubt that it would necessarily even go to the highest bidder, that the way these things works, it's actually very much people who are well-connected in government, rather than the highest bidder.

There is much more to this in terms of the privatization and how privatization works. One of the things about privatization is that the fact is that Manitoba Hydro is, as the government says over and over again, owned by all of us. It is a Manitoba business.

When we sell off the ownership, we are exporting ownership to Stantec, which is headquartered in Edmonton. That means that, instead of the profits and benefits flowing from Teshmont to—and staying—and to either Manitoba Hydro or staying in Manitoba, they will go to Alberta. This has happened quite a bit under this government, that we're seeing public services and public assets being sold off to Alberta. So, we're exporting ownership, we're losing control and we're losing all the benefits that come with ownership.

The other is that when privatization happens, it's not just a question of saying, well, we're going to shrink—the idea that we're shrinking the public sector. The fact is, again, to the comments of the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma), when he says that we're talking about growing the size of the government, we are all—every single one of us in this Chamber—is paid for. We are all part of government. We are all working at jobs.

When we spend money, that money we spend is just as good as money at—whether is it a restaurant or a business or buying furniture, when we spend that money, that money is every bit as real in the pockets of the people who get it as if we were working for the private sector. The government is part of the economy, and the fact that this—that the members of government don't realize that is really quite amazing.

I will also say though, however, that when it comes to referenda, it only took 'til in the last two years to actually have a law about—that would make referenda work at all. This was shown in part because when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) took his court case over raising the PST, it was discovered, first of all, that that is a right of government, it is a right of government to raise taxes, that you're not actually supposed to just pass off to people. In fact, it's probably unconstitutional to do so.

But that—we have had no referendum law. So all the things we were supposed to have on referendums, it was all just a window dressing and political theatre. So whether it was a balanced budget, whether it was raising taxes or whether it was selling off Hydro, there was no truth whatsoever to that until the referendum law was actually passed.

* (10:50)

The other concern about privatization is it's not just a question of saying we're losing these assets. It's who's actually making money from the sale, because this is one of the things that is the most—is that—this is the—one of the most important things when it comes to lawyers or whoever else—whichever that middleman is or middle person. They're the ones who are really, really profiting from these sales.

So, when these assets get exported—when ownership—when the PC government exports ownership to another jurisdiction, it means that somebody is actually benefiting from that sale. It might be a lawyer, it might be a—or it could be, say, a consultant, but this is actually the way that a lot of consultants and lawyers make their money by skimming off the sale of public assets which are better placed in the public realm over the private sector.

Now, I will point out that while the government—members of the government have said that they put it on the record that they will not sell off any part of Hydro, they just did. And this has—the members of this party also ran on a campaign, so they're saying they had no intention to sell off MTS, which they did.

I will also note to correct the Minister for Crown Services when he was saying that Hydro's debt is surpassing provincial government's under the NDP. It is not under the NDP that it is surpassing—risking to surpass the core debt of government. It's happening under this government, under the PC government, because the basic practices of taking money from Hydro and running up debt for Hydro have never changed.

The dirty secret of the Manitoba government's relationship to Hydro is that the worse Hydro is working, the more debt that it takes on, the more that it overbuilds, the more money the provincial government can take out of it. So there's a debt guarantee fee, which really shouldn't be there because we all own it. We are going to be on the hook for that \$20-plus billion of debt that Manitoba Hydro has, and they only have \$2 billion of revenue a year, roughly.

And I will say there were lots of problems with the way the NDP approached the management of Hydro. In 2003, Gary Doer wanted to interfere with the Public Utilities Board because he was frustrated with the way they were setting prices and he was—made that absolutely clear. The NDP also sold off and privatized land titles along with other assets. But I will also say the NDP never had nine members of the

Hydro board quit. And the reason they quit was because of the financial risk that Hydro poses to Manitoba.

And this government could actually provide all sorts of relief to Hydro instead of forcing workers to take pay cuts and instead of forcing workers to take layoffs. They keep saying, well, we own Hydro. So when a government—so when a business has an option, you can either lay—to cut costs, you can either, you know, lay people off and hurt—which hurts both workers and customers, or maybe you pare back a little bit on the massive dividends you're paying to the owners.

Because this government and the PC—the NDP government before took out—it's something on the order of \$400 million a year in capital taxes, in water rentals, and in debt guarantee fees. And all of that is happening while Hydro's racking up massive debts.

There is a debt swap happening between the Manitoba government and Hydro. For years, the PC and the NDP alike, for decades have been putting our debt onto Hydro's books and it risks breaking Hydro. And it risks—and it leads to the temptation on the part of this government to maybe sell it off, but they won't for two reasons: one, is that it brings in 400—over \$400 million a year to the Province's coffers.

And when they spoke with Sandy Riley about this, he said no one actually wants to buy Hydro because it's not worth anything because its debt is so huge. And it is a result of decades of political interference, which used to be hidden and is now absolutely explicit in this budget. In this budget, the government is overriding the PUB and ordering Hydro to deliver a price hike. The entire purpose of the PUB and all the rules we have are set up to prevent political interference, which is now explicit in the budget.

Now, I'll say two other things just to make points about the people who've been—who were hired to over—to review Hydro, and which, again, although I've been critical about the NDP, there have been plenty of reports know exactly what's already happened.

This is an expensive political witch hunt where Gordon Campbell was hired—Gordon Campbell, who was premier of BC, and did exactly the same things with BC Hydro. There is a Site C dam in northern BC which is widely considered to be a fiscal disaster, massive cost overruns. Who is responsible for it? Gordon Campbell. Who does this government first

hire before he ends up being dismissed and disgraced? Who did they first hire to review Manitoba Hydro? Someone who did exactly the same thing.

And as for Brad Wall, there are two issues. One: he's been an outspoken opponent of Manitoba Hydro. He has complained about the way our—the way Manitoba's transfer payments are calculated because he thinks it's unfair that Manitoba's energy generation, which was built at great expense, which was built, is treated differently than the resources of energy from oil, which are—which no one built, which were under the ground.

So I will say I'm—once again, I'm very—it is very important to—I do agree. We have the referendum legislation in place. This should not be sold off. We are happy to support this. I will say one thing again to the MLA for Radisson, that every single tech company he named depends entirely on subsidies or has governments for clients. So, I'm really tired of this idea that the private sector can somehow support and live without the public sector. The two depend on each other.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The way the rotation goes, the next person on the list is the honourable member for McPhillips.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): It's always a pleasure to virtually rise in the House and enjoy—and I saw your post the other day, Madam Speaker, commenting on the first here in Manitoba, as we had our first, you know, virtual vote.

I think it actually gives a backdrop as we move into Remembrance Day. I think it gives all of us an opportunity to pause and appreciate that despite the heckling, despite the barbs back and forth, we truly are a blessed and fortunate country because of what our veterans did for us. And I encourage all of my colleagues on all sides of the House to take a moment this Remembrance Day and, you know, as best you can and in a socially distanced way, take a moment, though, to thank those veterans who made that ultimate sacrifice that we can be here in this Legislature and speak on behalf of Manitobans. And yes, it may get a little testy at times, but this is far better than the alternative, Madam Speaker.

There is a certain irony, Madam Speaker. As I listen to this I think there was a time where you had, I think, incorrectly seen me as some sort of instigator when it came to heckling, but as I listen on the outside now, clearly, the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine),

I mean, listening to your admonishment, would be an instigator of heckling, and as I listen more and more, it seems that every day the NDP's heckling grows more and more.

So I would urge them to try to tone that down in respect of Remembrance Day and 'respect' of the debate that we're trying to have here today, because I want to understand and I want to hear from the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), his bill and his rationale for the bill so that we can have an understanding as to where his party is coming from.

Now, I listen very carefully because I think it is important that, as elected officials, that we listen to our opponents because they do have a view. I'm not saying, in particular with the NDP, that it's a valid view, but they do have a view and I think it is important that we do hear from them.

But he did say something. He talked about taking publicly generated wealth and turning it over to private hands. And I agree that that simply is really not something that any government wants to do, but, unfortunately, the NDP did that. They took publicly generated wealth and they turned it over to union hands. So, there's a certain irony, Madam Speaker, that the member for St. James admonishes the turning over of publicly generated wealth, but has no issue when his own NDP government turned over the public registry—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 2—Increase Staffing and Support for Personal Care Homes and for Seniors

Madam Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Increase Staffing and Support for Personal Care Homes and for Seniors, brought forward by the honourable member for Union Station.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I move, seconded by the member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino),

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately increase staffing levels

at all personal-care homes, reverse fee hikes for residents and cuts to hair-to-home-care services and also prioritize supports for the seniors and elders in the province.

Madam Speaker: I would ask the member to do it again, as the seconder was not in their seat, and it is important that when members are seconding a motion that they are actually in their seat.

So I would ask the member to start again.

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor),

WHEREAS the Pallister Government has for years abandoned supports for seniors and elders in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the Pallister Government cut shovel ready projects for personal care homes in Winnipeg and Lac du Bonnet in 2017 even after those communities had raised millions in support of these projects; and

WHEREAS the Pallister Government cut \$2.3 million from the long term care budget in 2018; and

WHEREAS the Pallister Government cut \$1 million dollars from the budgets of personal care homes in Winnipeg in both 2017 and 2018, without warning or consultation; and

WHEREAS the Pallister Government has failed to build any new personal care home beds since it assumed office in 2016 and instead only cancelled projects; and

WHEREAS the Pallister Government has made no move to increase funding to personal care homes to support increased costs for personal protective equipment, staffing, training and communication with residents and families since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS the Long Term and Continuing Care Association of Manitoba, along with many groups representing nurses, aides and other health care workers, have long called on the Pallister Government to increase supports and funding for personal care homes but those calls have been ignored and rebuffed; and

WHEREAS the Pallister Government has cut home care supports, rolled back services and overworked home care workers as part of the cuts to health care services in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS the Pallister Government raised fees on residents of personal care homes in the middle of a pandemic while not offering any other supports; and

WHEREAS the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on seniors and residents of personal care homes leading to tragic outcomes for many seniors and families.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately increase staffing levels at all personal-care homes, reverse fee hikes for residents and cuts to home-care services and also prioritize supports for the seniors and elders in the province.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), seconded by the honourable member for Wolseley,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately increase staffing levels at all personal-care homes, reverse fee hikes for residents and cuts to home-care services and also prioritize supports of the seniors and elders in the province.

MLA Asagwara: I'd like to start by sharing a bit about my own first experience in long-term care.

When I was a teenager, my—one of my first volunteer jobs was—I guess not a job, volunteer gigs—was at the long-term-care home in St. Norbert. And that was my introduction to long-term care. I had never worked or volunteered in that kind of setting before. To be honest, you know, as a first generation Canadian and most of my family is actually Nigeria, I had never actually even really been around elders that much. All of the elders in our family are in—are in a different country.

And so that was, for me, a really eye-opening experience. It was something that shaped the way that I would move forward in the rest of my life, and certainly was a really great introduction in terms of what it means to build relationships with seniors and elders and older adults, and what it means to provide care in that setting.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I'm really grateful that I was able to learn from some incredible health-care aides, nurses, the residents themselves. And, you know, when I—when I

was—became an adult and started working as nurse, I also worked in long-term care. And I'm well aware of just how heavy that workload is. It's a very physically taxing job. It is a very busy job, can be very stressful. But it is—it is one of the most rewarding kinds of work that you can do.

I've been fortunate to work alongside, in my career as a nurse, some really incredible nurses, health-care aides, environmental workers. You know, kitchen staff, laundry staff, you name it, there isn't a single person working in a long-term-care home who doesn't centre the care and the needs of the residents who reside there and their families. And so it's with all those experiences in mind that, you know, when I say thank you, I know when my colleagues say thank you, to those folks who are doing that work, we sincerely mean it from a place of understanding what those folks are doing in their day-to-day work and how much they care for those in long-term care.

You know, it's an honour, it really is. It's an honour and a privilege to be able to provide direct care to older adults. It is an absolute privilege to be able to be a part of providing dignified, respectful, safe care and residence to folks who have contributed so much to Manitoba.

And that's part of the reason why it is so disheartening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to not only see what this government has done before the pandemic: the multiple cuts to long-term care; the cuts to the services that those in long-term care need, for example, you know, occupational therapy and physiotherapy. How many folks in long-term care have hip and knee replacements and, unfortunately, are maybe not able to afford the private occupational therapy or physiotherapy they now have to access because the government cut those resources?

You know, it's disheartening that the government has not built a single personal-care-home bed of their own, failed to build the 1,200 beds they promised in 2016. It's disappointing that they haven't addressed the staffing issues in long-term care. These are all things that the government failed to do, the government did do in terms of cuts, leading up to this pandemic. But it's during this pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I think everyone now can see the harmful impacts of this government's decision making in terms of long-term care and personal-care homes.

The fact that Manitoba was a jurisdiction in this country that saw our first COVID case much later than other jurisdictions, the fact that we knew that older adults, those living in long-term care, were at great

risk should COVID-19 enter their homes, and the fact that with all of that information and the fact that we were afforded the luxury of time to be able to be proactive, the fact that this government failed to act, failed to implement the resources, invest the resources, the money, the PPE, the staffing to ensure that those living in long-term care were safe, is shameful.

It is that much more shameful when we hear the Minister of Health make the comment that the deaths in long-term-care homes are unavoidable, something that every single expert who has heard that callous statement has said is false. And it's disappointing that the minister has not yet apologized for that statement, has not even acknowledged that that statement is wrong. He's had plenty of time to do so. I know that that acknowledgement would mean so much to families who have unfortunately lost loved ones to COVID-19 in personal-care homes. I know this because almost every single day over the past several weeks, well into late, late, late at night, I'm talking to families. I'm talking to families who have loved ones at Parkview Place. I'm talking to families who have loved ones in long-term-care homes across the province who are scared, who are paying attention to what we're doing and what we're saying as legislators because they need some sort of comfort, reassurance that actions are being taken to address what's going on so that their loved ones don't become another number that's shared during a briefing in regard to a COVID death.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's important to recognize not only the good things that we do as legislators, the good decisions that are made; it's important that we recognize the ways in which we have failed, the ways in which we can do better. You know, it's that recognition that allows us to create strategies and plans and to listen to those who have the information, who are the experts, to listen openly and be able to integrate that information into our decision making.

*(11:10)

Certainly, in the last couple of weeks, the questions that I've been asking in question period of the Minister of Health, trying to get answers on behalf of Manitobans, trying to encourage the minister to, you know, do the things that we've been calling on this government to do since before COVID came here, since COVID did arrive in Manitoba, increase staffing, ensure there is adequate PPE for those working in long-term care, listen to the folks who are

working on front lines and take their concerns seriously. Invest in long-term care, not just for during this pandemic, but certainly, so that as we move beyond this pandemic, long-term-care homes across the province are better positioned to respond should there be a crisis, and to provide dignified care, respectful care, to those who are vulnerable, to our older adults, to our loved ones in long-term-care homes who are elders, to provide that care consistently and well into the future.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that all members of this House will take this resolution very seriously and recognize it for what it is, for an opportunity for the government to finally start making some immediate decisions that will positively impact long-term care, that will see our loved ones in residencies treated with the dignity and care they deserve, to see our health-care workers be able to go to work with the adequate resources to do their jobs and feel safe, to go home and feel like their families are also protected, to not be burnt out, to not be, you know, scared going into the workplace that they're going to be working without the appropriate or adequate number of co-workers, to not feel like they can do their jobs to the best of their abilities, and I know all of them are doing just that, doing their jobs to the best of their abilities, but they need this government to do their part.

Manitobans have spent the last seven months doing their best, doing their part. This government hasn't matched that. That's all we're asking for. That's all Manitobans are asking for, for this government to match Manitobans' commitment, match their level of sacrifice during this pandemic and provide what is needed for people to be safe.

And so with that I hope that we will all support—I know that we will—but I hope that all members of this House support this resolution today.

Thank you.

Questions

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

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I was wondering if the member opposite could inform the House on who they have consulted about this legislation.

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

We have consulted long-term-care providers themselves. We have consulted with folks who have been doing research in this area for years and years. We have consulted different organizations that provide support to older adults in the province. And we've consulted directly with families. We've consulted directly with residents in long-term care. We have consulted with Manitobans.

I take a lot of pride in the fact that we have found every way possible during this pandemic to do just that, to make sure that we're accessible and able to get the information directly from the experts and from those who are living the experience that we're trying to address right now. And, you know, it's with that well-rounded perspective that we're able to come up with—

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

The honourable member for Brandon East—or is there—Wolseley. The honourable member for Wolseley.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Can the member for Union Station tell us exactly how this government failed to protect Manitoba residents of long-term-care homes?

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for the question, member for Wolseley.

There's just so many things that I could list off. You know, the government failed to provide adequate staffing, failed to hire the right—or sorry, the adequate amount of staff to be able to ensure that staffing levels across the board in long-term-care homes were adequate. The government failed to invest adequate resources despite the calls from long-term-care providers, failed to invest the resources needed to ensure that there was an adequate supply of PPE for all health-care workers. The government failed to ensure that who's in long-term care and, specifically, I'll speak to Parkview Place because that's a care home in my own constituency and we're well aware of what's been going on there—

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

Mr. Isleifson: I'm wondering if the member from Union Station could please inform the House if they are aware that our \$2-billion health-care funding guarantee will increase the already record levels of investment that our PC government provides to health care, which, by the way, is already \$648 million higher than the NDP government ever spent when they were in power.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for the question.

I'd like to point out that this government has made multiple cuts to long-term care and that, unfortunately, those cuts to long-term care did not leave long-term-care homes well positioned to respond during this pandemic.

For example, the Pallister government cut \$1 million from the budgets of personal-care homes in Winnipeg in, not only 2017, but also 2018, without warning and without consultation. You asked about consultation before, the member, about how we consulted. And also the Pallister government cut \$2.3 million from the long-term-care budget in 2018. So—

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Speaker, my question relates to how long has the problem of insufficient funding and insufficient staffing been going on, and can the member give us a little bit of information about the trajectory over the year since it began—there began to be a shortfall.

MLA Asagwara: What we've heard from long-term-care providers across the province is that since this government came into power that, unfortunately, there have been funding freezes, there have been cuts that have exacerbated, you know, any issues or concerns that may have been existent.

And so, you know, certainly in 2017 and 2018, the cuts that were made without any warning, without any consultation whatsoever, really created a bit of a significant impact that long-term-care homes, unfortunately, have just not been able to recover from. And despite their pleas to this government, have not seen those dollars, you know—

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

Ms. Naylor: Can the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) share with us why a seniors advocate office needs to be developed in Manitoba?

MLA Asagwara: An office for the seniors advocate would be an important office for older adults in Manitoba. It would be an independent body that would use evidence and research to inform strategic planning and address systemic issues in terms of long-term care.

And it being an independent office is really important because it would mean that, you know, the government of the day couldn't influence the decision making and the recommendations that come of that office, something that the research supports and it's happening in other jurisdictions in the country. There are other models that we can look to, and, certainly, it's something that we've been hearing from associations in Manitoba that we need to get that established.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon East.

Mr. Isleifson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe the question is from the member from Rossmere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, the honourable member for Rossmere.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm curious to know if the member for Union Station currently is employed in any way in the health system or has been since being elected and if there would be—if that is the case, if they could share briefly the nature of their employment in the health-care system.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for the question. You know, we're here today, and I'm bringing this resolution forward to address the government's failings during this pandemic and the decisions the government made leading up to this pandemic that have compromised our ability within the health-care system, long-term-care homes specifically, ability to respond adequately and provide the care necessary to keep residents safe. You know, that's a direct result of this government's decision making in the years leading up to this pandemic. And the government's inaction during this pandemic has, unfortunately, cost Manitobans their lives in long-term care. And it's disappointing that the government has yet to, you know, heed our calls and heed the calls of many Manitobans, experts in the field.

* (11:20)

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

I believe there is a question from the honourable member for Notre Dame—or the honourable member for Wolseley. The honourable member for Wolseley, would you mute—unmute your—

Ms. Naylor: Sorry, I've got it. Thanks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Ms. Naylor: Yes. Sorry. Just give me a second here, I have to fly back between files now.

So thank you for the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for answering my previous question about the senior advocate. I'm wondering if you can share a little bit more about how a senior advocate would address the root causes of the personal-care-home disparities in Manitoba?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) for that great question. The—an office for the seniors advocate would be able to use extensive research, be able to use investigative abilities and powers to look at the issues within our long-term-care homes, look at the issues within the system and speak specifically—and provide recommendations that would specifically address root causes. And I think that's something that's really important for folks to understand, that this office would be looking at how do we support systemic change. And that's what's so significant. That it's not just about addressing the issues for right now, it's about addressing them at a preventative or root level so that we have long-term positive outcomes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for—the honourable member's time is up. We have another question from the honourable member for Rossmere.

Mr. Micklefield: Thank you. I'm wondering if the member could inform the House if they are aware of the significant measures that have been taken to protect seniors in Manitoba, specifically during these recent weeks and months, and why none of those measures featured in the preamble to this discussion.

MLA Asagwara: Thank the member for the question.

I—I'm focused and committing—committed to ensuring that we don't see any more deaths in long-term-care homes. I would argue that instead of—I guess, the member opposite would like to brag about actions that have been taken. I think it's important to recognize that we'd had a number—unfortunately—a number of deaths in long-term-care homes. And that perhaps we should focus on what the government can do to prevent any more.

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

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate is open. Any speakers?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): It's my privilege to be able to speak to the resolution that is before the Chamber this morning. I want to begin by saying that COVID-19 is hard on everyone.

And I want to signal this morning that we have, once again, Lanette Siragusa, the chief nursing officer for Shared Health, who is joining Dr. Roussin on a regular basis now again, reconstituting that team that was in place in the early days of the pandemic. And yesterday she reflected in the media event where she was with Brent Roussin on the fact that this is hard on everyone, including health-care workers, and that we have health-care workers who continue to test positive for COVID-19, we have health-care workers who no—to no fault of their own have come in contact with patients or other people and have been sent home to self-isolate. And we have people across the health-care system who are bravely going to work and showing up and wearing their PPE and interacting with their colleagues and in the clinical settings—acute care, and other care settings, including long-term-care homes, interacting with their residents and with their clients and with their patients. And we thank them all for their work.

We offer today, our deepest condolences to those who have lost someone to COVID-19. We offer our condolences to any who is right now dealing with a sick member of their family. And so we start by thanking our front-line workers this morning for the way that they are working in hospitals and personal-care homes.

These health-care workers do difficult work under challenging circumstances any day of the week, never mind in a global pandemic. So, we recognize their service, we recognize their courage and we thank all of them for helping to keep us safe during these exceptional times in which we are living.

I would, because we are on the subject of personal-care homes and long-term care, I want to offer this update as well and indicate that there was a sprinkler system water line break at Rideau Park Personal Care Home in Brandon just two days ago. And I want to thank all of the region. I want to thank those individuals who work at the care home. I want

to thank the region's response administration, their disaster response. I want to thank EMS, Shared Health, and Shared Health's workforce that is stationed in Brandon, thank the City of Brandon. All of these partners together working, who had to, in very difficult circumstances, move very quickly to decant some residents from half of the building.

And I want to say today that we have been able to safely and successfully place 46 residents, relocated on a temporary basis, to places in Brandon and indeed across Prairie Mountain Health. Every effort is being made to communicate well and often with families. Every effort is being made to make sure that residents are being well cared for.

This has been a heroic effort undertaken by all involved, and it shows the partnership that is possible. It is the last thing that Prairie Mountain Health wanted to be dealing with right now. It is the last thing that the families of these residents, and the residents indeed themselves, wanted to be dealing with, and they are. And so people are stepping up, and I wanted to provide that update to all members of the House today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say as I begin this morning, mindful of the time, that we have taken measures to protect personal-care homes. We reject the content of this resolution that casts aspersion, that points fingers, that uses all kinds of speculation, that is absent any kind of constructive ideas about how to go forward.

I said yesterday and I will say again today to the opposition, there is a way in a global pandemic for the opposition parties to really add value, to be part of a coherent effort to focus on the health and safety of all Manitobans and to be able to occupy a role in which they allow the best interests of Manitoban to be kept in mind and to be constructive in their criticism. We have not seen that yet here. We have seen it in other jurisdictions. And we continue to call on the opposition parties to get in line, to focus on the needs of Manitobans.

This is a global pandemic, and it is time for the opposition to play a constructive role, to get into those trenches and help with everyone else. There will be plenty of time in the aftermath of a pandemic to point fingers and said who did what, when, where. And there will be mistakes that will have been made, and we'll be the first to own where those mistakes have been made. Right now, we need help from all members of this House to keep the health and safety

of Manitobans first and foremost in all of our deliberations in this House and every single day.

So, we reject all of the misinformation that is offered in this resolution. I know that my colleagues will also speak to these things and talk about the important and real and quantifiable investments that this government has made, because we care about seniors, because we care about those who are receiving home care, because we care about those in our personal-care homes.

This morning we will hear from the—I always say the parliamentary secretary, that's not quite the term we use in these settings—but we will hear from the member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) who is that legislative assistant in health who has been assigned this special role, who is working alongside all of the home—all of the personal-care-home operators in this province, looking at new models, looking extra-jurisdictionally at what is being done.

Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe in many respects, we have been having in this province, for years now, the wrong conversation about the needs of seniors and how to best care for them. And the NDP did nothing to advance the models of how we should be addressing—not in this way where we place some in a personal-care home and send everyone else home.

* (11:30)

And I hope that we have opportunity this morning to hear about the efforts that that member of the Legislature is making in collaboration with so many other agents across our system and beyond our borders to be able to rephrase what we are doing, to make new investments, to talk about how to fund personal-care homes into the future, to talk about what models work best for residents with the best outcomes, with the lowest rates of infection, with the highest satisfaction rates of the workers who are there. There is so much more that can be done. We are sobered by the work that is in front of us, but we are energized knowing the difference that we can make when we strive to do better in these ways.

So we are committed to modernizing the way we care for seniors in this province, a broad continuum of services that meet seniors appropriately at the point of their need is what we mean.

Here's a few things we've done to protect personal-care homes: we've implemented stronger infection prevention and control measures; we have had public health issue instructions on when, where and how to use PPE, and it has been provided to

workers; we have screened staff daily before entering facilities; we are building and delivering those all-season visitation shelters that will go to every single personal-care home, either an external shelter or an internal one, to make sure that we can continue to have residents in personal-care homes meet with and have contact with their loved ones, their caregivers, even if COVID-19 should be shutting down regular visitation privileges. We're proud of that investment. We're proud of the role that the Minister for Central Services has had in helping us to deliver this on time to these sites.

We have adopted a single-site model that is helping limit the people who work at single care homes, that prevents workers and volunteers from spreading the virus. We have indicated to the personal-care homes they will not be out any money for a COVID-19 response; we reject the resolution that states that's exactly what's taking place. That is false, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have indicated—we've already solicited for the first quarter and second quarter expenses of every personal-care home in this province. The expenses that they have incurred in—for the fight against COVID-19, they will be refunded for; we will not make them wait a year to do it. We'll be refunding them in a dynamic way based on their receipts. We have had LTCAM and other—the long-term-care association of Manitoba and other partners, the service delivery organizations. The facilities themselves thank us for these measures to help them make the investments they need, investments in human resources, investments in other resources, investments in PPE, investments in other forms of support.

We know that our home care funding is up \$50 million over what the NDP funded home care. I will say it again: up \$50 million over the NDP's funding of home care. That is up; that is not down.

Seniors will remember that we froze the Pharmacare deductible to make sure that in a global pandemic we wouldn't be spending more money on that.

Many other things to say about how our government is investing in seniors, and I'm looking forward to the comments of my colleagues to bring that advice.

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

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I'm—like the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), I've spent some

time working in a personal-care home as a teenager as well. I was only 18 when I did my first college job placement in a care home, helping out in the recreation services department.

I also spent many years visiting both of my maternal grandparents in long-term care, and in late 2018, my own mother entered long-term care for a short time before she died. I can still taste the anxiety and the stress involved in helping my siblings make the best decision for the best possible care for my mom who was in her 90s at that time.

So when I speak on the issues of long-term care, it's certainly not from the perspective of someone who's never stepped foot inside such a facility. Many of us on all sides of this House have had to make hard decisions for people we love, and many of us love seniors and want what is best for them. But unfortunately, the pandemic has exposed just how poorly the Conservative government has treated our seniors.

Manitoba seniors and elders have given so much to our society and they deserve high-quality care, especially towards the end of their lives. They deserve to live in personal care homes that are adequately staffed. Personal-care homes should be prepared with adequate staffing, supplies and other supports that are necessary for them. We know that the NDP government did take action. They increased staffing on the front line of our personal-care homes. But all of that has been undermined by the year-after-year cuts by the Pallister government. We want stronger policy that mandates staffing ratios to fill long-term vacancies in private-care homes across the province.

Health Minister Friesen claims that outbreaks and deaths in personal-care homes are—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind the member that when they're addressing a member in the Chamber that they either go by their title as a minister or their constituency.

Ms. Naylor: My apologies. Thank you for that important reminder.

Our Health Minister claims that outbreaks and deaths in personal-care homes are unavoidable. I profoundly disagree and so do the experts, as we've heard. This became a bit of a national disgrace when those comments were stated on the CBC and heard across the country, so that experts in geriatric care from other provinces had to go on record to say this wasn't true. And they know—they know because their provinces had the outbreaks early on. They know what

happened in response to that. And they know that we had an opportunity in Manitoba to learn from their mistakes and from their disadvantage of being hit so quickly into the pandemic.

This government had seven months to prepare, seven months to learn from those tragedies that took place in Quebec and Ontario and other provinces. They had time to consult, to plan, invest and train. They had time to separate residents by more than an end table.

I received many calls from people in my constituency, who worked in long-term care, with their concerns as early as March and April. They identified the inconsistent responses. Recreation workers were concerned about having to enter rooms without PPE and still being expected to lead some classes. All of those concerns were redirected by myself or my office to the WRHA and to Manitoba Health.

And I would have thought that those early alarm bells would have led to a good plan for these homes seven months in when COVID-19 began to spread more widely in our province. But divestment in funding from the Pallister government has led to where we are today. With seven months into the pandemic it's evident that this government's heavy hand in budget cuts has left Manitobans unprepared to weather the COVID-19 pandemic. And we've all witnessed this tragedy through the high contraction rates and deaths of Manitobans.

Manitobans who are loved family members have died as result of these cuts at Parkview and other places. This government has done nothing since taking office to invest in Manitoba's seniors and elders, and especially over the COVID-19 pandemic. The list of cuts by the government that have directly impacted seniors and elders is exhaustive. They've cut funding not once, but twice to personal-care homes, millions of dollars in cuts that should have been in place to serve and protect our seniors. They cut shovel-ready projects for personal-care homes in Winnipeg and Lac du Bonnet in 2017 that would take the pressure off of existing facilities and would have added capacity to the system.

This government cut 2.3 million from the long-term-care budget, \$1 million from the budgets of personal-care homes in 2017 and 2018, all without warning or consultation with those most impacted. This government actually promised, in the 2016 election, that they would buy new beds for personal-care homes, and they have not bought one

bed, and they have cancelled existing projects in the province. They promised 1,200 additional new beds. We'd like to see some of those promises come through now at—or some time in the last four years.

The Pallister government has not adequately resourced personal-care homes during the pandemic, telling them instead to keep their receipts. That's not a plan or an adequate response to the challenges these places face. We know that many Manitoban seniors and elders have been impacted by the heavy cuts this government has imposed.

He has—Pallister's heavy hand has not stopped with—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I—order. I just want to remind the member, again, to either use the Pallister government or use the, you know, honourable First Minister or Premier (Mr. Pallister).

* (11:40)

Ms. Naylor: My sincere apologies.

Pallister's government has continued to cut home-care supports, rolled back important services and overworked home-care staff. And I want to say a word about home-care staff. Home-care staff are some of the least paid people, just like personal home-care workers, some of the lowest paid members of society doing some of the most important work. So, that's also an element that we need to look at is how we treat, train and pay for important work.

The Pallister government believes it's unavoidable to see high rates of deaths in personal-care homes, yet other health professionals across Canada have noted that 110 of Manitoba's 125 care homes do not have positive cases of COVID-19 as of October 23rd. So, the Pallister government should be looking into the deficiencies, rather than state publicly that these deaths were unavoidable.

Seniors and elders in our province are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to tragic outcomes for many seniors, elders and families across Manitoba. Under Brian Pallister's government seniors and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, I wanted to remind the member if—to either use the person's title or the constituency name, or the Premier.

Ms. Naylor: I am terribly sorry.

Under Pallister's government, seniors and elders have seen cuts to the services they need and deserve. Personal-care homes have seen the basic annual cost

of accommodation rise by over \$5,000 a year, yet PCH funding was cut \$2 million over two years, and then frozen.

Seniors' day programming costs have also exploded, rising from \$8.85 to \$18.88 per day, and that's \$2,000 more per year—that's over \$2,000 more per year for year-round programming per senior.

In addition, there have been multiple cuts that impact seniors such as the Pallister government's cut to 56 in-patient surgical beds. And, using the pandemic, the Pallister government is quickly privatizing health services, including \$4.5 million for an untendered, out-of-province mental health service contract, which I know from speaking to constituents has not been working well at all. So, a private contract with Morneau Shepell and a large contract with Dynacare.

It should not be surprising. The Pallister government has spent years cutting and defunding public health care while contracting out and privatizing our health services. Pallister has also raised fees for—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I just once again remind the member to address the member of the other—by the title or the constituency name, or by the minister or Premier (Mr. Pallister).

Ms. Naylor: The Pallister government has raised fees for residents of personal-care homes in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic while not offering any other support. This government has failed to increase staffing levels at crucial times pre- and during the pandemic to all personal-care homes. They've chosen to keep fee hikes for residents and continue cuts for home-care services in Manitoba.

And Manitoban families have continued to contact myself and my colleagues to express their concerns about the COVID-19 outbreak at Parkview Place. Families are simply not receiving timely information about their loved ones, and the divestment in health care has led to Parkview being understaffed.

The families have told us that—

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

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): It certainly is an honour to jump on here and put a few words on record and maybe even straighten out a few points that have been put on record that simply do not have any merit.

Before I believe—before I begin my comments, however, on this resolution, I do want to take the opportunity to pass along my appreciation to all health-care workers in this province for their dedication during a very difficult time. These last few months have definitely been hard on a lot of people and, you know, these front-line workers and all front-line workers, whether you're housekeeping, laundry, it doesn't matter, they're in there working day in day out, you know, for the benefit of all of our residents. So, I want to pass that along.

And we heard earlier from the minister when he was speaking, and I do want to follow up on that, and also add—and acknowledge the staff and families and residents in my constituency at Rideau Park Personal Care Home for facing yet another challenge with the recent waterline break. Again, a lot of people at play in there, but this really just proves that Manitobans are really a hearty bunch, and we will prevail with everybody working on this.

I found it interesting, and I do want to thank the member from Union Station—worked in health care as a nurse, I appreciate the work she's—that they have done in that role, my apologies. And the member from Wolseley, stating that she too had been involved in health care. I really do appreciate that. The work that is done in health care certainly, you know, is not an easy task. I spent 21 years in health care prior to being an elected provincial official here. Seventeen of those 21 years was under the direction of the NDP government.

One of the questions that I was hoping to ask earlier on in the question stage of those 17 years—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind the member to address the members appropriately.

Mr. Isleifson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My apologies.

Again, I was saying for 17 years, the NDP failed to improve the health-care system—all 17 years I was involved in health care. And I saw the work that was not getting done and the challenges that I had faced and my colleagues faced in health care at the time. And it's—I have a hard time listening to them now when they bring forward a resolution on health care that they blatantly did not look after for 17 years, but I have listened very closely to the words of the member from Union Station and the member from Wolseley, and I must say that I have seen less holes in a block of Swiss cheese than I have that's contained in this resolution.

I do agree, and it is no secret, that we are seeing staff challenges in every sector in this province, much the same as can be seen across our entire country. Health care is not exempt from the challenges in staffing levels. Even a resolution or a bill that was passed recently in the House, you know, allowing and making sure that folks that are not feeling well can stay home and not lose pay and not lose their jobs.

Is it going to get easier? It might get tougher, you know, because of that, but that's what we need to do to work on this pandemic. I do find it difficult, though, and very unfortunate, that members on the opposite side of the House are using this pandemic as an excuse to try and gain political points when so many families are suffering due to reduced work hours, simply because they are staying home because of COVID-related reasons.

I know the member was asked about consultation regarding the legislation, and I asked that question for a very specific reason. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the minister mentioned previously, I have been working and consulting with a number of groups and individuals in our long-term care sector regarding our personal-care homes but also our community services, and those services that are available to our older adults in this province, whether it be institutional services or community services.

The health and well-being of Manitobans is definitely our top priority as we move through this pandemic. Manitoba's older adults have contributed so much in the way of life, raising their families, building our communities and they deserve the best in their later years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had some great discussions and have sought expert advice, in addition to those we heard earlier, I have consulted with the Manitoba Association of Senior Centres, the Active Aging in Manitoba, Retired Teachers Association of Manitoba, the Centre on Aging, Alzheimer Society of Manitoba, the Transportation Options for Seniors Network and many more.

The goal of the Manitoba government is to support health and well-being of seniors and their loved ones, and our government is committing to ensuring the health and well-being of our seniors and their loved ones at all times and especially through this COVID-19 pandemic.

I will say with the onset of COVID-19, our government has instituted steps to keep seniors in our personal-care homes safe. As we've heard, we're all

aware, we've placed restrictions on visitors visiting, enhanced screening for staff, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols and the implementation of on-site staffing models designed to stop the spread of the virus to and among our residents.

Our government has taken many steps ensuring the safety of our older adults by introducing virtual chronic-care visits for PCH residents, which permitted physician to have an appointment with their patient virtually as an alternate to an in-person visit.

* (11:50)

While we recognize that having to place restrictions on visitation, our government recognizes the necessity of personal visits and has supported an increase visitation at personal-care homes and long-term-care facilities.

We were the Province to introduce and fund the construction of outdoor all-season visitation shelters, which permanent residents to—which, pardon me, permit residents to visit with loved ones in a safe and 'sanitary' environment. Some visitation 'sultures' are already in place and others are expected to be in place in the coming weeks as construction continues in a lot of locations all at once to meet this obligation—160 shelters across Manitoba have been delivered. And there are—out of those 160, 105 of them are external buildings, and the remaining 55 are internal units.

I do want to acknowledge and thank my colleagues, the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living (Mr. Friesen), the Minister of Central Services (Mr. Helwer), the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations (Ms. Clarke) and yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for tending to the constituency of Brandon East and looking at some of the first visitation shelters at Fairview Personal Care Home, Rideau Park Personal Care Home and Dinsdale home.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you have heard and we've all heard in the Throne Speech that was just a few short days ago, our government is committed to the development of a Manitoba seniors strategy. The future of the older adults in our province are not restricted to personal-care homes. We need to look at a variety of areas within this spectrum. We need to look at home- and community-care options. We need to look at aging-in-place communities. Where do people live? How can we bring families closer together? How can we reduce isolation in times of—like COVID? How can we bring families together for visitation that—so they don't have to drive halfway

across the province to visit their loved ones? We need to look in at these aging-in-place communities as an option for bringing people together. We need to look at all accommodation options, not just personal-care homes. We need to look at behavioural beds, memory facilities, supportive housing and so much more.

I would love to go on and on about the work that we've been doing over the last seven to 10 months, but I—as you can see, I'm running out of time, so I certainly don't have that ability to do so. This work has—that has been completed, though, it certainly does include input from groups like the long-term-care association of Manitoba, the Manitoba association of residential community-care homes for the elderly and CanAge just last week—a great meeting with CanAge to get their perspective and expert advice.

So I know I've got just over a minute left, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do want to take a few minutes to correct some misinformation that the member from Union Station has put on the record. First of all, the statement that our government has abandoned support for seniors in Manitoba could be no further from the reality. In fact, in our first two years in government we have built almost twice as many PCH beds in Winnipeg than the NDP did from 2010 to 2016.

Another statement suggests that this government has failed to build any new personal-care-home beds since assuming office in 2016. I've heard that twice today, and the fact of the matter is, since April of 2016, we've built 257 PCH beds with another 250 currently under construction in Steinbach and Carman. And I would welcome the members from Union Station and Wolseley to join me and we'll go out there so they can see those beds themselves.

Again, I have so much more but my time is running out and I know my colleagues want to speak to this as well. So I thank you all for your time and I certainly look forward to the rest of this debate.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): First of all, I want to say that we will be supporting this resolution, notwithstanding some concerns about the precise accuracy in certain of the whereas clauses. But there is clearly a need for more staffing and better staffing levels at personal-care homes in Manitoba.

One of the striking examples is this report from the Long Term & Continuing Care Association of Manitoba in which they state that the COVID-19 costs are in addition to the personal-care-home situation in terms of 15 years of funding freezes. That's 11 years

under the NDP and four under the Conservatives of funding freezes. There was no funding for increased supplies around infection, prevention and control, and zero 'anrenewal' inflationary operation increases. As well, in the past two years, there have been direct funding reductions implemented along with other regional cost-saving measures, which many times directly and negatively impacted our members.

Now, the long-term-care association is correct in pointing out that for the first six months, the Manitoba regional health authorities and government ignored their responsibility to fund their public health orders and directions in long-term care. I'm pleased that finally in September, the Minister of Health did say that he would provide funding for the COVID-related expenses and that personal-care homes could bring their expenses in. It is a step forward, but it is not sufficient.

I have talked with many, many people who have family in long-term care or individuals in long-term care. I raised concerns about Parkview Place as early as 2011. In terms of the quality of care there, the situation has not improved. I raised, in 2017, major concerns about a home in Portage la Prairie where there was a lot of issues around Portage—the quality of care.

I should add that my father has—personally was in long-term care for two years and—before he passed away, and I've seen the good and the problems. And it's important to remember that some care homes are actually doing remarkably well, but even as there are all too many which are really not providing the quality of care that is needed.

Now, I would like to refer not only to the Long Term & Continuing Care Association reports, but to one I—which I have here, which comes from the Manitoba Association of Residential and Community Care Homes for the Elderly, and they have the same experience. They say that—this is a report produced in 2019—that facilities have been consistently underfunded over the last 10 years in providing salary benefits.

This is clearly a problem which has gone on for many years, and started at least by 2010, from this report from Marsh, and earlier than that from the Long Term & Continuing Care Association. The Marsh report says that facilities have not received any increase in health funding to cover the increased costs in staffing and expenses.

As the Manitoba association of residential and community care for the elderly indicates, seniors' care is one of the most essential issues facing the Manitoba health-care system today. Approximately 15 per cent of the population is over age 65, and within the next 15 years, 10,000 Manitobans will reach an age where they may require long-term-care services. This is a critical issue. It is a critical short-term and longer term issues.

The Marsh report continues: Over the last 10 years, dietary expenses have increased by 36 per cent because of an increase in food quantity, quality and price. Nursing and recreational supplies increased by 50 per cent, and there has not been a recognition that there needs to be an increased staffing, and this is—a major reason for this is the rise in highly acute residents at personal-care homes with

complex needs including dementia. And this increase in acuity of care at personal-care homes is growing and, I quote, in Manitoba at alarming rates.

So that the research studies, again from the Marsh report, show that there are inadequate nurse staffing levels. This contributes to poor health outcomes.

We need to increase staffing levels and we need to do this as quickly as possible in order to have adequate care and adequate—

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 29, 2020

CONTENTS

ORDERS OF THE DAY		Resolutions	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS		Res. 2—Increase Staffing and Support for Personal Care Homes and for Seniors	
Second Readings—Public Bills		Asagwara	379
Bill 203—The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act (Referendum Before Privatization of Subsidiary)		Questions	
Sala	369	Isleifson	382
Questions		Asagwara	382
Teitsma	371	Naylor	382
Sala	371	Gerrard	383
Wasyliw	371	Micklefield	383
Johnston	372	Debate	
Lamont	372	Friesen	384
Debate		Naylor	386
Wharton	373	Isleifson	388
Teitsma	375	Gerrard	390
Lamont	377		
Martin	379		

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>