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of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon. | Union Station | NDP |
| BALCAEN, Wayne | Brandon West | PC |
| BEREZA, Jeff | Portage la Prairie | PC |
| BLASHKO, Tyler | Lagimodière | NDP |
| BRAR, Diljeet | Burrows | NDP |
| BUSHIE, Ian, Hon. | Keewatinook | NDP |
| BYRAM, Jodie | Agassiz | PC |
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

The 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 the welfare of all our people. Amen.

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

Please be seated.

Private members' business, the honourable government House—oh.

First, before we get to that, I have a—orders of the day, private members' business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The Speaker: And a selected bill announcement.

Speaker's Statement

The Speaker: So I'm advising the House that I've received a letter from the Government House Leader and the honourable member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) indicating that the member for Tyndall Park has identified Bill 232, The Autism Strategy Act, as their selected bill for this session.

And as a reminder to the House, rule 25 permits each independent member to select one private member's bill per session to proceed to a second reading vote and requires the Government House Leader and member to provide written notice as to the date and time of the debate and the vote.

I 'therebefore' been advised that the question will be put on Bill 232 on Tuesday, March 17, 2026. Debate on the second reading will begin at 10 a.m. Question will be put and second reading motion at 10:59 a.m.

House Business

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Pursuant to rule 34(11), I am announcing the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Tyndall Park. The title of the resolution is Recognizing ANCOP's Contributions in Uplifting Vulnerable Families, Strengthening Communities and Fostering a Culture of Compassion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to rule 34(11), it has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Tyndall Park. The title of the resolution is Recognizing ANCOP's Contributions in Uplifting Vulnerable Families, Strengthening Communities and Fostering a Culture of Compassion.

* * *

MLA Fontaine: Okay, from 10:00 to 10:30 this morning, I'm going to call Bill 230, the Moose Hide Campaign act, and then from 10:30 to 11:00, would you please call Bill 231, The Indigenous Heritage Month Act, for second reading.

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now proceed to second reading of Bill 230, The Moose Hide Campaign Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), until 10:30; followed by second reading debate on Bill 231, The Indigenous Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), from 10:30 until 11:00.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS**Bill 230—The Moose Hide Campaign Day Act
(Commemoration of Days, Weeks
and Months Act Amended)**

The Speaker: So now we'll proceed to second reading of Bill 230, The Moose Hide Campaign Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière): I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Boniface (MLA Loiselle), that Bill 230, The Moose Hide Campaign Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended); Loi sur la Journée de la Campagne Moose Hide (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Blashko: Bill 230, The Moose Hide Campaign Day Act, is an important step our government can take in addressing violence against women, children and gender-diverse peoples. Before we speak to the bill and the work of the Moose Hide Campaign, I think it's important that I acknowledge that I'm only standing here bringing forward this bill because of the tireless work—over many, many decades—of women.

Women, particularly Indigenous and racialized women, have advocated, organized, grieved, rallied and fought for gender-based violence to be taken seriously by the public and community leaders. I want to thank them for their work. Some of these women sit right here in this Chamber and in our provincial Cabinet.

I consulted with many service providers, people supporting the work of women's shelters, researchers, advocates and survivors. I want to thank them all for meeting with me and sharing their expertise and knowledge. Our communities and our province are stronger and healthier because of your commitment to a just society. So much of that work laid the foundation for the Moose Hide Campaign.

This is an Indigenous-led grassroots movement that invites men and boys to take responsibility for ending gender-based violence and to stand up for respect, safety and healthy relationships. The campaign was founded in 2011 by Paul Lacerte and his daughter Raven Lacerte, members of the Carrier First Nation in northern British Columbia.

During a hunting trip along the Highway 16, often called the Highway of Tears, they reflected on the devastating reality that many Indigenous women and girls have gone missing or been murdered along that corridor. After harvesting a moose during the hunt, they cut pieces of the hide into small squares and began distributing them as pins. Each piece of moosehide became a symbol of a pledge: a commitment to honour, respect and protect women and children and to stand against gender-based violence.

Over time, the campaign evolved into a nationwide movement with millions of moosehide pins distributed and thousands of communities participating in Moose Hide Campaign Day each year.

* (10:10)

Early support from organizations such as the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and other First Nations leadership helped introduce the campaign to Manitoba, encouraging men and boys to stand alongside women and families in speaking out against violence.

Today, Moose Hide Campaign Day is observed across the country through educational events, community gatherings, walks and ceremonies that raise awareness about violence against Indigenous women, gender-diverse folks and children while promoting healing and accountability.

Through this Indigenous-led movement, communities across Canada are coming together to affirm a simple but powerful idea: that violence against women, children and gender-diverse peoples must end, and that each of us has a role to play in building a safer future for everyone living in our society.

Violence against Indigenous women, children and gender-diverse folks is an issue that affects communities across our province, and it requires all of us to work together to build a safer Manitoba. This—the importance of this work cannot be overstated. Across Canada, Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQI+ folks have faced disproportionately high levels of violence. Indigenous women represent only a small share of the population but account for a much larger share of victims of violence and homicide.

In Manitoba, despite Indigenous peoples making up only 18 per cent of the province's population, approximately 70 per cent of female homicide victims in Manitoba in 2022 were Indigenous women. Across Canada, Indigenous women are four times more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience violence,

and many experience multiple forms of abuse through their lives.

Our NDP government has also taken meaningful steps to support this Indigenous initiative. In 2024, we provided funding of up to \$250,000 to support the establishment of a Moose Hide Campaign office here in Manitoba, with the aim of bringing this campaign's message to more Manitobans including schools, workplaces and community organizations that want to participate in building respectful and violence-free communities.

Moreover, our government has been working more broadly to support community-led initiatives that address gender-based violence. In partnership with the federal government, we invested over \$6 million to fund 19 community initiatives across the province that are working to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors.

These investments have helped expand practical supports for survivors while strengthening prevention efforts by supporting training programs for shelter workers, including a tuition-free shelter support worker micro-credential program at Red River College Polytechnic, which helps prepare front-line workers to support people fleeing domestic violence and unsafe situations.

Building on this work, in February 2025, our government invested eight hundred and eleven dollars in—or \$811,000 in funding to support programs that engage men and boys in preventing gender-based violence. This funding has been supporting Manitoba community organizations, delivering programming that helps men develop healthier relationships with women and gender-diverse folks and challenge harmful behaviours.

These initiatives include programs at Ma Mawi centre, NorWest Co-op Community Health Men's Relationship Program, The Pas Family Resource Centre's northern men and boys program, Aboriginal Health and Wellness's men's program and Elmwood Community Resource Centre's inspiring newcomer men program.

Most recently, in 2026, our government invested more than \$767,000 through the From the Ground Up—Safe Healthy Communities for All program community development projects that support women and gender-diverse Manitobans overcoming gender-based violence.

I've always been a believer in doing the upstream work, getting at the root cause of an issue rather than settling for a short-term fix. This campaign and the

work it undertakes is just that: upstream work that invites people into a dialogue about respect, dignity and value. Unlearning misogyny, transphobia and racism and recognizing where they are present in our communities and in our structures is no small task, but that's what ending gender-based violence will take.

The Moose Hide Campaign is a way in which people, regardless of age, gender, geography or race, can engage, learn and model how to change this deep cultural norm that permits violence against women, children and gender-diverse people.

For far too long, gender-based violence has been framed as a women's issue, when, in fact, this is a men's issue. Men are predominantly perpetrating the violence while women and children are forced to deal with the consequences of this aggression. It is overdue for men to step up and play an active role in changing these cultural norms, to engage young men in tough conversations around boundaries, respect and healthy relationships.

Before I was elected, I worked with high school students and oftentimes we'd be witnessing young people navigating their first relationships, often without the skills to properly weather the ups and downs of a young relationship.

The Moose Hide Campaign is a resource and opportunity educators, parents and communities can embrace and learn from in order to build the skills to navigate these conversations and equip future generations with the ability to build better, more fair worlds. By designating the third Thursday of May as Moose Hide Campaign day, this bill invites Manitobans across the province to take part in events, learn about the campaign's message, and reflect on the role of—each of us can play in preventing violence.

Formal recognition also helps ensure that the values at the heart of the Moose Hide Campaign: respect, responsibility and protection for women, children and gender-diverse peoples continue to be shared with future generations. Recognizing Moose Hide Campaign day in Manitoba will help bring more attention to this important movement and encourage Manitobans across our province to take part in building communities rooted in respect, safety and accountability.

I want to once again thank all the people that have worked to end violence against women, children and gender-diverse folks. The work is difficult and often underappreciated. You are imagining, investing in and

building a world better than the world we inhabit today.

I want to thank those individuals and organizations that took the time to meet with me during the consultation process: Humaira from Healthy Muslim Families; Tracy [*phonetic*] and Kendra from RESOLVE Manitoba; Ashley from Rainbow Resource Centre; Durdana, Auntie Shahina from Islamic Social Services Association; Tsue and Deena from Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters; Lois at YWCA Brandon; Ange at Genesis House; Theresa at Circling Buffalo; Sana at Youville; Cynthia at North End Women's Centre; Martin at Coalition of Manitoba Cultural Communities for Families; Haran and Quinn from Klinik; and, of course, Raven Lacerte and her team at Moose Hide Campaign.

Addressing gender-based violence is an urgent need for Manitobans and all of the people listed above, and thousands of others have been working towards this tirelessly. It's important that we here today, pass this bill and do our part to make space to bring more men and boys into this urgent conversation and build that better world for current and future Manitobans.

Thank you.

Questions

The 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 floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I want to say thank you to the member from Lagimodière for bringing this bill forward here this morning.

As mentioned, we know that domestic violence, IPV violence is significant in northern communities and they are faced with limited accesses for victims.

I'm just wondering if the member can share with us how Bill 230 will help provide equal access to support and protection in those northern communities?

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière): I thank the member for the question.

This bill is really—I spoke a little bit about upstream work, but it's really about opening up opportunities for conversations so that there isn't a need for those supports. We've made—our government has made investments into different gender-based violence programming, whether it's about prevention or supporting survivors, but really this bill is about doing that upstream work, changing that culture so that ultimately over the long term those supports become less and less necessary.

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): Could the member for Lagimodière share why, with the House, why it's so important that Manitoba formally recognizes Moose Hide Campaign day and what message this recognition sends to women, children and gender-based diverse people across our province?

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

I think this is a great example of really great work happening in community and the opportunity for a government to affirm and uplift that work. So I think it tells—it signals to community that there is good work happening and we can support that and provide one more opportunity, provide one more resource for that work to continue in a larger, more expanded way.

* (10:20)

So seeing a government set a tone about addressing gender-based violence is necessary, and that front-line work that the Moose Hide Campaign and all service providers are providing is important. And this works—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the member for Lagimodière for his—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Just remind all members that the proper way to address the Speaker is Honourable Speaker, not just Speaker.

Mr. Guenter: I thank the member for Lagimodière for his work on Bill 230 and on this important issue.

And I'd like to ask him to speak a little further on the significance of the moosehide and how it relates to this issue?

Mr. Blashko: Yes, I thank the member for the question.

And it's really kind of the origin story of the organization for the Moose Hide Campaign Day, and it's about the relationship between Raven and her father

and the important conversations that happen in different ways, whether it's in communities, whether it's on a hunt, there's all kinds of opportunities for us to engage in those conversations that help build that better world.

So the moosehide is really the point at—and the origin story of the organization and is a reminder of our connection to our world.

MLA Loiselle: The Moose Hide Campaign began as an Indigenous-led initiative rooted in the leadership of Paul and Raven Lacerte.

Could the member speak about the significance of supporting Indigenous-led movements like this one and the role they play in addressing gender-based violence in our communities?

Mr. Blashko: Thank you for that question.

I think it's fair to say that not all of the best ideas come from government. A lot of really great ideas and initiatives come from community and also from—particularly Indigenous communities. So when we're listening to community members who are starting initiatives, who have good ideas, it's our role as government to support them.

And so folks experiencing much closer this violence that we see in society, see it on a daily basis, they often have the most relevant answers. So it's our role to be a little humble when we're in this Chamber in these roles and recognize that these solutions often do exist in community—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I thank the member for bringing forward this bill that's not only an important day of awareness and recognition but also draws to attention the significant challenges that we have in Manitoba as it relates to violence against women, children and two-spirited people.

Other than designating the day as moosehide awareness campaign day, can the member please tell the House what other concrete actions or policies the government will implement along with this proclamation?

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

And, yes, this is about recognizing one day officially, but that work happens 365 days a year, both in this Chamber and out in the community.

And we have a wonderful Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), who is also in charge of Women

and Gender Equity Manitoba, who regularly is making investments in all kinds of programming and initiatives that are—that's making our community safer for women, children and gender-diverse folks.

So the member does not have to worry. We have a fierce minister whose announcements and funding and resources will continue to address these issues.

MLA Loiselle: Communities across Manitoba currently participate in Moose Hide Campaigns, events such as walks, ceremonies and educational gatherings.

Could the member highlight some of the ways Manitoba—Manitobans have embraced the campaign and how these events help bring people together to raise awareness and promote healing?

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

And one of the smallest steps folks can take is wear the—wearing the moosehide pin. It's a really great—it sends out a signal. It's a good conversation starter for folks who might not be familiar with the campaign.

But, yes, over the past few years, folks have really embraced the campaign here in Manitoba. There's been really large rallies and walks across the province. I've been really fortunate to participate in some of them. And sometimes the work is quieter. It's conversations in a workplace. Post-secondary institutions have really embraced the campaign as well.

So we're seeing this campaign become more of a presence year-long in our province in so many different ways with that Moose Hide Campaign Day being that—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: The Moose Hide Campaign specifically calls on men and boys to be part of the solution.

And my question to the member is: What partnerships and programs is the government supporting that actively engage men and boys in violence prevention?

Mr. Blashko: Yes, I thank the member for the question.

And yes, this is very much focused on the role—the active role of men and boys. And so just last year, we funded several programs. I'll list them again. So it was about \$800,000 that was meant to provide this type of programming at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre,

the NorWest Co-op Community Health's Men's Relationship Program, The Pas Family Resource Centre's northern men and boys program, Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre's men's program, as well as Elmwood Community Resource Centre's inspiring newcomer men program.

MLA Loiseau: The Moose Hide Campaign has grown from a small grassroots effort into a nationwide movement with millions of pins distributed across Canada.

Could the member speak about how powerful it is to see a grassroots initiative grown this way and why formal recognition in Manitoba can help continue that momentum?

Moreover, could the member speak about how recognizing Moose Hide Campaign Day can help educate future generations about healthy relationships and the importance of standing up against violence?

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

And, yes, I think future generations is really an important perspective to take and how this campaign is really accessible to young people. The language isn't complicated. We're really asking—we're recognizing the harms of the past and the current harms, but we're also building that future with no violence.

So I think engaging young people is super important, and a campaign built around engaging different generations is needed in this moment.

So I'm thankful to Raven and the Moose Hide Campaign for all the work they've done, and I look forward to continuing this work.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Again, I want to thank the member from Lagimodière for bringing forward this bill, Bill 230, and the work that he's put into bringing this forward here today.

This bill is something that should speak to every one of us here in Manitoba. It should unite every one of us here in this Chamber, and we all take responsibility and we all share that responsibility to end violence against all people in our country and across the world.

We know and—that Manitoba has one of the highest IPV rates—intimate partner violence and

domestic violence—across the country. We know that Indigenous women face significantly higher risk and 20 per cent of Canada's homicides are related to IPV and domestic violence, that these statistics are disturbing, to say the least, that we continue to see an increase of violence across our country and in our homes. Too many families and too many communities and individuals continue to experience the devastating impacts of domestic violence and intimate partner violence.

The Moose Hide Campaign is an Indigenous-led grassroots movement that has grown into a powerful national initiative. It calls on men and boys to step forward and be part of the solution, to take responsibility, to challenge harmful behaviors and to model—

* (10:30)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hour now is 10:30. As previously announced, we will—when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have eight minutes remaining.

Bill 231—The Indigenous Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

The Speaker: As previously announced, we will now go to second reading of Bill 231, The Indigenous Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I move, seconded by the MLA for Elmwood, that Bill 231, The Indigenous Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Cross: I'm proud to rise today to present Bill 231, The Indigenous Heritage Month Act, a bill that would designate September as Indigenous heritage month in Manitoba.

For me, this bill is not abstract policy, it is personal. I stand here today as a Red River Métis woman, as a legislator and as someone who grew up understanding that the story of this province cannot be told without the story of Indigenous peoples being included.

Long before Manitoba entered Confederation, long before European settlement, this land was already home to complex societies, thriving economies,

systems of governance and vibrant cultures. Indigenous nations across now—what is now known as Manitoba had deep relationships with the land, sophisticated trade route networks and traditions that guided communities for generations.

These societies were not temporary or primitive; they were strong, organized and deeply rooted. And yet we also know that history took a painful turn. For generations, colonial policies attempted to erase Indigenous languages, cultures and identities. Systems like the Indian Act and the residential school system were designed to assimilate Indigenous peoples and suppress their traditions.

These policies cause deep harm that is still felt today. But despite those efforts, despite the attempts to silence cultures and erase identities, Indigenous peoples did not disappear. Instead communities showed remarkable resilience, languages survived, ceremonies continued, knowledge was passed down and cultures endured. That resilience is something that should be recognized, honoured and celebrated, and that is exactly what this bill seeks to do.

Bill 231 proposes something simple but meaningful: that Manitoba formally recognize September as Indigenous heritage month. At first glance some may ask why that matters, but recognition matters. Recognition creates space, recognition creates opportunity and recognition creates awareness.

An Indigenous heritage month recognition would give communities across Manitoba the time and the space to celebrate cultures, share knowledge and teach the next generation about the histories and traditions that have shaped our province. And perhaps most importantly, it would provide a powerful opportunity for young Indigenous people, because identity matters to everyone.

When Indigenous youth see their cultures recognized and celebrated in our province, it sends a message that their languages, their traditions and their stories matter. It tells them that their history is not something to hide or forget; it is something to be proud of. That pride can shape a young person's confidence, their sense of belonging and their belief in their future. And that matters not just for Indigenous youth but for everyone in Manitoba, because when young people grow up proud of who they are, they grow up ready to lead.

Honourable Speaker, Indigenous peoples have contributed enormously to the development of this province. Long before European contact, Indigenous

trade networks connected communities across the continent. Knowledge of the land, waterways and ecosystems guided the earliest exploration and economic development in this region. Indigenous peoples were essential partners in the fur trade that helped shape the early economy of the Prairies.

And those contributions continue today. Across Manitoba, Indigenous businesses, governments and entrepreneurs are helping drive economic growth. Indigenous economic activity generates billions of dollars in economic impact and supports jobs and investments across our province. Urban reserves, Indigenous businesses and community development initiatives are strengthening local economies and creating opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Manitobans alike.

In other words, Indigenous peoples are not only part of our past, they are an essential part of our present and our future. Recognizing Indigenous heritage month helps ensure those contributions are understood and appreciated. It allows Manitobans of all backgrounds to learn about the true and complete history of our province.

Because reconciliation requires understanding. Reconciliation requires the truth. And understanding and truth begins with education. As late Senator Murray Sinclair once said: Education got us into this mess and education is the key to getting us out of it.

Indigenous heritage month is one way we can advance that education. It creates opportunities for schools, communities, cultural organizations and governments to host events, share stories and celebrate achievements. It encourages dialogue. It helps build relationships. And it helps Manitobans better understand one another.

Honourable Speaker, reconciliation is not a single action or a single piece of legislation. It is a journey. It requires listening, it requires learning and it requires sustained commitment. Our government believes that meaningful reconciliation must involve respect, collaboration and partnership with Indigenous peoples and governments.

Recognizing Indigenous heritage month is part of that work. It is a step towards acknowledging the past, celebrating the present and building a better future together. It is also about ensuring Indigenous voices and stories are heard. Too often in the past, Indigenous histories were ignored or misrepresented.

Indigenous heritage month creates space for Indigenous communities to tell their own stories,

share their own knowledge and celebrate their own achievements. And that is so powerful. Because when people hear those stories, when they learn about the resilience, the innovation and the contributions of Indigenous peoples, it helps break down barriers and it builds understanding.

Honourable Speaker, this bill is not about division. It is about recognition. It is about respect. And it is about ensuring that the cultures, histories and contributions of Indigenous peoples are properly acknowledged in our province. Manitoba is stronger when we recognize the diversity of the people who built it. We are stronger when we learn from one another, and we are stronger when we celebrate the traditions that shape our shared future.

Designating September as Indigenous heritage month sends a clear message. It says that Manitoba values the cultures and identities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. It says that we recognize the contributions Indigenous peoples have made, continue to make to our province. And it says that reconciliation is not just something that we talk about, it is something we act on.

Honourable Speaker, for Indigenous youth across Manitoba, this recognition will mean something real. For communities working to preserve languages, traditions, it will provide a platform. For Manitobans who want to learn more about the true history of this province, it will create opportunity. And for our province as a whole, it will strengthen understanding and respect.

This bill invites all Manitobans to reflect, learn and celebrate. It invites us to honour the resilience of Indigenous peoples. And it invites us to move forward together.

I am proud to bring forward this legislation. I hope members of this House will join me in supporting it, because recognizing Indigenous heritage month is not just about acknowledging the past, it's about shaping our future together, a future built on respect, understanding and reconciliation.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed in the standard rotation. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

The honourable member—the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

* (10:40)

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Could the member for Seine River share with the House why it is important for Manitoba to formally recognize September as Indigenous heritage month, and the message this sends about valuing the cultures, histories and contributions of Indigenous peoples?

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I'd like to thank the minister for her question. It's a really important one.

I thought long and hard about this bill. I worked on it for quite a long time. I did a lot of consultation. The reason why it's so important for Manitoba to formally 'recogelize' this month is because we recognize so many other cultures and events and, you know, professions.

Why have we not yet recognized the people who have been here since time immemorial, the people who helped shape this province, the people who were generous enough to share this land with us and their ways of knowing and being?

It's incredibly important because everybody needs to feel like they belong and for a very long time, not only in this province but across the country, Indigenous people were told that they did not belong. They were devalued, dehumanized. They were controlled by government policy, and I think we're living in a time where reconciliation requires action, and this is an actionable step.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): This bill does bring forward some recognition, but action is also essential.

What specific measures will the government implement to ensure Indigenous youth across Manitoba have real access to language, learning, cultural education, mentorship from Elders and Knowledge Keepers?

MLA Cross: That work's already being done. Of course, there's never enough of it. As someone who worked in the education system and, in particular, I was an Indigenous education teacher, I can tell you that the Province has created pathways.

I can tell you that currently the social studies curriculum is being worked on to ensure that we have included the truth about history in this province and in Canada to include Indigenous peoples and their

contributions. I think that we have a government right now who is perfect for the work that we're about to do.

We have the first First Nations Premier (Mr. Kinew) in all of Canada. In this room alone, we have 12 Indigenous MLAs serving Manitoba, not just on the government side, but we have an Indigenous MLA on the opposition side. Who—what government could be more ready to do the work that we're doing right now? I think we do a lot, but there's always more we can do.

This bill cannot be connected to money, as we all know. It cannot be connected to policies where it requires us to invest funds, but I think it encourages people to do the work, people to listen, people to learn. And I know that policy is constantly being developed to ensure that students, youth, individuals have access to their language, to the things that they need. We have—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Kennedy: Indigenous heritage month is designed to give Indigenous youth the space to connect with their culture, traditions and identities.

Could the member speak about why this recognition is meaningful for young Indigenous people in Manitoba?

MLA Cross: I'm going to answer that question with a little bit of a story. Prior to being elected, when I worked in Louis Riel School Division on the Indigenous education team, one of the things our team did was bring our Indigenous students together once a month.

We had an Indigenous Youth Leadership Council that would gather with all the Indigenous ed teachers. One of the activities we chose to do with the kids early on was actually bring them together and make sure that it was a safe space. We only had Indigenous education teachers in the room and we actually did a little questionnaire with the kids.

We did a survey, asking them questions about safety, belonging, how we were meeting their needs, because we know Indigenous students are not achieving at the same rate as other students across this province. And one of the students actually answered a survey—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I'd like to thank the member from Seine River for bringing this important bill forward.

I would like to ask the member why September was selected as Indigenous heritage month rather than aligning with National Indigenous History Month in June, and can the member please explain the difference between the two different commemorations?

MLA Cross: I want to finish my last point, then I will answer that question. That student said they only felt safe in a bathroom stall, and so that tells me why this recognition is important.

I went back and forth choosing the month for this bill, and it was a difficult decision. And after tons of consultation, folks did want me to look at June. However, June we often associate with Pride month and this is a month that deserves its own recognition, where it's not being picked apart by other things happening.

September seemed like a logical solution. Kids are back in school. The focus in schools is on residential school system because of Orange Shirt Day on September 30. Powwows are going on through the summer. Folks are busy doing ceremony. They're busy in their sweat lodges and their sun dance circles—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Kennedy: Manitoba has a rich history of Indigenous economic, social and cultural contributions from pre-contact trade networks to contemporary business and governance.

Can the member highlight how formally recognizing Indigenous heritage month helps all Manitobans understand these contributions?

MLA Cross: Great question. I think I want to answer it from the perspective of the things that we were all taught, things that maybe we have a little bit of understanding but not fully.

And I want to look at the perspective of the Indian Act. And when I say that, I'm talking about the policies that were implemented by the federal government used to control Indigenous peoples. Essentially, Indigenous peoples were welfare-like, they were wards of the state. Their welfare was tied to the—you know, what the government wanted.

So Indian Act policies include the residential school system; the pass system, which restricted movement; the peasant farming act, which restricted how they could farm and what tools they could use for farming. It was tied to status, who was considered status and not? Chief and council systems, cultural restrictions—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Thank you to the member from Seine River for bringing this bill forward.

The question that I do have—and, again, because one of the reasons is because it's in my constituency—but to the member from Seine River: Was the national Indigenous residential museum consulted on Bill 231, and where will they be able to help out with this process?

Thank you.

MLA Cross: I thank the member for that question. They were not consulted directly; however, I have spent time there. I will talk about who I did consult with.

This bill is something I worked on for a couple years and so I was able to consult with the late Grand Chief Cathy Merrick. We talked extensively about this. We met. I met with Chief Garrison Settee—Grand Chief. I met with Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, President Chartrand and his policy committee.

I met with Indigenous leaders from the North. I really spent my time speaking to folks about what this would mean, and what it means is that we have a month where we can really promote Indigenous knowledge, sharing stories, sharing truths so that hopefully we can come together and understand we're all people at the core. We may come from different places, we may practise our faith in different ways, our language might be slightly different, but at the core of it we all want to belong and we deserve to belong. And I think that's the meaning behind this.

MLA Kennedy: Events and learning opportunities during Indigenous heritage month allow Manitobans of all backgrounds to learn about Indigenous history and culture.

Could the member speak about the value of these opportunities in fostering understanding and reconciliation across the province?

MLA Cross: Thank you for that question.

I think there's a lot of opportunity that can come out of this recognition: (1) as I mentioned, schools are doing this work through the month of September. Kids are coming back, they're reading stories about residential schools, they're starting to learn about treaties, they're learning about land acknowledgements—now there's actually a month that's kind of solidified

that can be tied into curriculum eventually down the line.

Folks have an opportunity to get out into community and learn a little bit more. I can see Indigenous nations and groups promoting activities where folks are invited to come in, just like when you think about the powwow on Orange Shirt Day. That is one of the largest powwows attended in Manitoba, and it's not just Indigenous people who are coming to an event like that, it's people from all walks of life.

And when we come together and we understand—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: Can the member tell us here in the House how the government will measure the impact of this initiative to ensure that it strengthens understanding, respect and reconciliation across Manitoba?

MLA Cross: That's actually a really great question. Thank you for that question.

* (10:50)

I think there are measurables for this bill, for this recognition. It's going to start in our schools where we're seeing achievement hopefully increase for our Indigenous students. Because one of the problems with Indigenous student achievement isn't their own intrinsic motivation, it isn't something that they do, it's the people around them that cause them to feel like they don't belong.

We have a generation who wasn't taught the truth. Sometimes that message is trickling down to the kids in classrooms who don't understand, they still believe in stereotypes. Belonging is everything for people to achieve success, and I think that's immeasurable.

Divisive rhetoric, I think language being used, social media posts that are still racist towards Indigenous people—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

And the time for questions has also expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Again, I want to thank the member for—from Seine River to—for bringing this bill forward. It's an important bill, and I'm pleased to stand here and put some words on the record regarding the Bill 231, The Indigenous Heritage Month Act.

This bill recognizes the deep and enduring history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and Manitoba.

It also acknowledges the harm caused by historic government policies, including the residential school system and provisions of the Indian Act which were designed to forcibly assimilate Indigenous peoples and suppress their languages, identities and cultural practices. Despite these efforts, Indigenous communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience by preserving and continuing their languages, traditions and cultural identities. The bill highlights the importance of ensuring that Indigenous youth have opportunities to learn about their culture, traditions and languages so they can develop pride in their heritage and identity.

The month of September also has a recognized day, Orange Shirt Day, and I have the—had the opportunity to attend that event in Neepawa for the last number of years. The story of orange shirt is a remarkable story and one of Phyllis Webstan [*phonetic*]—Phyllis Webstad, sorry—and I want to read in her own words her story that I find to be very remarkable and very impactful.

So, in her words: I went to the Mission for one school year in 1973 to 1974. I had just turned six years old. I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up the—up in the front and was so bright and exciting, just like I felt to be going to school. When I got to the Mission, they stripped me and took away my clothes, including my orange shirt. I never wore it again. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me. It was mine. The colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared. I was 13 years old and in grade 8 when my son Jeremy was born. Because my grandmother and mother both attended residential school for 10 years each, I never knew what a parent was supposed to be like. With the help of my aunt, Agness Jack, I was able to raise my son and have him know me as his mother.

Those words are the story of just one individual, but the investment that Phyllis made to herself is absolutely remarkable. But what speaks even more is the impact of her story on people across Canada and the awareness that she has brought across the nation. We are all learning and we are all better for it.

Orange Shirt Day has created not only an awareness but it's also provided education to those who visit on Orange Shirt Day—perhaps it's a park or another event that Indigenous communities are hosting. Orange Shirt Day gives a community an opportunity to learn together, to see and hear the sounds of Indigenous culture, to listen to storytelling, to create beadwork and, of course, eat bannock—love bannock. I've spoke to many people who have attended and have enjoyed those learning experiences.

I've seen a growing interest from the communities and, in particular, Neepawa, where a significant number of students attend and take part in many activities. This event does drumming, powwow, dancing and stations are set up so that—where volunteers teach youth and adults the rich history of beading, skirt making, bannock baking, drumming and dancing.

While attending one of these events, over the course of a period of years, I've watched a young—two young females, sisters, grow into—now they are doing—making drums on their own. They take pride in showing me the skirts that they have made, and their family has become more and more involved, and it's great to see them not only learning, but absolutely embracing their culture and being better for it. Another—and this speaks to the education in the school, during I Love to Read Month, I had a young girl reach out looking to find books.

She asked where she could find books. She wanted to learn her—more about her culture and more specifically, her language, so she had asked me where can she go to get that material, so it was—I was able to help her. I was able to point her in the right direction, but it's also comforting to know that students, in particular this young girl, felt comfortable in asking me for that help and that guidance.

I do want to take a moment to mention what our PC team did to invest in many programs and organizations to continue the support of Indigenous culture and heritage. I know my colleague and friend, the MLA from Lac du Bonnet, brought forward legislation implementing treaty education across Manitoba schools. That was brought forward in 2023. I know the PC government committed to helping support commemoration and the protection of Indigenous residential school burial sites.

In 2022, the PC government brought forward support for Indigenous-led searches for those burial sites of children who attended the residential schools. In 2021, government provided supports

and programs for Elders and Knowledge Keepers to have those individuals in schools to help with education and promote the involvement through Indigenous ways. In 2023, the PC government worked with Every Child Matters to create new gardens for reflection on—did that here—right here on the Legislative grounds, Honourable Speaker.

And in 2023, the PC government waived fees to help residential school survivors reclaim their traditional names, Honourable Speaker. This legislation is important. It is important for Indigenous peoples. It's important for all people to learn more about the Indigenous culture, the history that's behind it, learn the truths and work towards reconciliation. And, again, I want to thank the member.

This is important legislation that has come forward. And I know from my own experience, attending Indigenous events, powwows, Orange Shirt Day events, moosehide walks, that we are all learning. We're all learning every day. And by establishing Indigenous heritage month would also provide—

* (11:00)

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have one minute remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Women's Health in Manitoba

The Speaker: The hour being 11 o'clock, it is now time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is resolution No. 4, titled Women's Health in Manitoba, brought forward by the honourable member for Tuxedo.

MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo): I move, seconded by the member from Lagimodière,

WHEREAS women in Manitoba have long encountered barriers to accessing comprehensive health care when they need it, impacting their wellbeing and quality of life; and

WHEREAS decisions made by the previous failed PC Provincial Government weakened women's health services, such as the closure of the Mature Women's Centre and reducing access to specialized care for women; and

WHEREAS the previous PC Provincial Government eliminated lactation consultant positions, removing vital breastfeeding and postpartum supports that help ensure healthy outcomes for mothers and newborns; and

WHEREAS the current Provincial Government is rebuilding and strengthening women's health services throughout Manitoba, restoring programs and supports families depend on; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government doubled the Fertility Treatment Tax Credit, helping to lower financial barriers for Manitobans pursuing fertility treatments and surrogacy; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government doubled the Manitoba Prenatal Benefit to better support low-income pregnant Manitobans; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government implemented universal no-cost prescription birth control, ensuring that access to contraception is not determined by income; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government took action to protect reproductive healthcare by creating buffer zones around clinics that provide abortions, protecting patients and doctors; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is improving early detection of breast cancer by lowering the self-referral screening age to 45, with further expansion to age 40 underway; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has restored funding for lactation consultant positions so that new parents can receive skilled feeding and postpartum care; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is expanding access to prenatal and reproductive care in rural Manitoba through the introduction of midwifery services in the Interlake—Eastern Health Region, bringing care closer to home.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba recognize the importance of accessible, comprehensive women's health care across their lifespan and commend the provincial government for its continued work to restore, expand and strengthen women's health services in Manitoba so that women and families can receive care with dignity, safety and support.

Motion presented.

The Speaker: The motion is in order.

The honourable—a question period of up to 10—the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton).

MLA Compton: The strength of a health-care system can often be measured by how well it supports women at every stage of their lives. From preventative care and reproductive health, to pregnancy and childbirth, to cancer screening, menopause care and healthy aging, women deserve a health-care system that is accessible, compassionate and reliable. And when women have access to that care, families are stronger, communities are healthier and our province moves forward together.

That is why I rise today in strong support of the resolution before the House: that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba recognize the importance of accessible, comprehensive women's health care across their lifespan and commend the provincial government for its continued work to restore, expand and strengthen women's health services in Manitoba so that women and families can receive care with dignity, safety and support. Honourable Speaker, a health-care system that works for women works better for everyone.

But, Honourable Speaker, we must also acknowledge something important in this debate. Women's health services have too often been vulnerable to political decisions, and Manitoba has seen a troubling pattern. When Progressive Conservative governments are in power, women's health services have too often been weakened, reduced or placed at risk.

We saw years of underfunding and destabilizing changes to our health-care system. Clinics closed, services were cut, health-care workers were stretched beyond their limits. And when governments weaken health care, the consequences are real. Wait times grow longer, preventative care is delayed and the care women depend on becomes harder to reach. Because when health care is weakened, women are often the first to feel the consequences.

Honourable Speaker, I speak about these realities not only as a member of this Assembly, but from my own experience working within Manitoba's health-care system. Before entering this Chamber, I worked as a nurse in Manitoba. I had the privilege of caring for Manitobans at home at some of their most vulnerable moments in their lives. I saw first-hand the incredible dedication of our health-care workers. I also saw what happens when a system around them is stretched too thin.

I remember one woman who came in deeply frustrated and discouraged after learning that the mature women's health clinic she relied on had been closed. That clinic had been where she went for her routine care, screenings and support. When it shut down, she suddenly didn't know where to turn. She told me that she felt like the system had simply abandoned her.

Now she had to travel further, wait longer and navigate a system that had suddenly become much harder to access. And, Honourable Speaker, moments like that stay with you because they remind you that decisions made in this Chamber do not stay in this Chamber. They show up in hospital hallways, in waiting rooms and in the lives of women trying to access care.

When the mature women's health clinic closed, the need for care did not disappear, it simply became harder for women to find it. Honourable Speaker, rebuilding women's health services means restoring the care that helps detect illnesses early and support women throughout their lives. Our government understands that women's health must be supported across the entire lifespan, and we are taking action to make that happen.

In Budget 2025, our government invested \$4.6 million to support lowering the screening age for breast cancer to 40, while expanding screening infrastructure, staffing, training and mobile screening services. And we have already begun that work by lowering, officially, the screening age to 45, because early detection saves lives.

Honourable Speaker, we also know that the earliest days of motherhood are critical. The earliest days of a life matter, and families deserve the support they need during these first moments. Our government has added permanent lactation consultants to support mothers and babies in those important early days.

We have expanded midwifery services for the first time in the Interlake-Eastern health authority and expanded services in Norway House Cree Nation. These services mean families can access culturally appropriate care closer to home. And we know how important that is to positive health outcomes for each and every Manitoban.

During my time as a nurse, I experienced how important that can be. I remember one new mother who was overwhelmed in those first days after giving birth. She desperately wanted to breastfeed, but she

was struggling and beginning to feel like she was failing. A lactation consultant was able to spend time with her, provide guidance and give her the reassurance that she needed. By the end of that visit, you could see the relief on her face, because sometimes the difference between feeling defeated and feeling supported is simply having the right care available at the right moment.

Honourable Speaker, supporting women's health also means protecting access to reproductive health care. Birth control and abortion services are essential parts of modern health care. They allow women to make decisions about their bodies, their futures and their families, and access to those services must never depend on income or geography. And that is why our government has funded access to abortion services and introduced legislation to establish safe buffer zones for health care, for health-care providers, ensuring patients and providers can access care and their areas of work safely.

We have also taken historic steps to make contraception accessible. As of October 1, 2024, Manitobans now have access to universal prescription birth control. And in Budget 2025, we added free access to emergency contraception. Reproductive health should depend on medical need, not on someone's ability to pay, because when women can access birth control and reproductive care, they are healthier, families are stronger and communities are more stable.

* (11:10)

Honourable Speaker, when women's health care does not end—women's health care does not end after the reproductive years. For far too long, menopause care has been overlooked in our health-care system. Our government has made hormone replacement therapy free for Manitobans going through menopause, and we are restoring the mature women's clinic. We have also provided funding for ovarian cancer research right here in Manitoba, helping advance life-saving research.

We are also supporting Manitobans who are starting families. We have doubled the fertility tax credit, helping families manage the cost of fertility treatments. And we have doubled the Prenatal Benefit, supporting parents during pregnancy.

And, Honourable Speaker, Manitoba has taken a groundbreaking step in advancing dignity and health in the workplace. Manitoba is now the first province in Canada to make menstrual products free

and available on every job site. Because menstrual health is basic health, and dignity at work should never depend on whether someone can afford essential products. And, let's be real, bodies are unique, and sometimes you can be the best prepared, but you still can get caught in a surprise. So it's very important that these products are available and easily accessible.

In closing, taken together, these initiatives demonstrate a clear commitment to rebuilding and strengthening women's health services across Manitoba. And they stand in sharp contrast to the patterns we saw under the—under the previous Conservative governments: years of cuts, instability and a health-care system pushed to the brink.

Women should never have to wonder whether the health services they rely on today will still exist tomorrow. And women who lost—like the woman who lost access to her clinic, the mother who needed support for the first days deserves support and women—

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

Questions

The 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 followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Roughly half of Manitoba's population—just over half—is women. And they are necessarily impacted by the fact that ER wait times are currently at record highs. We've recently seen a number of deaths of people who sought emergency care. Three of the four deaths over the last several months were, tragically, women.

Can the member explain how this resolution is going to help lower wait times and lessen the number of deaths in Manitoba?

MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo): I thank the member opposite for that question.

We know wait times are on top of mind for everyone, and our government is committed to improving the wait times for all Manitobans.

In May, we've partnered with front—with the front lines to establish the lower wait times team, and they're tasked with making changes to improve the emergency flow and wait times.

We've hired 3,500 net-new health-care workers, which we know, yes, is going—is part of the solution in helping improve the flow of wait times in the emergency rooms, as it will help improve safe care and getting people—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): First of all, I want to commend my colleague for bringing this PMR forward and to appreciate her for her years of service in the health-care system.

I'm wondering if the member can explain how our investments in universal no-cost prescription birth control are reducing financial barriers and making reproductive health care more equitable and accessible for women across Manitoba?

MLA Compton: I thank my colleague, the member from Wolseley, for this question.

Access to free birth control—free prescription birth control—is life-changing in Manitoba for any woman or gender-diverse person who needs it in their health journey. And particularly being able to access the best form that is for their needs, because we all know medications have different price points, just even have price points. And so for some people, any form of contraception or hormonal birth control was limited or inaccessible because they didn't have any way to afford it. And so this is allowing—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): Who have the NDP consulted on this resolution?

MLA Compton: Pardon me, I'm a little tongue-tied. I thank the member from Spruce Woods for this question.

Who have we consulted? We consult all Manitobans and especially health-care workers on the work that we are doing to fix health care.

I know as someone that worked in the health-care system—this spring, I'll be a nurse for 20 years—I've never had a government show up in such a different way from a previous government, but this one did. The listening tours—I know I'm having many—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Compton: —meetings with health-care providers. Many are reaching out to me with solutions of making health care better. And we know that our investments are having—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Naylor: I'd like to—I know the member didn't quite finish her last answer, so she might want to elaborate, but then I also would love it if she could speak to the impact on Manitoba women of doubling the Fertility Treatment Tax Credit.

MLA Compton: I thank my colleague for that question.

I can't speak for everyone in this Chamber, but, myself, I have personally had members within my own family and friends that have struggled with fertility and their strong desire to start a family. And we know that there is a fee for that, and it is not inexpensive.

And doubling this tax credit enables families to have more opportunity to utilize their own funds in a way to have more opportunity, more chances, because we know one round of I-V-S may be successful or it might not be. So this is a way that our government is supporting families to grow and be created how they would like to be.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): We know 'wany' women wait until later on in life to have their families because of careers or whatever the choices they are that they've made.

Can the member please tell the House why the current NDP government removed the routine, extra medically necessary ultrasound testing for women 35 and over for the aged pregnancies?

MLA Compton: I thank the member for that question.

I'll be real honest, it sounds like a very specific policy decision that I would have to provide answers back, which I'm very willing to provide those back to the member. But our government is very much committed to improving the current reality of health care and especially women's access to care. And we know having full-body autonomy, being able to access your primary-care provider where you can to receive culturally appropriate care is so important.

And many—for many years, women's health and women's health policy has not held those factors at heart or been involved in decisions that—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MLA Naylor: Could the member share with us what the impact of our government doubling the Manitoba Prenatal Benefit, what impact that has on women's health and children's health in this province?

MLA Compton: I thank my colleague for that question, Honourable Speaker.

* (11:20)

We know, as research continues to emerge, how important a healthy pregnancy, a healthy person, a less traumatized, stressed person during their pregnancy is in setting a foundation for a healthy life for their child. And so we know that's being able to afford good food, having housing and things like that.

And so increasing that Prenatal Benefit during that time, that super, super important time, when that baby is growing is so essential that we know this is a piece that's helping our children to grow up healthier and happy and be able to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mrs. Cook: We know the diagnostic wait times, particularly for mammograms and ultrasounds, are far too high. A large part of the reason for that is staffing, something that MAHCP has called out this current government for, stating publicly that, quote: Manitoba is struggling to retain specialized health-care professionals on the front lines. With every government announcement, allied health is asked to do more and are told help is on the way, but it's not happening.

Do the NDP believe that this resolution will speed up the recruitment of allied health workers like sonographers and mammographers?

MLA Compton: I thank the member opposite for this question.

We, absolutely, here on this side of the House know that investment in expanding the capacity for doing the work is essential, and so that's why the work both of the Minister of Health but also the minister of advanced training and—Advanced Education and Training is so essential, as well as the minister of immigration and labour, of working together to be increasing the seats in our diagnostic training programs, in our nursing programs, in our medical programs.

The mammography program, specifically, they're increasing the number of folks that they can train so we can have more so we can meet the need of the increased—well, the increased need—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Naylor: Could the members summarize how this government's step-by-step approach—reversing cuts, rebuilding capacity, investing in workforce development and modernizing access—reflects our government's broader commitment to strengthening women's health across every stage of life?

MLA Compton: I thank my colleague for that question.

Our government understands that when we're making changes to health care, to fix health care to make it better, it needs to be strategic, it needs to be with intention, it needs to be evidence-based and informed.

And so it's—we're very committed to making sure that we are increasing our capacity, so we're staffing up, we've hired over 3,500 health-care workers, but we also know we're working with immigration and labour, we're working with advanced training. We're bringing in, from other places in the country as well as other countries, more health-care providers, and we know all of this is going to improve the flow as well as ultimately—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

And the time for questions has also expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Another Tuesday and another self-congratulatory resolution from the NDP.

They sure need a lot of pats on the back and a lot of external validation, but I will say, and I've said it before and I will say it again, that hubris is insulting to Manitobans who are waiting longer than ever for the care that they need.

Manitobans are rightfully offended that members of the NDP caucus want to waste precious time in this Legislature talking about themselves when they should be focused on improving health care for Manitobans, not to mention, this is just laziness. They recycle the same tired talking points, churn it through ChatGPT and—boom—we have another resolution congratulating the NDP.

MLA Shannon Corbett, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

But I think it's important we put some facts on the record. To get elected, the NDP made all kinds of promises. But two and a half years into their mandate, it's clear this Premier (Mr. Kinew) and this Health Minister are in over their heads. They said whatever they needed to say to get elected, and now, when Manitobans try to hold them account—hold them to account for their promises, they can only engage in political spin and deflection. There is no accountability from this NDP government.

But while they are busy patting themselves on the back, ER wait times are at record highs, higher than they were under the previous government, higher than they were during or prior to COVID. And people are actually dying waiting for care. Many of those Manitobans that have died are, of course, women.

A 69-year-old woman named Debbie Fewster died in October 2024 after waiting almost two months for triple bypass surgery that she was told she needed urgently.

Genevieve Price died in the St. Boniface Hospital emergency department on November 22, 2025 after spending 30 hours waiting for appropriate care.

Stacey Ross died on January 16, 2026 after an 11-hour wait for admission in the St. Boniface Hospital emergency department, and her family was subsequently told that the long wait was a factor in her death.

And Judy Burns died on January 21, '26 also at St. Boniface Hospital, and her family has raised serious concerns about the care that she received.

Not to mention that front-line health-care workers, many of whom are women—most of whom are women—are sounding the alarm about the conditions they face on a daily basis. It's clear, honourable deputy Speaker, the NDP's record on women's health is a lot of talk and not a lot of action.

But you don't have to take my word for it. Let's look at the Fraser Institute's *Waiting Your Turn 2025* report which reveals that in 2025, the median wait for a breast biopsy was seven weeks, the second longest wait time in the country and way above the national average. The median wait for a mastectomy was eight weeks in 2025, the longest wait in the country. And the median wait to see a gynecologist in Manitoba is nearly 16 weeks. That's gone up by 30 per cent in one year, from 2024 to 2025, under this NDP government.

Members in this Chamber will know that an issue that's near and dear to my heart is that of breast cancer screening. And while I am glad to see that the breast screening age has been lowered to 45, it's not low enough; it needs to go down to 40. And I think it's worth noting that the current government only moved the screening age under duress. They were at first reluctant, in fact stating that they were going to follow the guidelines put forward by a discredited national task force, making Manitoba one of the last provinces to lower its screening age.

But I think the NDP should be careful about taking credit for this change, because that credit actually belongs to the survivors and tireless advocates and organizations like Breast Screening Advocates Manitoba, Dense Breasts Canada, the Canadian Cancer Society, that have been tirelessly fighting for this change. *[interjection]* Yes, they do deserve a round of applause.

But I think it's also important to note that Manitoba is still one of the only provinces to offer no supplemental screening for women with dense breasts whose cancer can be missed on a mammogram. There's a lot of work to do to improve breast screening practices and women's breast health for Manitobans.

Another issue I want to talk about is women's heart health. This is something—heart disease and stroke are actually the leading cause of premature death in women in Canada. Women experience heart disease differently than men in several important ways.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, women's heart disease tends to appear in the smaller blood vessels of the heart rather than the major coronary arteries. So what that means is that their symptoms don't look like the heart attacks that you see in the movies. Women are more likely to experience chest discomfort, not that crushing pain; shortness of breath; fatigue; indigestion or nausea; back or neck pain.

And a lot of the tests that we use to diagnose heart attacks are not as effective with women. Women are less likely to be prescribed needed drugs such as blood pressure or cholesterol-lowering medication after a heart attack., not to mention that women's hearts are impacted by pregnancy, menopause and hormonal changes; 90 per cent of all spontaneous coronary artery dissection cases are women. And women are less likely than men to attend cardiac rehabilitation programs after a heart attack.

So for women's heart health to improve, the health-care system needs to catch up to the fact that women's hearts are different and ensure that new knowledge about women and heart disease is translated into better prevention, diagnosis and treatment. Women remain underrepresented in research, medical school curriculum. Many guidelines for heart disease and stroke still fail to adequately address women's unique needs.

* (11:30)

And these shortcomings shape public awareness. According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, nearly 40 per cent of people in Canada don't realize that heart disease and stroke are in fact the leading cause of premature death in women. And this has led to some heartbreaking results: cases of women who experience a heart attack having their symptoms go unrecognized, and women who experience stroke are at a higher risk of dying than men, and if they survive their outcomes are worse.

But here's where I want to talk about some of the good news. There is some great work happening right here in Manitoba to change this.

I do want to recognize Dr. Anita Soni, who leads Cardiac Sciences Manitoba that has consistently ranked at the top of CIHI's national rankings for cardiac care, despite what the NDP will tell you. We do have world-class cardiac care in this province.

I was privileged to recently tour the Albrechtsen Research Centre at St. Boniface Hospital, led by Dr. Lorrie Kirshenbaum. He is the director of the Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences at St. Boniface Hospital research.

I met with Dr. Michael Czubyrt and Dr. Inna Rabinovich-Nitikin [*phonetic*] and their peers. I toured Dr. Rabinovich-Nitikin's [*phonetic*] lab. She's doing incredible research about women's heart health right here in Manitoba. I also want to talk about the Her Heart Her Way program.

It's an innovative women's heart health prevention program made possible through a partnership between the Victoria Hospital Foundation, the Reh-Fit Centre and the WRHA. It's a free 12-month virtual program pairing women who have an increased risk of heart disease with online mentors who support participants to make heart healthy nutrition, exercise and lifestyle choices. It's for women with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease who want support to change lifestyle risk factors.

Women aged 30 and older at risk of cardiovascular disease can be referred to this program if their primary health provider determines they meet eligibility requirements. Every participant is matched with a mentor and receives ongoing support and guidance.

It's a program designed by women for women. It is tailored to each woman's individual needs and its virtual format helps reduce barriers to participation. I do want to note that this program was first developed in 2022 under the previous PC government as part of a social impact bond to support women's heart health and it's a very, very good and very successful program.

So, while there is a lot of work to do to improve heart health outcomes for women, I'm encouraged to know that a lot of that work is happening right here in Manitoba. These researchers, these scientists, these doctors and these experts are changing lives and they will change the face of women's heart health for women everywhere.

I also briefly want to touch on ovarian cancer before I run out of time. We know that this is one of the most deadly cancers with a five-year survival rate of only 45 per cent. It's another women's health—heart women's health issue where Manitoba researchers are leading the way.

I had the pleasure of visiting Dr. Mark Nachtigal's lab at the University of Manitoba Max Rady College of Medicine, where he and his research team walked me through some of their projects to better understand and work towards a cure for ovarian cancer. It was very exciting and so very cool, honourable deputy assistant Speaker, to see the work that is going on right here in Manitoba.

So while I am—I'm not on board with congratulating the NDP government on anything yet, I don't think they should be hanging the mission accomplished banner. I do want to shout out all of those people in Manitoba who are working to change the face of women's health.

Thank you.

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Honourable assistant deputy Speaker, it is a privilege to stand today to talk about women's health care in this Legislative Chamber. And while the previous speaker alluded to the fact that this is grand-standing or self-congratulations, it is not that at all.

It is simply taking the space that we have earned here to speak about something that is incredibly important and was neglected by the members opposite for seven and a half years. Women's health and access to essential health services is fundamental to a healthy society, and each and every day I wake up grateful to live in a province where we maintain and celebrate a woman's right to choose, for autonomy over her own body and to live in a place where my daughter can determine her own life's course based on her choice for her own reproductive health.

And while in this moment in this Chamber that does not seem revolutionary, because we are in this beautiful province we call Manitoba. In many other corners of the world right now that right is not only being challenged it is being taken away. And I want to say how incredibly grateful I am to sit on a side of the House where we will always defend a woman's right to choose. We will always support access to safe and affordable abortion. And we will always celebrate an individual's freedom to determine their own reproductive health.

I want to talk about the great investments and the positions that this government has taken since coming into office. Now, we made it clear when we were elected that because we had such a phenomenal representation on this side of the House, that we would use that representation to ensure that Manitobans are reflected in the policy decisions that are being made.

That included bringing in free, accessible, universal birth control for every individual in Manitoba who requires a prescription for birth control. And I have friends in other provinces who talk about how phenomenal of a program that is, because it not only gives a woman a right to determine if and when she is going to bear children, but also allows us to have the flexibility in our economy and our society to help ensure that we keep our folks working who want to continue working, and that we give, frankly, people who have not previously had the choice as to whether or not to have multiple children that opportunity to say, I want to make a different choice for myself.

I know that, when I speak to constituents in my area, that it is life-changing for some of them. Some of them are in relationships where their male partners have control over family finances, have control over decision making that, quite frankly, they ought not. And to give women the freedom to choose on their own without seeking permission from a man is

fundamentally changing the way that communities operate.

And to also continue to expand those services to folks in the North in places where we have high rates of child poverty, giving people the option to not have more children, or to wait until it's time, is frankly incredible.

I want to talk about the hormone replacement therapy. So I have had the privilege of birthing two beautiful children naturally. They—I adore my children, but I am not going to have any more. And I am heading into a different phase of life that requires hormone replacement for me. That's my choice. And I'm incredibly grateful that it's being recognized as the essential health care that it is.

We know that when women start losing estrogen, it affects their tissue density, the elasticity in their tissues—which the previous speaker alluded to women's heart health. There is a strong correlation between estrogen levels and women's heart attacks. And if we are able to provide hormone replacement therapy for women who are perimenopausal or heading into menopause, we're not only helping them deal with the uncomfortable side effects of menopause, but we're also saving those hearts and keeping them strong.

Bone density is also impacted by estrogen levels. So again, this is an investment not only in hormone changes and comfort of women, but ultimately in the longest term sustainability of our public health-care system. Stronger bones mean fewer broken hips, fewer broken legs, and additional resources in our system to be used for other things.

Honourable Speaker, under the previous government, women's health was not prioritized or celebrated. We had cuts to CancerCare, We had cuts to training seats across the province and we most certainly did not have targeted investments into women's health.

* (11:40)

So I appreciate this resolution so very much to give us the opportunity to talk about the things that are going to make a real impact in our health-care system. I agree with the members opposite in that the health-care system that they left behind is completely understaffed, completely underresourced. We were losing people to other jurisdictions by the carloads.

But, honourable deputy Speaker, we're at a place now where we are inviting new health-care

practitioners in. Doctors from other countries are excited to practise medicine in Manitoba because they have the freedom to practice how they want to. We have, in our system, research opportunities that are no longer afforded in other countries because of their antiquated policies around DEI or ensuring that research is reflective of the populations that exist in this country.

So when there is a big relationship between how a region, how a population, how a community deals with questions that frankly shouldn't be questions anymore around reproductive health and women's rights and our ability to recruit the best and the brightest. We are getting folks coming to work in Manitoba who are excited at the notion of being able to freely practise medicine and to know that they will be able to do it in a way that is scientifically sound and will ensure that communities are healthier.

The previous government did a lot of damage, honourable deputy Speaker, and it's going to take time to fix it. We've expanded training opportunities all across the province. We're continuing to expand those opportunities and we are working with our partners in health care, we're working with patient advocates and we are ensuring—pardon me—that the health-care system that the next generation inherits is much better than the one that we have at the moment.

We're making progress, we'll continue to make progress, but we won't be able to make progress if the members opposite occupy the seats on this side of the House again where they're beginning to again question a woman's role in society, a woman's right to choose and a woman's autonomy over their own body. And we know, honourable deputy Speaker, that the candidates that are lining up to potentially take the Progressive Conservative nomination in Steinbach have some pretty strong views around my right to choose what happens in my own uterus.

And so, honourable deputy Speaker, I don't think that there is a more important time to have this conversation than now. Our government on this side of the House will continue to work within scientific evidence, we'll ensure that we keep our personal views outside of how health care is provided and we will certainly continue to defend all of the women and gender-diverse folks' rights to choose how and when they have a family, if they choose to have a family.

So, in closing, honourable deputy Speaker, I am so proud of the investments that we've made in women's health care and I can't wait to continue that good work.

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): Honourable deputy Speaker, one of the most critical areas of women's health is early detection of disease and particularly breast cancer. Breast cancer remains one of the most common cancers affecting women. Early detection saves lives. Screening programs allow cancers to be detected earlier when treatment is more effective and outcomes are significantly better.

This is why the MLA for Roblin introduced bill 221, the early screening for breast cancer act. Her legislative would have established a firm deadline to lower the age of eligibility for routine breast cancer screening from 50 to 40 years old, no later than December 31, 2026. It would also have required annual public reporting on progress towards the goal and the number of mammograms performed each year. Those reporting provisions were about 'transparency' and accountability.

Manitobans deserve to know whether progress is being made and whether screening capacity is being expanded to meet the demand. During the debate on that bill, the government announced its intention to lower the screening age to 45. That announcement came after 'substained advocacy' for—by survivors, advocates and the work for the member of Roblin.

And yet, despite that recognition, the government chose to kill the bill—legislation that would have ensured accountability and transparency in achieving that goal. Hiding from accountability and transparency has unfortunately moved from being a bad habit of this government to being a policy of this government.

Today, as we debate a resolution about the importance of women's health care, I would again urge members opposite to support women and support lowering the screening age to 40 in a clear and accountable way.

I recently was at the Brandon University and met with Dr. Majunder [*phonetic*], and she's a researcher at the BU and she is researching breast cancer cells. And I had such an interesting morning with her. It was just unbelievable the stuff that they were doing in this lab. I then asked her if she would do a little video announcing that age has went down to 45. But, again, she said, in her little interview: It is great that the ages went down to 45, but it's not low enough.

Cancers that start at these younger—breast cancer that starts at these younger ages is actually coming more powerful, aggressive and untreatable. So the

earlier we can detect will save young mothers', ladies' lives.

I recently also had a friend message me. And she said to me: This happened to me. Mammograms every year for the last five years. I have D dense breast. Manitoba, as well as other provinces, don't do ultrasounds or an MRI as a tag-on test to look for breast cancer in C or D density. Please advocate for this additional test or screening. They lowered the mammogram age, but that still doesn't help women with C or D density. One out of every eight women are misdiagnosed every year, and I was one. This is from my—quoting from my friend.

Not only that, it's a lack of education. Even when the doctors—when I went to the doctor and I felt something, he said, you just had a mammogram four months ago, you don't have breast cancer. So I trusted him and waited for another eight months. My gut was telling me, go back. So I did. And a different doctor sent me for a mammogram and an ultrasound and found it. Thank God I went back. It was 6.5 centimetres by then.

Even the doctors need to know that mammograms don't detect breast cancer in C or D density. A year from—actually, I could have had a lumpectomy—chemo that just about killed me, a mastectomy and a rebuild, and after 25 rounds of radiation—could have been removed with a lumpectomy when it was that small. I am still mad about it, and my feet has neuropathy from chemo and fatigue from five years of meds I'm on it.

I recently talked to another person that has D density breasts. And when she was in having her last mammogram, the lady asked, why are we not doing further testing for this? And she said, we have the equipment right here, but it costs too much so they're not allowing us to use it.

* (11:50)

Well, think of the cost that my friend would have saved the health-care system alone if she would have got diagnosed with a lumpectomy instead of having all this chemo—and chemo's not cheap—and the radiation, the hospital, the doctor bills, everything that comes with her fight. And she still doesn't know if her fight's over yet. So we need to really, really look into earlier screening and better treatments for people with dense breasts.

Recognizing the importance of women's health also means confronting challenges that women continue to face when trying to access care. Across the

province, women have experienced disruptions in services due to staffing shortages, system capacity challenges and in recent months, we have seen examples where maternity and birthing services have been paused or nearly paused due to insufficient staffing.

Expectant mothers deserve stability and certainty when it comes to the care they'll receive during pregnancy and childbirth. Women seeking specialized procedures, fertility treatments or gynecology or surgeries are also—just one sec, sorry—women seeking specialized procedures, fertility treatments or gynecological surgeries also require a health-care system that has the workforce and infrastructure necessary to deliver those services.

A resolution recognizing the importance of women's health care must also be a call to action. It cannot be hollow political posturing or 'virtuous'—'virtuo' signalling. It must be a commitment to recruit, train and retain the health-care professionals that women rely on every day: midwives, obstetricians, gynecologists, nurses, sonographers and many more others. Without those professionals, even the best policies will not translate into real care for the patients.

Honourable deputy Speaker, women's health is about dignity, access and respect. It's about ensuring that women in every community—urban, rural, northern—can access the care they need without unnecessary barriers. It's about ensuring that survivors of violence receive compassionate support. It's about ensuring that expectant mothers receive safe prenatal and delivery care. And it's about ensuring that women have access to cancer screening and treatment and follow-up care. And it's about ensuring that the health-care system recognizes and responds to unique needs to women experience throughout their lives.

So today, while there may be a disagreement about the political framing of this resolution, there should be no disagreeing about the underlying principle. Women in Manitoba deserve accessible, comprehensive health care across their lifespan. That is the goal we're supporting, and that is the goal worth working together.

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): I'm very happy to be able to get up on the heels of International Women's Day and speak a little bit about the importance of women's health in this province and the work that we're doing to make sure that it is supported always.

And, you know, I know I've heard a few things here today about a suggestion from the critic opposite that we're self-aggrandizing here or something of that nature. I would just say that, you know, at times our words, I think, sort of act like mirrors and they can reveal more maybe about the person speaking them than about the subject being discussed.

The Speaker in the Chair

And I want to be clear that this resolution today is about women's health; that's what this resolution is about. Access to screening, reproductive care and supports for families—that is the focus of this resolution here today.

And, you know, I'm very proud to be a part of a team that has so many incredible leaders, so many incredible women in our caucus who are doing this work along with everyone else here. And as part of our promise to deliver better health care for women, we are doing a number of different things, and I want to highlight them quickly here.

You know, we've added more permanent lactation consultants to help moms and babies in those critical early days; hiring midwives in the Interlake-Eastern health authority for the first time; returning birthing services to Norway House Cree Nation.

We have funded access to abortion services and introduced legislation to ensure safe buffer zones for health-care providers. We have—as of October 1, Manitobans have access to universal prescription birth control. And in Budget 2025, added access to free Plan B.

We've made hormone replacement therapy free for Manitobans to support those going through menopause and are restoring the Mature Women's Centre, which—yes, it is very exciting. It's a long list. And, actually, I'm not quite done.

We have also provided funding for ovarian cancer research in Manitoba. We doubled the fertility tax credits and the Prenatal Benefit to support women starting families.

Now, we are the first province in Canada to make menstrual products free and available on every job site in Manitoba. And I see the Health critic is also applauding, because she approves of that move, I think, by our government. And I appreciate that support.

You know, we set out in our government with a goal of hiring as many health-care workers as we

possibly could after the very callous cuts of the government that was previous to us and is now sitting opposite. You know, we have now hired 3,500 net-new health-care workers.

And when we took office, we faced the worst doctor shortage in the country. And that gap is now closing a little bit. We've got 285 net-new doctors added between October and July of this past year.

We're ending the practice of mandatory overtime for health-care workers. We're working to legislate staff-to-patient ratios in priority areas of the health-care system. We're continuing our efforts to create accessible health care and lower hospital wait times in Manitoba by building new emergency rooms that were closed by members opposite who are cheering a lot as I say this—they're making a lot of noise.

You know, we're reopening the mature women's clinic. We're starting construction on a new ER in Eriksdale, renovating the children's ER at HSC. System-wide, we've added 351 fully staffed beds.

We launched the lower wait time and system improvement team and a province-wide lower wait time strategy focused on cutting ER access. We've announced online same-day booking through Medinav to make sure that Manitobans receive accessible support to medical services.

We've built several minor injury and illness clinics across the province, and the excitement from the members opposite are getting even more excited to tell you more. It's been wonderful. We've built several minor injury and illness clinics across the province. We opened Manitoba's first—Brandon minor injury and illness clinic. We opened the Misericordia Health Centre minor injury and illness clinic in February 2025. On the Grace campus, we launched the extended hours primary-care clinic. At the Vic, we have an extended-hours primary-care clinic.

All of these services are available to women in our province to make sure that they are supported through their health journey. We are so proud to continue to do that work as a team.

And for you as Manitobans, thank you so much. We'll continue to listen and do this important work every single day.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): I just want to say a couple quick words here, that it's interesting that they want to say all these things that are up—like, available to women in our province, except that

women are waiting two years to see a gynecologist, so how can they even get these services?

So those are big issues we need to address. In rural Manitoba right now, the wait-list for seeing a gynecologist is a year and a half to two years. We need to do better for women's health.

If women's health is a priority, that is something that needs to be a priority. We need to get that wait-list down. We need to make sure we take care of women and get them in to see a gynecologist as soon as they can see one. There's no other excuse for that.

We need to make sure we do make women's health a priority in our province, and young women

need to see the doctor. If there's any health concerns, how can they go see a doctor when they have to be on a list for two years, Honourable Speaker?

We need to do better when it comes to women's health. Whether they're young women or older women, we need to make sure we take care of all of us. And—

The Speaker: Order, please.

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

The hour being 12 o'clock, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 today.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

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