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

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
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MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Woleseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
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PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
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SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
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SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
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TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 4, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated. Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Could you call Bill 213 for second reading debate this morning?

House Business

Ms. Fontaine: I'll get all of the House business done.

Madam Speaker: All right.

Ms. Fontaine: Madam Speaker, pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu). The title of the resolution is Creation of an Independent Seniors Advocate Office.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that pursuant to rule 33(8), the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for The Maples. The title of the resolution is Creation of an Independent Seniors Advocate Office.

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Madam Speaker: So, it has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 213 this afternoon, The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act (Trained Health Professionals and Evidence Collection Kits).

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 213—The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act (Trained Health Professionals and Evidence Collection Kits)

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): This bill requires—

Madam Speaker: Order.

The member needs to make a motion and have a seconder, which I will acknowledge, and then she can speak to the bill.

Ms. Lathlin: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), that Bill 213, The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act, now be read for the second time.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, seconded by the honourable member for Thompson, that Bill 213, The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act (Trained Health Professionals and Evidence Collection Kits), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Ms. Lathlin: Madam Speaker, this bill requires the minister to report annually, by health authority, on the number of health professionals with special training to examine children who have been sexually assaulted and on sexual assault evidence kit inventory.

Sexual assault causes acute physical, psychological and emotional trauma to survivors, particularly to child survivors. This trauma can affect survivors for their entire lives, especially if they don't get the help they need.

We recognize that too many women and girls who experience sexual assault or sexual violence are afraid to report their experiences or testify in court, which has led to widespread under-reporting of sexual assault across Canada. Sexual assault survivors need to be examined by specially trained health professionals and evidence of sexual assault needs to be collected and preserved in a manner that furthers the administration of justice.

Although this process is necessary, it could be traumatic for many victims. We should be working

towards making this process as easy as possible. However, many Manitoba communities suffer from a lack of specially trained health professionals and sexual assault evidence kits.

This lack of resources affects child survivors, who force—who are forced to travel to Winnipeg for the specialized medical attention they require. This drags out the process for victims, making it more traumatic for them. Often, victims will have to fly all the way to Winnipeg without being able to take a shower until a health professional gathers the DNA evidence.

This is also a very real obstacle to finding perpetrators of sexual assault. It is already hard for many victims to report their assault due to fear and guilt. This lack of resources only makes more youth no longer want to report their sexual assault after learning that they must travel all the way to Winnipeg to do so.

Travel can also be expensive and time-consuming, and children need someone to take them, which can be difficult to organize when parents, guardians have to work or—unable to travel and can't afford it. The purpose of this bill is to help children and young people in northern and isolated communities access crucial health care when they have been sexually assaulted.

Madam Speaker, Bill 213 will help protect and seek justice for all victims of sexual assault in northern Manitoba. Currently, in northern communities like my community of The Pas, only adults have access to be examined by a nurse when sexually assaulted.

If a minor, a child reports a sexual assault, they're flown to the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg, where they are seen and where they're properly examined by a nurse practitioner who is trained to do so. Health professionals use sexual assault examination kits to gather DNA evidence, which can later be used by police to charge the predators of sexual assault.

Madam Speaker, our children have to leave their homes and communities, without being able to take a shower, to be examined in Winnipeg. They are forced to leave their communities, after traumatic events have happened to them, to try to seek justice and care.

This lack of critical health services will only add to the problem of predators getting away.

This inequality in access to resources for victims of sexual assault has grave implications on the mental health and emotional health of young victims.

Madam Speaker, our children deserve better. This government needs to invest in more resources for underage victims of sexual assault in north—in the North and ensure communities have an adequate supply of trained health professionals and in sexual assault examination kits.

Madam Speaker, it is my hope that this bill is supported unanimously to support our children and to finally bring the care and justice that is desperately needed in the North.

Ekosi.

Questions

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

Are there any questions?

* (10:10)

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I want to ask the member for The Pas-Kameesak, what led you to bring this bill forward?

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Thank you for that question.

What led me to bring this bill forward: that I had a very, very personal connection into this incident, and as a mother, as an Indigenous woman, this was brought to my attention, and I thought what better way as a legislator to bring this matter forward, especially as a mother. And that is why I think it's a true honour to provide and fight for better protection for our children by pursuing this bill.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Dawson Trail.

The honourable member for Dawson Trail would need to unmute.

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Okay, there we go.

Can I ask, who did the member consult with on this bill, and what were their recommendations?

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak.

The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak might be muted.

Ms. Lathlin: Got it.

There is really no need to consult when this is personally happening to your family. This was a direct injustice—information of injustice that was presented to my family and I. So there is no need to consult there.

What I did do once I found out that this was a fact of a lack of access to health care, I did go to the MKO AGM, to the grand chiefs, presented this predicament and asked for their support for this upcoming bill, and I received all of the—I received their support unanimously at the last time we gathered as a nation.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, my question to the member for The Pas-Kameesak.

I just want to—you to elaborate a little bit more about why getting the appropriate sexual abuse examination is so important in cases related to CFS for example, that if it's not done properly and right, you could have one parent falsely accused of child abuse in situations which are made much more difficult court cases, much longer. Just would ask for your comments.

Ms. Lathlin: Well, when it comes to reporting, first of all, any child that's in CFS care, I just pray to God that they have the support there with them if such a traumatic event happens to that child. If not, then we're just feeding the next generation of children that really do need mental health services.

I cannot speak on behalf of the families, but all I do know is that when a child comes forward, they will need all the support they need, whether that's just somebody being there with them when they actually go to the ER and report this or to the nursing station. I think it's crucial that any kind of service will be beneficial to—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ms. Naylor: Can the member tell us how many children are transported to Winnipeg each year due to a lack of appropriate health care, health professionals or evidence kits in northern Manitoba?

Ms. Lathlin: Well, I know for fact that when it comes to health services for children, most of our children have to go to the Health Sciences Centre, to the Children's Hospital, and I am looking forward to

where health-care services, especially in emergency, are going to be provided beyond the walls of the Children's Hospital in Winnipeg.

It is my goal to have these services provided in our communities so therefore our children can lead to a road of recovery and healing, which is much needed after a traumatic experience such as this.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I want to thank the honourable member for bringing the—this important bill forward.

I'm just wondering why the member chose to limit this just to children, and I'm curious as to whether or not she considered adding adolescents and adults to this bill as well.

Ms. Lathlin: Currently, adults have access to sexual assault examination kits. Currently, adults have access to have sexual assault examinations conducted on them. Currently, children 18 and under, which includes adolescents, do not have that access. If you want to be examined as a child after being sexually assaulted, it has to be done by a specially trained nurse practitioner who has that training to conduct that on a child.

Mr. Lagassé: I agree that in many cases of sexual violence and sexual abuse that a lot of it goes unreported. This approach is one of many steps to addressing sexual violence. Encouraging the reporting of abuse is integral to the success of this approach.

Did any stakeholder groups have recommendations about outreach to encourage the reporting of abuse?

Ms. Lathlin: Like I said, families, people come from all sorts of backgrounds. When it comes to reporting of abuse, like I said, children need to have that support. If there's no support, they'll be lack of reporting of that abuse. *[inaudible]* that the member of Wolseley had asked, we do not know how many children go unaccounted for when it comes to lack of health services, especially in this kind. We do not know. We don't have that information, but I believe once this bill is passed, we will start to have—tracking that information for questions such as this.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Mr. Nesbitt: Yes, could the member please elaborate on where and who would provide the necessary training, and would it be through existing services or in an academic setting?

Ms. Lathlin: Those questions were—I'm looking forward to working with the government to answer.

Currently, the training would be provided for nurses and nursing stations in northern Manitoba, in the hospitals and the health centres within First Nations. There is currently no funding to provide that training. That's exactly what this bill is urging the government to provide. And in terms of education, yes, please, do so and incorporate that into the education when it comes to this specialized training that requires government funding.

Ms. Naylor: I wanted to ask the honourable member: what have northern community members said in response to your introduction of this bill?

Ms. Lathlin: That's an excellent point. It was absolute shock, just like how I was shocked as a mother when I found out that there was no support for children going through that experience. It was absolute shock. In fact, what I learned—that Manitoba has the lowest percentage of hospitals carrying sexual assault kits to be—to provide access to which—women and children—or to women who have been sexually assaulted.

Mr. Lagassé: Does the member know of any other province that has this kind of legislation and its effectiveness?

* (10:20)

Ms. Lathlin: As far as I know, this is a nation-wide problem in terms of lack of sexual assault kits. And in terms of lack of sexual assault examinations for children, all I know that it's currently here in Manitoba. I'm not too sure about the other provinces.

Ms. Naylor: I'd like to ask the honourable member: how will this bill help northern children to report their sexual assaults and get the medical help they need?

Ms. Lathlin: This will help northern children to be able to come forward to report this assault at home, with their family surrounding them, in their communities with their friends and family to support them. To be able to take a shower right afterwards instead of having to wait up to 24 hours—that's the most crucial thing.

This is going to be beneficial and healing for all our children if these services were provided at home with their friends and family and loved ones, and the support they need.

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

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I want to thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) for bringing this very important issue for debate to the floor of the Legislature. She and I have had the opportunity to work in the past on many issues, including those with our children in care, Madam Speaker, and I know she believes passionately about these issues.

And certainly, we look forward to working with her on this very important issue. And I know she feels passionately about it, and as do we, Madam Speaker. This is a very important issue about children in Manitoba and making sure that—who are victims of sexual assault—and ensuring that they get the appropriate care that they need closer to home.

So first, Madam Speaker, I can provide some additional context for the House about the resources that are currently in place to support survivors of sexual assault. The sexual assault nurse examiner, or SANE team, includes specially trained nurses who conduct examinations for injuries, and provide testing and treatment for sexual assault survivors.

SANE offers, Madam Speaker, a comfortable and safe location for patients to meet with their care team. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is for people of any age or gender who have been sexually assaulted.

The SANE program has a streamlined approach to intake of pediatric patients for acute sexual assault. When a pediatric patient presents to any hospital or health-care facility and there is a concern of sexual assault, the facility will page the sexual assault nurse examiner on call. The SANE on call may triage the patient over the phone and assess the need for and timing of an acute sexual assault exam.

Currently, Madam Speaker, the Health Sciences Centre has 15 nurses on the same team who are all trained to perform forensic exams for children. However, our government recognizes that there is a need to ensure that children living in other parts of our province who require a forensic exam are able to get one without having to travel to Winnipeg.

This has been a long-standing and chronic problem in Manitoba—one that dates back, in fact, to the previous government, Madam Speaker. But I can tell the House that our government is committed to

taking action to support child survivors of sexual assault.

In fact, our government first recognized this issue and identified it as a key feature with Manitoba's clinical and preventative services plan. The clinical preventative services plan, or CPSP, is Manitoba's blueprint, Madam Speaker, for health system transformation. It is informed by evidence, expertise and consultation with health-care professionals, community agencies, regulatory bodies and labour groups.

The goal of the CPSP is to provide Manitobans with better health care sooner and closer to home. Page 42 of the CPSP, which is available online for all members and all Manitobans to see, outlines some of the key features of the future state in Manitoba. Madam Speaker, that page states, and I quote: Ensure victims of sexual assault have equitable province-wide access to appropriate sexual assault services such as the same program currently delivered in Winnipeg.

Government approved the CPSP, I'll just remind members of the House, back in November of 2019. And while COVID has, of course, impacted timelines, I'm pleased to inform the House that work is already underway to achieve this very important goal.

To begin with, we have looked to other jurisdictions who have broad provincial models for this type of care, to learn from their best practices. For example, Madam Speaker, we know that in some other provinces and parts of the United States there are successful models of care for sexual assault victims in rural or remote areas using telehealth. In these cases you would have local nurses trained to administer sexual assault evidence kits using a trauma informed approach, paired with a telehealth consult with an expert sexual assault nurse examiner. This devolved approach would eliminate the need for sexual assault survivors to travel to Winnipeg for treatment for the—and get the care that they need.

There may be other opportunities to improve access to treatment and care for sexual assault victims as well. To that end, as minister, I have asked the Department of Health and Seniors Care—with expediting work on this important matter and reporting back to me with solutions that can be implemented here in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, I believe all members of the House are genuinely concerned for the well-being of those who have been the victim of sexual assault and

I think—and I think that everyone in this Chamber would agree that child victims of sexual assault should not have to travel to Winnipeg to care—for care at a time when they are particularly vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to addressing this long-standing problem with real action. When faced with difficult problems, taking action is what our government does.

In health care, for example, we've taken bold action to address a number of pressing issues. We've hired over 1,600 nurses since June 2019. We've taken action on wait times. The average ER wait times in Manitoba have decreased from 5.6 hours in 2015 to 3.8 hours this year. Wait times for an MRI, which were 21 weeks in 2015 were down to 15 weeks in 2019. Prior to COVID, Madam Speaker, we increased surgery volumes for a number of priority procedures, giving more Manitobans access to the care that they needed. In 2019, we increased the number of annual MRIs performed by more than 20,000. More than 62,000 additional CT scans were performed. Manitobans had over 1,700 more cataract surgeries and nearly 1,200 more hip and knee surgeries in 2019 than under the previous NDP government.

We've also increased investment in personal-care homes, Madam Speaker. Since April 2016, we've built 257 personal-care-home beds with another 253 under construction. Last year, we spent \$50 million more on personal-care homes than the NDP did in their last year of office.

And last, Madam Speaker, last summer we announced an historic \$280-million investment in safety upgrades to personal-care homes.

Madam Speaker, these are just a few examples of what we have done here in Manitoba, but we know, obviously, that there is much more work that needs to be done, and so I'd like to thank the member opposite again for raising this important topic. I certainly appreciate her passion for the issue, and I look forward to working with her, as I have in the past—and we have worked well together, despite what the members opposite are chirping from their seats there—the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) and I have worked well together.

So, guided by the clinical and preventative services plan, which highlights this very important topic, we are committed to providing greater access to treatment and care for sexual assault survivors outside of Winnipeg. And I know that many of my colleagues want an opportunity to speak to this very important

issue. So with that, I will close off my remarks to allow other members to have the opportunity to speak to this very important issue.

I once again want to thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) for bringing this to the floor of the Legislature for debate today.

* (10:30)

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): It was very important to me to have the opportunity to speak to this private members' bill and I want to thank my colleague, the honourable member from The Pas-Kameesak, for bringing it forward.

As a young woman, the early part of my counselling career was spent working with sexually exploited youth. Most of the teens that I spent time with in those years were survivors of sexual assault. This was in the mid to late '90s, and even way back then, the youth I worked with had better access to appropriate medical care than the youth in northern Manitoba do today. Granted, this was in a major urban centre in another province, but it set my expectations on how we can and must do better for all sexual assault survivors.

I was shocked to learn that children who experienced sexual trauma in the northern Manitoba must travel to Winnipeg for care. I've also spent time, more recently, with youth from the North who have their ongoing counselling and trauma care in Winnipeg. That's bad enough, but the fact that there is not appropriate and immediate emergency care for sexual assaults of children and youth is unjust and a further assault on their humanity.

Sexual assault is emergency medical care and it—sorry, treatment of sexual assault is emergency medical care and it should not be delayed. Sexual assault causes acute physical, psychological and emotional trauma to survivors, particularly child survivors. This trauma can affect survivors for their entire lives, especially if they don't get the help they need.

However, long-term trauma can be mitigated by being believed, by having appropriate supports and immediate care when it is needed. Trauma can be mitigated by victims knowing that there is, in fact, help available and that they will be treated with respect.

Sexual assault survivors need to be examined by specially trained health professionals, and evidence of sexual assault needs to be collected and preserved in

a manner that furthers the administration of justice. Although this process is necessary, the process itself can be traumatic for victims and we should be working towards making this process as easy as possible.

However, as noted, many Manitoban communities suffer from a lack of specially trained health professionals and sexual assault evidence kits, and this lack of resources disproportionately affects child survivors who are forced to travel to Winnipeg for the specialized medical attention they require. It simply drags out the process for victims, making it more traumatic for them, having to fly all the way to Winnipeg without being able to take a shower or until a health professional can gather DNA evidence.

And it just creates a real obstacle to finding perpetrators of sexual assault as well. It's already hard for many victims to report their assault due to fear and guilt, and this lack of resources only makes more youth no longer want to report their assault if they understand that they're going to have to travel all the way to Winnipeg to do so.

The purpose of this bill is to help children and youth in northern and isolated communities access crucial health care when they have been sexually assaulted. This bill will require that the minister releases annual reports, the breakdown by health authority, how many health professionals there are with special training to examine children who have been sexually assaulted and on sexual assault evidence kit inventory.

This is a right for all Manitobans. Access to health services is a right for all Manitobans, and the government is currently failing northern Manitoba children. These reports will hold the government publicly accountable for failing to hire staff that have the specialized training to examine children who have been sexually assaulted. And in turn, the hope is that this spurs them to take action to ensure that northern children have access to proper health professionals and evidence kits.

I'm sure many members are aware that girls are much more likely to be the victims of sexual assault than boys everywhere, but especially in northern Canada. This isn't to minimize the impact on all genders when it comes to sexual assault, but young women and girls in the North are eight times more likely to be the victim of a sexual offence. And Indigenous women are also more likely to be victims of sexual assault, with self-reported rates of sexual

assault more than triple for Indigenous women than it is for non-Indigenous women.

When interpreting rates of sexual offences, it's important to recall that only one in 20 sexual assaults are reported to police and, therefore, sexual crimes reported by police likely underestimate the true extent of sexual assault and sexual violence against young women and girls.

We also know that sexual assaults often have delays in reporting, especially if it involves family members. This gap may be driven in part by the increased rates in sexual offenses at the hands of family members, particularly extended family members, among young women and girls in the North.

More than a third of sexual offences against young females in the North are committed by a family member—Sorry. More than one third of sexual offenses against young females in the North committed by a family member were reported to police over one month after the incident, compared with just under one quarter of those involving a perpetrator who was not related to the victim.

And, what that statistic tells me is there is so much courage. It takes so much for a young person to come forward when an incident is new and has just occurred, and they need to be treated with appropriate medical care and respect in that moment, not a day or two later, after taking a flight to Winnipeg.

The significant psychological barriers to reporting one's sexual victimization at the hands of a family member to authorities are well-established in studies, and remote Manitoba child victims of sexual assault are faced with even greater barriers to reporting their assault, due to that lack of access.

We have to foster an environment that encourages victims to come forward so that abusers face the consequences of the law, but also because that care can change—it can change the outcomes. You know, traumatic events don't have to cause trauma in people's lives forever, but it's all about what kind of care they get and the kind of support that they get early on in the traumatic event that can change the impact on their lives.

One major obstacle that impedes children reporting their sexual assault is, as I said, because of knowing the abuser. And when a youth can't safely and discreetly report that someone close to them is abusing them, it puts their health and safety at risk. And this is exactly the predicament that many Northern children face.

When children are forced to travel to Winnipeg simply for law enforcement to get the necessary DNA samples as evidence and for them to get the help they need, it creates a massive 'discentive'.

Again, I want to thank my colleague for bringing this forward, and I want to make a comment on how committed we are on our side of the House to reducing sexual violence against women and girls as well as people of all genders.

And I think that there's—I mean, a number of us on our side of the House have worked in health care, have worked specifically on files around missing and murdered women and girls, and have worked directly with sexual assault, so we're bringing a lifetime of knowledge to this issue. We're committed to reducing the sexual violence and supporting women and girls with health care and child care.

We—on our side of the House there were annual increases to shelters and crisis services. The NDP founded Iskotew: Aboriginal Women Healing Program in Thompson. They launched a campaign with the Blue Bombers to educate men about healthy respectful relationships with women and girls, and funded what if she was your daughter, a widespread campaign to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

And just in this session, we introduced bill 2014, the mandatory training for provincial policies, looking at systemic racism and human rights in order to help protect people from violence.

Our NDP team will stand up for and has stood up for women and girls who have survived sexual assault and sexualized violence. We will continue to fight for women and girls' safety and equity, and once again, I really want to thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) for bringing forward such an important bill. I have gratitude for that.

Thank you.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'd like to say thanks to the member for The Pas-Kameesak for bringing forward this very important issue to be debated in the Legislature today.

And I also want to thank her for her courage in speaking out on this issue and raising awareness in this House by bringing this bill forward, as well as sharing her personal story on a segment that aired on W5 that the member had brought my awareness to.

* (10:40)

And in the segment on W5, the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) spoke with courage and honesty and conviction about the need for having appropriate services for child survivors of sexual assault where they live, and she shared a very personal story, and I commend her honesty, her bravery and her courage for that.

I also want to thank my colleague, the Minister of Health for instructing her department to ensure that sexual assault survivors have equitable province-wide access to appropriate sexual assault services wherever they live, and believe that we can work together on this issue so that child survivors of sexual assault do not need to get on an airplane and fly down to Winnipeg for an exam.

We know that when someone is raped or sexually assaulted they—their body becomes a crime scene and they—we know that that evidence needs to be preserved. So what that means in real terms is that in the aftermath of a rape or assault, the survivor cannot take a shower, cannot clean the grit out from underneath their fingernails, cannot comb their hair, wash their face or brush their teeth. That means they have to live with the scent of their perpetrator on them until after the exam. And I don't think anyone in this Chamber or anyone in our province would agree that that is tenable that someone would have to live in that environment for a dozen hours, up to 36 hours or longer, waiting to get that sexual assault examination performed.

And so, again, I really am eager to work with my colleague, the Minister of Health, so that we can change that long-standing practice of putting sexual assault survivors on airplanes or on buses or other routes to get them to Winnipeg to the HSC for examination at the SANE clinic.

I do want to take a moment to express my appreciation for those 15 nurses who are dedicated in the SANE clinic here at HSC, who have taken that specialized training so that they can provide a trauma-informed approach to survivors of sexual assault. I know that they are the first point of safety, that they are a safe harbour after a storm for so many survivors who arrive at the SANE clinic and fall into the care of one of those compassionate nurses, and really want to thank them for their skill, their dedication, and their expertise, and we look forward to having more practitioners able to take this work on in our province.

I do also want to highlight the work of a group, a nation-wide group, called She Matters for their investigative report on the availability of sexual

assault kits in all regions across the province. The work of She Matters was highlighted also in this W5 segment that the member for The Pas-Kameesak had told me about. And the work that this advocacy group has done to highlight the lack of rape kits and trained practitioners to do sexual assault examinations in hospitals across our nation was very startling and undoubtedly work—something that needed to have a light shone on so that we can all work towards ensuring that these kits and these trained practitioners are available where they're most needed.

I believe it is extremely important that we, as legislators, listen and learn from the findings of their work so that we can do better, particularly for children in these awful situations.

The work highlighted by the She Matters campaign and the need for this—the same practitioners outside of the city of Winnipeg as raised by the member for The Pas-Kameesak certainly confirmed something that we've known for too long here in the province of Manitoba: that we have the highest sexual assault prevalence in the nation. It is a shameful record that we hold as a province, and we all must do better to work to eradicate gender-based violence and sexual assault.

One of the things that we have done, and I'd like to commend the work of my colleague, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Mrs. Cox), for the framework that she has brought in in helping eradicate gender-based violence and sexual assault, a framework that is now helping to get results in our province, as well as being a leader in other jurisdictions who are looking to the Manitoba model for developing their own framework.

We know that this is a start, but it is not far enough and we all must work together in a non-partisan way in this Chamber and throughout this province to eradicating gender-based violence, sexual assault and ensuring that our survivors receive the supports that they need.

And in speaking of the survivors and the supports that they need, whenever we do talk about rape or sexual assault, I think it is important to highlight some of the resources that are available for those who are going through those circumstances. We have a 24-hour sexual assault crisis line through Klinik that survivors can call, as well as for survivors who are 16 years or older, they can do third-party reporting through one of four agencies in our province who are trained to collect that testimony, and Klinik being one of them. And it is important for survivors to

reach out and get the support that they need in the aftermath of rape or sexual assault, so that they can begin their healing journey immediately.

So, again, I just want to commend and honour the bravery of the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) for bravely sharing her story, her family story and for speaking with such passion and conviction and moving towards a better future for our survivors in—particularly in the North. And I also want to thank my colleague, the Minister of Health, for instructing her department to ensure that all sexual assault survivors have equitable access to sexual assault services, such as the SANE program that is currently being delivered here in the province of Winnipeg.

And, finally, I want to thank all those who work with survivors, whether they're in community or in hospital, for the work that they do in helping survivors transition from being a victim into survivor. The work that they do is truly incredible and they are angels on earth. So I want to thank all of them.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I will begin by thanking the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak for bringing this legislation forward. It is very important that sexual assault and abuse examinations be done very well, respectfully and meticulously—and be appropriately handled and reported, and this includes in Winnipeg as well as all over Manitoba.

The member for The Pas-Kameesak is correct that the appropriate examination related to the—an alleged sexual assault needs to be done near where the assault has occurred and as soon as possible, and that such examinations need to be done and reported to a high standard. Such examination should be available by well-trained health professionals at sites all around Manitoba. It is really essential that we have accurate, appropriate and well-done examinations done by individuals who are well trained. Accusations of sexual assault and abuse are very serious matters and need to be handled really well by highly-trained professionals.

I give you an example: I'm helping an individual whose situation turns on a sexual assault or sexual abuse exam and its evaluation reporting. And in this case, there's court testimony that a sexual abuse or assault examination was done, and yet there is nothing recorded in the chart, and witnesses at the time say it was not done. And the result of this has been a

five-year dispute and thousands and thousands of dollars in court costs, and the situation is still not fully resolved.

It is really important that we have health professionals who are well trained in doing such exams and in properly recording and reporting on the results and doing the appropriate tests, including DNA tests. In the case I mentioned, there were also concerns that DNA should have been collected, but was not. This speaks as well to the importance of such exams being done well and to a very high standard so that there's valid information on which decisions can be made.

Really important to emphasize that getting accurate examinations and reporting requires having well-trained professionals doing the examinations. Having a report of the number of highly trained professionals in each region would be an important step and ensuring that there's excellent training and excellent performance of sexual assault and abuse examinations is a part of this.

*(10:50)

Madam Speaker, in summary, Manitoba Liberals will support this legislation put forward by the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak and hope to see that it is passed and comes into effect.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): This—can you hear me, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Yes, we can hear you.

Ms. Marcelino: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Marcelino: This bill requires the minister to report annually by health authority on the number of health professionals with special training to examine children who have been sexually assaulted, and on sexual assault evidence kit inventory.

I'm very proud to be in the same caucus as the member for The Pas-Kameesak, and very proud to stand with her and children and youth, especially in northern, rural, and remote parts of this province, that will be impacted and provided basic dignity by the passage of this bill. I thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak and her young relative for the courage they've had in every single step of this arduous journey and making it this far to see Bill 213 before this House today. The member was spurred to this action on behalf of someone she loves, but in so doing,

the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) is also advocating on behalf of many—unfortunately too many—that will need this kit.

According to a report by She Matters, 52 per cent of hospitals here in our province do not have sexual assault evidence kits on hand for adults when victims need them. And as the member of The Pas-Kameesak found out, there is only one hospital in Manitoba that has these kits and health professionals specially trained to treat children.

We know that here in Manitoba we report the highest rates of sexual assaults from all Canadian provinces, and we know that assault rates against women are much higher in northern, rural and remote areas than in urban areas. The unanimous passage of Bill 213 is an important step that our Legislature can take today in providing dignity and justice to children and youth survivors.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): And I'd like to thank my colleague, the MLA from The Pas-Kameesak, for providing us with this opportunity to speak to this bill today. You know, it is so important. It's a heart-wrenching and heartbreaking issue to hear. And to you, I thank you so much for bringing it forward. Telling your personal story, it is such a difficult thing to do, but by doing this we know that we can make those really important changes to provide better service to children and adults as well, that have faced, you know, such a traumatic experience in their life. So I say to you, thank you very much for doing this.

You know, I want to reiterate what my colleagues have said and opposition members, that, you know, this—we all recognize in the Chamber that sexual assault survivors need and deserve, you know, access in their community, and faster, better access so that individuals can go and have a shower and provide—be provided that compassionate care that they really need. So, again, thank you so much to the member from The Pas-Kameesak for bringing this forward.

I really do want to say that I'm thankful to be able to put some words today, you know, on the record with regard to this. And, you know, while we know that we do have, you know, trained sexual assault nurse examiners, which is really an important part of, you know, of going through this whole process, we need to ensure that individuals have those services in their community so that they don't have to wait extended periods of time, so that they can get that

trauma-based care and, you know, the treatment that they require in a much faster way.

And again, I just have to tell you that my heart breaks when I just talk about this because it is just such a traumatic experience. So I am so pleased that—to be working together with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) to be able to, you know, find a process to address this issue. And in—by looking across the provinces and United States for better ways to be able to help these children—and all victims of sexual violence, as a matter of fact—are really, really important to do.

And I know that we will, in fact, find a solution and make those services more readily available, either in your northern community or those isolated communities. And where, in fact, those individuals would prefer to continue to have that care and service provided outside of their community, that as well will be—continue to be an option for them because we know that sometimes individuals would prefer to be outside of their community. But that is the decision that they need to make.

So just want to say thank you, again, so much.

You know, as the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, we recognize that there is more to do, as well, to address domestic violence in this province. And, you know, just back—it was December the 4th when I announced with Minister Cliff Cullen that we have \$5.6 million from the Victims Assistance Fund to be able to provide to victims of crime and victims, as well, of domestic violence, recognizing that, you know, by providing these funds—these \$5.6 million—reaching out to many of the, you know, Indigenous organizations, the women's shelters—many of them that I have talked to already have submitted applications and really are going to be finding innovative ways to be able to help address domestic violence here in the province.

So by those—that Victims Assistance Fund, we're going to have funds available in two different areas so that Indigenous organizations, they can focus on developing projects to address violence against Indigenous women and girls, on LGBTQ community. And this will also address any of the calls to justice in the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls policies that we're looking at right now.

There's also going to be the—a second area where it's going to be open to community-based organizations to develop projects to support victims of crime, including proposals for new and expanded

work with victims of crime, gender-based violence or in response to the MMIWG inquiry and recommendations.

So, you know, there's this—much work that we have done, but there is much more work to do. And when our Premier (Mr. Pallister) established the Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet years ago, he recognized that, you know, domestic violence, gender-based violence is not relevant only in one area.

It crosses many government departments. And, you know, we can't work individually; we have to work together. So that's why, by having this opportunity to talk today to this very heart-wrenching issue, it gives us the opportunity to work together and find solutions. And that's what we are doing today. So I really want to thank the member again for bringing this forward.

You know, with regard to our Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet, you know, we raised our framework, we brought out framework to the table—to the federal table. And many of the other provinces are looking at our framework as a model. And we did receive a correspondence or call from the government of BC, who are—plan to use our framework as a model in developing their own gender-based violence framework. So, you know, it just speaks to the good work that we are doing here, you know, not only unilaterally but together with many, many departments to address gender-based violence here in the province of Manitoba.

You know, we've also done many other—brought in new legislation—the Employment Standards Code—to expand the legislation to apply not only to individuals—of domestic violence but to any individual who has experienced sexual violence or stalking, regardless of who the perpetrator is. And we recognized that that was important because it is not only domestic violence, you know, the violence affects individuals who have been victims—

* (11:00)

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have three minutes remaining.

The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 10—Keep Manitoba Hydro Public

Madam Speaker: The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Keep Manitoba Hydro Public, brought forward by the honourable member for St. James.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I move, seconded by the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), the following resolution to keep Hydro public:

WHEREAS Manitoba Hydro, including its subsidiaries, is a publicly-owned Crown Corporation and therefore belongs to all Manitobans; and

WHEREAS Manitobans deserve affordable and consistent utility rates, which can be ensured by keeping Manitoba Hydro and its subsidiaries operational and public; and

WHEREAS provinces that privatized their hydro services such as Ontario, British Columbia and Nova Scotia have experienced massive increases in energy rates and less public accountability; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has repeatedly made decisions that make Manitoba Hydro less profitable and are ultimately opening the door for privatization by selling off profitable subsidiaries like Teshmont and putting a stop sell order on Manitoba Hydro International; and

WHEREAS Manitoba Hydro International was recently forced to wind down its international consulting operations, which has consistently made millions in profits for Manitoba Hydro, helping keep rates low; and

WHEREAS this decision will eliminate good jobs and cause experienced professionals to leave the province and put financial pressure on Manitoba Hydro, which will translate into higher utility rates for Manitobans; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has plans to deregulate and sell off other divisions and subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro, putting good paying jobs and the Crown Corporation at risk; and

WHEREAS keeping utility rates affordable is not a priority for the Provincial Government, which is why it is using legislation like Bill 2 and Bill 35 to circumvent the Public Utilities Board and unilaterally raise rates on Manitoban families.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial

government to keep Manitoba Hydro public by ensuring that no piece of Manitoba Hydro, including its subsidiaries, be wound down or sold off so that Manitoba utility rates remain among the lowest in Canada.

Motion presented.

Mr. Sala: I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to speak about this really important resolution. Manitobans understand how important it is that we keep Manitoba Hydro public, and they understand the importance of it to our economic future as a province. They understand the importance of keeping Hydro public and ensuring that we can continue to have access to affordable, reliable electricity long into the future, for our kids and our grandkids. And they understand the importance of keeping Hydro public in helping us to get to a cleaner energy future. A net zero future, Madam Speaker, is—Hydro would play an essential role in helping us to get there.

Manitobans know that the impacts of privatization would be disastrous in Manitoba. We don't have to look too far back, a few weeks ago, to see what happens when we allow private entrance into our energy markets. We look at what happened in Texas and we saw that hydro—or electricity rates skyrocketed for customers. Reliability was absolutely a disaster for those customers in Texas.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And we can look next door to Ontario to see what happens when we move towards more privatization. We can see that energy bills go up for customers.

Yet, this government is putting Manitoba Hydro at risk through their interference in Hydro, through their secretive directions that they continue to give to Hydro, and through, fundamentally, their efforts at destabilizing that important Crown utility.

The PCs continue to raise this NDP privatization bogeyman, but Manitobans actually know that that threat is very real, that it's incredibly real. And we know that privatization has, in fact, already begun. We don't have to look far back to see evidence of that.

We know that this government moved to privatize Teshmont Consultants, which was a very valuable private subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro, and in doing so we lost a huge number of great-paying Manitoban professional jobs, jobs that have now been shipped off to places like Vancouver or Toronto.

And ultimately, we've lost public wealth in the process. Those were—Teshmont was an organization

that we as Manitobans all owned a stake in, and that wealth has now been packaged and handed over to the private sector, as the PCs love to do with public wealth.

We've also, in the process of getting rid of Teshmont, made Manitoba a less desirable place to live. There's less good jobs here. There's less opportunities for families who want to stay here and build a life in Manitoba.

You know, we look at what this government has done with Manitoba Hydro International. They wreaked havoc for six months for the employees of that organization, showing no care or caution with an organization that had made \$80 million of profits for Manitoba Hydro. Those are profits that all went directly to Hydro's bottom line and, in turn, helped to keep our energy rates in Manitoba low.

This was an organization that had 125 employees, and over the course of that six months, where this government created huge confusion in their work of winding it down, 35 of those employees left. Thirty-five people left, and those are folks that, again, have now likely had to leave the province. These are people with very specialized energy skill sets. And now they've been shipped off, again, to places like Toronto and Vancouver or other energy consultancies abroad, and they've left Manitoba.

So again, in the process, this government continues, as they attack Hydro, they continue to cut jobs and again reduce the ability of Manitoba families to make Manitoba a home, a place that they can build a life for themselves. And at the end of the day, the end result of their winding down of these key aspects of Manitoba Hydro International, of their selling off of Teshmont, is higher hydro rates for Manitobans, increased costs of electricity.

Now, the report that this government released last week, which was written by their friend and political ally and former right-wing premier, Brad Wall, demonstrated or offered us no new insights of any kind. We know that the report was a complete and total nothing burger, and we know that it was basically just a rehashing of reports that had been already conducted long ago. And we heard this by certain newspaper men talking about how everything that was identified in that report had already been reported on many years ago.

So we learn nothing for that, and, frankly, that was a \$2-million huge waste of money at a time when I think we can all agree that we could have used those

\$2 million to pay for the cost of supporting businesses, fighting COVID and helping Manitoban families—a giant waste of money for which we learned nothing.

But there was something that we did learn. We did learn something, and what we did learn, because it's stated in—with total clarity—in the document, is that this government is looking at divesting from the, quote, non-core functions of Hydro—spelled out in plain language for all to see. So Manitobans are left to wonder what that means. What does it mean that they're looking at divesting of these non-core functions?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have, on one hand, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet and his whole government that talks about us raising the privatization bogeyman, and yet, on the other hand, a report that was written by their friend says, in plain language, that they're looking at divesting of non-core functions of Manitoba Hydro. So which one is it? Which is it? Is there a bogeyman or are we actually looking at divesting from non-core functions of Hydro?

So what does this mean for Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker? A lot of Manitobans would want to know what this government is referencing when they're saying that they're looking at getting rid of non-core functions. That sounds a lot like privatization to us.

Is it going to be the customer service functions at Manitoba Hydro? Are those going to be lopped off, as what happened at BC Hydro some years ago, sent off to another province, another country even?

Is it going to be Centra Gas? Are we going to be divesting of Centra Gas and potentially raising our heating bills through privatization of that function of Hydro? Is that non-essential? Is that non-core?

Is it going to be Manitoba Hydro Telecom, who is currently managing our incredibly important dark fibre, our fibre-optic cable, our backbone that goes up and down this whole province? That cable is essential to helping us to get broadband access to northern and rural communities. Is Manitoba Hydro Telecom and their fibre going to be put on the chopping block? Manitobans want to know.

So what's non-essential here? What are we talking about selling off and handing over to the private sector this time? We look forward to finding out. And again, you know, on one hand, we talk about this bogeyman, and on the other hand, they spell it out in plain language for all to see.

You know, this report, beyond laying the groundwork and giving us telegraphing with total clarity what this government's intentions are with Hydro subsidiaries and their—quote, unquote—non-core functions, is simply going to be used as a pretense for raising rates on Manitobans. We've heard, over and over, endless exaggerations from this government about Hydro's financial state. We've heard that the sky is falling, and yet, Manitobans see, on the other hand, that their energy rates have never been lower.

So we've got a Chicken Little in our Premier screaming about Hydro apparently being sent in the tank by the previous NDP government. Meanwhile, Manitobans have the lowest energy rates—or some of the lowest energy rates on the continent.

So which one is it? Which of these is true? I think Manitobans are pretty smart and they see exactly what this government has been seeking to do and they know exactly what this government is up to. And they know that they're making up stories, because Manitobans know that their hydro rates are some of the lowest on the continent.

Now, with Bill 35 we know that the Premier is essentially trying to take away the protections that have helped to keep our hydro rates low for many years, and, in fact, we know that this government has submitted two rate applications, both of which were turned down. The government was sent packing with half of the rate increase that they'd sought.

* (11:10)

Now, what does that tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It tells us very clearly that this government seeks to significantly raise hydro rates at levels that are unnecessary, and the only thing protecting Manitobans from this government and this Premier is the Public Utilities Board.

And what are they seeking to do with Bill 35? They want to get rid of that. They want to move rate-setting from an independently reviewed process to a process that sits at the Cabinet table. And that's a huge risk for all Manitobans, and it's a huge risk to all of us because we are likely to see, when this government rams through Bill 35, significant increases to our hydro rates because we will no longer have the protection of the Public Utilities Board to buffer us from this government and what they're seeking to do.

You know, they're—the plan that we saw just a couple weeks ago, Hydro's 20-year plan, also speaks to a deregulated future, a future that has more private entrance. They speak to the entrance of micro-grids,

private operators within the Manitoban energy context.

All of this points towards the direction that this government is heading: more privatization, less ownership by the public in Manitoba Hydro and their subsidiaries. And all of that will result in increased energy costs for Manitobans—less reliable electricity in this province, as we've seen when privatization has taken a hold elsewhere, and, ultimately, less affordable power for all of us.

We need to make sure we protect Hydro. We're going to keep doing that. I hope these members will consider supporting this resolution.

Questions

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

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I thank my colleague for introducing this motion for discussion this morning.

It should be noted, and I think it's just a common fact, that Manitoba hydro rates, thanks to the incompetence—the fiscal incompetence of the NDP, have gone up significantly and continue to rise to deal with the financial burden left by the NDP.

How can the member stand here in the House today and defend these hydro rates as a result of his government's massive billion-dollar overspending and ignorance of the financial realities of electricity here in this province?

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Well, I thank the member for the question, and we can say with clarity that we know that if this government had their way, hydro rates would be jacked up to levels like we've never seen before. We know that they put forward two requests—rate increase requests, one of which was for 7.9 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker—7.9 per cent.

And what did the Public Utilities Board tell them? Go packing. They sent them with half of that rate increase because this government tried to get a rate increase that was well beyond what was needed. We know that hydro rates can remain low and that—we know that we need—in order to protect those rates, we

need the Public Utilities Board to continue doing their work.

We know this government wants to erode the role of the PUB through Bill 35, and that is wrong.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I will remind the member for McPhillips that him, his boss and the get-along gang just raised everybody's Manitoba hydro rates just in December, Deputy Speaker, by 3 per cent in the midst of a pandemic.

I thank my colleague for bringing this really important resolution to the House this morning, and I would ask him, you know, why is it important to keep Manitoba Hydro public?

Mr. Sala: I thank my colleague from St. Johns for the question.

Manitoba Hydro needs to remain public because it's only with a public hydro that we can continue to have access to reliable electricity and that we continue to have access to affordable electricity in this province.

We know what happens when privatization takes hold elsewhere. We can look next door to Ontario when we—where we see that they've moved down the path of privatization, where this government is looking to take us, and we know the risks of that.

Also, Manitoba Hydro needs to remain public because it's only through a public hydro that we can work towards that cleaner energy future that all Manitobans want to see us head down.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Now, the Wall report showed that the NDP had severely mismanaged, I would argue, our most important Crown corporation here in Manitoba.

I want to keep the question real simple for the member. He thinks that the \$2 million that we spent on that was not well spent, I think it was. But my question is, in the NDP's mismanagement of bipole and Keeyask, how much money was taken away from Manitoba taxpayers as a result of that mismanagement?

Was it \$2 million? Was it \$20 million? Was it \$200 million? Was it \$2 billion, or perhaps something even more than that?

Mr. Sala: Thanks so much for the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that this government's claims are widely exaggerated and Manitobans do not have any reason to trust anything

that comes out of this government. Not a single reason.

We know very clearly that Hydro's financial state is good. And they don't have to take our word for it. The Public Utilities Board stated very clearly that those investments can be very well managed and that those were investments that needed to happen.

This government will continue to make huge exaggerations about Hydro's financial situation so that they can raise their hydro rates, just like they did in December by circumventing the Public Utilities Board in the middle of the pandemic, just in time for the holidays. They're going to keep trying to do that and tell that story, and we're going to keep pointing it out.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm actually surprised, Deputy Speaker, that they're actually letting the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) ask any questions, because he seems to be keep getting the Pallister government in trouble with his tweets and his Facebook posts—and, of course, the erroneous facts that he's putting on right now, that none of us understood what he was trying to do just now.

But I will ask my colleague, what are the benefits of keeping Manitoba Hydro's subsidiaries public?

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

The Hydro subsidiaries that this government—one of them that they've already divested off, sold off to their friends in the private sector, made millions of dollars for Manitoban ratepayers. Those are funds that went directly to Hydro's bottom line and, in turn, helped to keep our hydro rates low, just like the millions of dollars that was earned from Manitoba Hydro International, another wholly-owned subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro that this government has done a huge amount of damage to in winding down some of the most profitable aspects of their work.

Subsidiaries make huge amounts of money for Manitoba Hydro. Those funds, in turn, go to help keeping our hydro rates low. We need to protect that and we're going to keep calling out their privatization efforts every day.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, I think—the question I had relates to the relocation of bipole.

I know that there were questions around the environment, but is the member aware of any other decisions or, basically, the refusal of the NDP government of the day to deal with First Nations on the east side of the lake and to send the—and to spend

a billions dollars to avoid dealing with First Nations on that side of the lake?

Mr. Sala: We on this side of the House respect Indigenous sovereignty. And we know that there was a lack of consensus at the time about building a bipole line through the east side of Lake Winnipeg. And, frankly, as much as this government would have liked to have seen us do it, we were not going to be able to ram through a hydro line through communities where it was not welcome at the time.

So we respect Indigenous sovereignty. We know that we need to ensure that we listen to those voices. And, frankly, this government—or the previous NDP government made the right decision in going down the west side as they did.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I do appreciate the member introducing this resolution.

My question to him—and I know the member from Radisson had asked this question, I'm not sure he got an answer, but perhaps the member can reflect on the NDP's track record with respect to management of Manitoba Hydro and the investment in the large projects.

Did that result in any tangible return on investment for the people of this province? Could the member please reflect on that?

Mr. Sala: Manitobans aren't buying this line of argumentation. They don't believe what this government has to say about anything.

This argument that somehow Hydro is in the tank just isn't bearing out. Manitobans have some of the lowest electricity rates on the continent. These guys can continue to talk about Hydro's apparently poor financial state. They can continue to exaggerate about it. They can continue to make false claims about what happened as a result of our investments, but Manitobans know better.

Manitobans are smart and they see that we have the lowest electricity rates—some of the lowest rates on the continent, and they know that those investments were important for the future of this province.

Ms. Fontaine: I would ask my colleague if he could explain some of the trends that we're seeing by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the decisions that are being made that marks—that we think the government is moving towards the privatization of Manitoba Hydro.

* (11:20)

Mr. Sala: I thank the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) for the question.

Look, the Brad Wall report—again, written by their friend and political ally—spells it out in plain language. The government is saying that they are going to be looking at the quote-unquote non-core functions of Hydro for divestment.

We know what that means, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that means more of the subsidiaries will be divested from, and we know that potentially Centra Gas may be let go.

So we know that there is no shortage of indications about what this government intends to do. We've already seen them privatize Teshmont Consultants. We've seen them wind down an incredibly valuable aspect of Manitoba Hydro International's business.

So we've already seen, with total clarity, what this government intends to do. They've projected that. They've telegraphed that. And we need to make sure we continue to fight against that.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): A question for the member opposite.

So, the former NDP government told Manitobans that the Bipole III project wouldn't cost them a cent, which they quickly reneged on.

I'm wondering if the member can please explain to the House how much the former government took from Manitobans to reroute the Bipole III project?

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

You know, frankly, I find it embarrassing that this government continues to reference this bipole project as though it wasn't needed. We had a huge amount of risk to this province; 70 per cent of our energy was going through two lines that were paired right together. One natural disaster, one ice storm could have felled those two bipole lines and Manitoba would have been in the hole for billions of dollars.

Manitobans know that that bipole investment was important. This government continues to make up stories about it, but we know that that was essential to ensuring that we had reliability of energy in this province. We're proud of those investments, no matter what this government has to say about them.

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

Debate

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

The honourable member for McPhillips. The honourable member for McPhillips, can you put your mic on? Okay.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is always a pleasure to virtually rise in the House and participate in this new legislative session. Like many of my colleagues on all sides of the House, we are looking forward to the opportunity where we're all—can sit again together and have a debate—a face-to-face debate as opposed to a virtual debate.

However, before we get into the comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the member opposite's motion this morning, I think it's important to remind all of us that the reason we're not sitting today is the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, again, I'm just reminding and urging my colleagues, and anyone, and Manitobans listening, to practise Dr. Roussin's advice and the advice of health-care professionals in terms of following the spacing between individuals, to wear a mask and to wash one's hands, and then, of course, to vaccinate when the vaccine becomes available, which increases on a daily basis. So if we all follow those fundamentals we'll be in that House soon enough.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did listen with interest to my colleague opposite's remarks on his resolution this morning. I—a couple comments did stick out for me. I think the one which I jotted down just so that I wouldn't—not misquote the member opposite was, and I am quoting, we, as in the NDP, learned nothing.

That is what the member opposite said in reference to the Wall report in the Hydro debacle that they led as a government, the multi-billion-dollar debacle, the infringement on Aboriginal rights, the environmental disaster that followed. And, again, I'm quoting the NDP member opposite: We, the NDP, have learned nothing.

So I think that's a taste for what Manitobans can look forward to if and when the NDP ever form government in a hundred years or so, that they can expect sort of more of the same in terms of disastrous economic policies.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's important for all of us, when we're debating these issues and discussing these issues that, you know what, that we listen to our colleagues and that—and I did listen to the

member for St. James (Mr. Sala). And I listened carefully when he talked about how the impact of privatization would be, and this is, again, his words. He called it disastrous. He mentioned that we, as in Manitobans, all own a stake in private—or in publicly held Crown corporations, and that the loss of any Crown corporation equals—and again, I'm quoting the member opposite—less opportunities for families to build a life for themselves here in Manitoba, and that Manitoba is losing very specialized skill sets.

And you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I—so I listened to those words and the member opposite lamenting the loss of employment with Crown, the loss of opportunities, and that, and yet, the member seems to forget that it was his government that sold for a song the Property Registry, which was a Crown corporation.

So, I mean, just so that the historical record is accurate, there were fewer Crown corporations in existence after the NDP came to office. That's right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The NDP actually sold off one of Manitoba's Crown corporations, they sold it to a out-of-province, private interest. As a result of that sale, we Manitobans all lost a stake in that Crown corporation.

Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were denied an opportunity for them and their families to be part of that and to invest here in Manitoba. So it's always interesting to listen to members opposite when it comes to the protection of Crown corporations when, as a government, the last thing they did was actually protect Crown corporations.

In fact, again—and the newspaper of record actually even commented that the former NDP government may have potentially sold that Crown corporation for hundreds—or tens of millions of dollars less than it was valued for, as they sold it to their friends in their—their union friends.

Part of understanding, though, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I did, I made sure that I read the member opposite's motion, that I remembered the importance of going through and understanding what the member would have to say. And the member talks about—and again, this is the member's own words, I mean, the member—the NDP is saying that they learned nothing.

Well, you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it is important that we all learn something. And it's unfortunate that it is through these means that we have to educate members opposite of their own—the NDP's, track record.

So I'm going to quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is December 30th, 2012. This is from the CTV News broadcast, and I'm quoting: The Public Utilities Board, the provincial regulator, warned last year—so, 2011—that low international prices could force Manitoba consumers to eventually subsidize exports and see domestic prices jump by 140 per cent.

So, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you talk about the member opposite proudly says that he and his NDP colleagues have learned nothing, and unfortunately—and fortunately for Manitobans, though, they did learn something when they fired the NDP in the election that brought a historic number of PC members to government, and then again, subsequently. The NDP did all they could with the pounding of signs in lawns and trying their standard fear mongering, but once again, Manitobans weren't buying what they were selling.

It's also important, Mr. Deputy Speaker—it's always interesting listening to the NDP when they talk about hydro rates. And again, if the member opposite actually did their homework, and I know homework can be a challenge for members opposite, I think they were big promoters in the cannot fail policies of the NDP government.

But when—actually, when the NDP first came to offer—office, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you take a look at their comments by their—by then-Premier Gary Doer or then-Hydro minister Greg Selinger, they would proudly tout off that Manitoba Hydro had the lowest rates in the world.

* (11:30)

I mean, a fantastic sound bite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you know what was also of interest is actually if you laid that comment out and the changing tone of that comment against Manitoba Hydro's financial distress and rising rates, you will see a change in the NDP's language. They went from advocating or promoting that Manitoba Hydro had the lowest rates in the world to the lowest rates in North America, and then in the next subsequent budget, they talked about how we had the lowest rates in Canada. And then they went to among the lowest rates in Canada.

So you can see under the NDP, even in their own spin and rhetoric, they went from advocating or promoting that Manitoba Hydro had the lowest rates on planet Earth to where, you know what, we have hydro. And I think that's a complete embarrassment for members opposite that that's the—that there—they

were forced because of their own financial ineptitude to change that understanding of where Hydro is in terms of an economic accelerator here in the province of Manitoba.

But members opposite, you know the NDP, they stood up as they rammed through and ignored the Public Utilities Board in order to—these multi-billion-dollar Hydro expansions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And at the time, they argued, you know what, Hydro is going to be Manitoba's oil. It will be what oil is to Alberta. And, you know what, they weren't far off. We have seen what's happened in Alberta with oil, with the collapse of the oil prices—in the impact that it has had on Alberta's finances.

When the NDP were first going off on this massive multi-billion-dollar Hydro expansion, they were looking at old data, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They failed consistently, despite numerous, numerous experts—including their own Hydro employees—warning them that the situation—the energy situation in North America was changing rapidly. Fracking south of border—

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

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I want to again just say miigwech to my colleague from St. James for bringing forward this resolution, but also for the attention and dedication and commitment that he has shown to the file of Manitoba Hydro and making this government to account for what is their path towards privatizing Manitoba Hydro, really, our Crown jewel here in Manitoba.

He is standing up for all Manitobans to keep our Manitoba Hydro public and I honour him for that and his commitment to this file.

You know, Deputy Speaker, every day when we get into this House and we listen to members opposite like the member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin) or the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma), and they spout off the things that they spout off, like, it always boggles my mind. Like, do they really believe—do the PC caucus really believe what they're spouting out in this House? Do they really expect Manitobans to believe the erroneous facts that they put in on the record, the spin that they put on the record, the pivoting that they put on the record from their atrocious handling of Manitoba Hydro?

How can members opposite—how can the PC caucus get up in this Chamber or out in the Rotunda when they go and speak to media or even when they

meet with Manitobans and feed them this, what can only be described as verbal diarrhea, in respect of Manitoba Hydro and the erroneous facts that they routinely put on the record?

Manitoba Hydro is an important—a critical Crown corporation for Manitoba, and we should be doing everything possible to ensure that it remains public and that it is there for generations. The PC caucus is so fixated on what the Premier (Mr. Pallister) tells them to say and what the Premier tells them to think and what the Premier tells them to do that they can't even see that the actions that they do today, taking those orders blindly from their boss, is contributing to generations—the generations that come after us.

And, you know, understanding—I know the member for McPhillips, you know, wants to put off there that we don't have low hydro rates. We absolutely do. I'm not sure if we have the lowest hydro rates on planet Earth, but we certainly have among the lowest hydro rates across Canada, Deputy Premier. We know that actually, in fact, there are companies that are company—[interjection] What did I say?

An Honourable Member: Deputy Premier.

Ms. Fontaine: Oh.

An Honourable Member: Should be the Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay. Perhaps next. Sorry. Sorry, Deputy Speaker, sorry. He liked that one.

We know that there are companies that are coming into Manitoba to start setting up companies in respect to Bitcoin mining. And why are they doing that? Why are they bringing their business to Manitoba, Deputy Speaker? Because we have the lowest hydro rates. And what is the PC government doing? What are the PC caucus doing blindly? They're slowly creating the infrastructure and putting those things in place where they're going to privatize Manitoba Hydro.

And here's my message to Manitobans why this is so important, and why the NDP get up every single day in this House to talk about Manitoba Hydro, and put on the record the facts of what's going on in Manitoba; it's because like MTS, where their best friends—where they sold it off on the cheap and then their best friends made millions of dollars and sold off MTS right before the—we were literally in the infancy—in beginning of an Internet service, they sold it off. Their best friends made millions of dollars. And

that's what they are planning to do with Manitoba Hydro.

They are looking at putting all of the power in the hands of the PC caucus, in the hands of the Cabinet, the very same Cabinet members that in the midst of a pandemic couldn't even get straight handing out and disseminating safe masks. That literally, Deputy Speaker, is pandemic 101. Give your citizens masks that are safe and will protect them from a pandemic. Give your citizens that are on the front lines in our health-care systems and in our schools the masks that will save lives.

They couldn't even handle that. And so now what they're doing is they've got a bill in the queue that will give the ability for this Cabinet—those same members that couldn't get the masks right—the ability to raise the rates of Manitoba Hydro. They—and we've already seen—we've already gotten a glimpse of what they're going to do because only in December in their BITSA bill, they embedded a 3 per cent increase to Manitoba Hydro for all Manitobans.

In the midst of a pandemic the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his get-along gang thought, you know what, this is a really good time to raise Manitoba hydro rates because Manitobans aren't struggling financially, Manitobans didn't lose their jobs, Manitobans aren't staying home more and using more hydro—this is a perfect time, let's raise their rates. That is the antithesis to what Manitobans need and the support that the government should be providing for Manitobans. But they raised it.

So the very same people that did that will now have the legislative authority to be able to raise our rates whenever we want. And again, this is the same Cabinet that only, again, a couple of months ago, nobody thought was a bad idea to steal money from Indigenous children.

Let me say this. The very same people that sit in Cabinet that raise people's rates, that couldn't get the masks right, that agreed with laying off or firing 11,000 Manitobans in the midst of a pandemic, and on top of all of that thought hey, let's just steal some money from Indigenous children because that's a good thing. These are the same individuals that will have control over Manitoba hydro rates. That's if they haven't sold it off already.

* (11:40)

So, you know, Deputy Speaker, we know that they're moving towards selling off Manitoba Hydro. They've raised the rates. And I'm going to put on the

record for Manitobans, just to put it in context, so since the Premier and his get-along gang became government, here's what's happened: the Manitoba hydro rates have increased by almost 13 per cent—3.3 per cent in 2017, 3.6 per cent in 2018, 2.5 per cent in 2019, 2.9 per cent in 2020.

So the same people, the same Cabinet that row—that increased all of those hydro rates, at the same time have only increased the minimum wage since 2016 to 2021 by what, 95 cents? So we have a minimum wage in Manitoba of \$11.95. So they don't see fit—they don't think it's important to pay Manitobans for their labour and help individuals to get out of poverty or not have to work two or three jobs. They don't think that that's important to spend money on that, but let's just keep raising those hydro rates of Manitobans.

And then who do they call in, you know, to try and justify and minimize what they're doing? Their best friend, Brad Wall. You know, I think any Manitoban would see straight through that contract and know that that was not an unbiased contract. It was not unbiased research. We know that that research was geared towards putting the infrastructure, planting the seeds into why they've got to break up Manitoba Hydro, privatize this, privatize that. That's what that money was spent on.

And in the same way that the Premier gave \$7.2 million to one of his best friend's pharmaceutical companies in Calgary to look at a vaccine that they may or may not do—which again, Deputy Speaker, they've never had any luck producing any vaccines—but let's give them \$7.2 million. We're going to give Brad Wall millions of dollars to produce a report that's going to justify what we want to do.

Meanwhile, we have a homelessness crisis. And where was this Cabinet that cares about, you know, raising Manitoba Hydro rates? Nowhere to be seen. People are dying. People are on the streets in minus 50 weather and this Cabinet and this—

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

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

It does feel like we've been here before. I think it was in October when we were talking about a similar topic here in the House and I had some words to say and I know that the members opposite didn't necessarily always like hearing what I had to say, but there were things that needed to be said, anyways.

And so, you know, when I read this resolution, my first reaction was the bogeyman is back. The bogeyman is back. There's nothing new with you-know-who. They come right back to it, exactly the same patterns of behaviour as they were exhibiting in the fall and, in fact, that they were exhibiting over many years prior.

Now just a quick reaction before I forget. The member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), I think she called us the get-along gang over here on this side of the House, and I'm 'prarity' sure she meant that to be a derogatory but, you know, she might claim otherwise. But I think I can take some positive from it because, you know, as PC caucus, I think we do actually get along with each other, and that's something that I think we're very proud of and it's certainly a very marked contrast to the behaviour that we see on the other side of the House, you know, among the NDP caucus.

I can't imagine it's a very pleasant place to be now. It certainly wasn't a very pleasant place to be when the previous leader, Selinger, was in charge and there was a rebellion. I'm sure it wasn't a very pleasant place to be when there were multiple members of Cabinet and of the NDP caucus who are actively engaged in covering up the actions of ministers like Struthers and the harassment and those kinds of behaviours that have no place in this Legislature. And we see that same pattern of behaviour. It's—they haven't learned.

You know, I think the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) has just been, not just accused, but found to be guilty of bullying and harassment so—and they're indignant. There's no humility on that side of the House. There's no shame it would seem and, you know, that's sad.

I think I should get back to the question that I asked the member for St. James. I was asking about how much money the NDP government mismanagement of Hydro wasted as part of the mismanagement of Bipole III and Keeyask.

I think he was complaining about \$2 million of the taxpayers' dollars. This was a very big deal for the member for St. James. And I do think that \$2 million is important, and it needs to be managed well. But that doesn't really give you an appreciation for the scale of the mismanagement that the NDP were engaged in when they were in charge of Manitoba Hydro.

Now, I'd asked, I think, you know, is it possible that NDP mismanagement wasted \$2 million of taxpayers' dollars? I think it's a little more than \$2 million. Is it more than \$20 million? It's more than

\$20 million. Is it more than \$200 million? Well, it turns out it's more than \$200 million too. Would it—could you imagine that it would be more than \$2 billion, a thousand times more than the amount that the member for St. James was just complaining about? I'm afraid to tell you that it is, indeed, more than that as well. That's what their record is. That's what they managed to accomplish when they were in charge of Manitoba Hydro and forming government.

Now, I do want to give some credit to the member for St. James. As I'm looking at his motion, there were some phrases in there that I can find myself in agreement to—I'm sorry, it's just on the other screen here, so you'll see my head turning as I read from it—but, you know, I think I can agree with him that Manitoba Hydro belongs to all Manitobans. That's something that we can affirm, and I'm glad to see that he believes that.

We believe that strongly on this side of the House too. And we've made that clear to Manitobans repeatedly that we will not be privatizing Hydro, that we will be respecting Manitobans' role in the future of Hydro. And that's something that, sadly, I think the NDP's record—and we've highlighted it already—well, it doesn't—it really didn't show the kind of respect that Manitobans would expect, that I think everybody would expect you to give the true owners of Manitoba Hydro, and that is the people of Manitoba.

Now, moving on, I think I can also agree with the member that Manitobans deserve affordable and consistent utility rates—predictable, I would even add to that, as well.

So, you know, that's—I think the member for St. Johns rightly said that that's a good way to attract businesses that need a lot of hydroelectricity as part of their operations. These are positive things. And I think it's also something that does make Manitoba a more attractive province to live in. It is—in fact, Hydro is our Crown jewel. And our own Premier (Mr. Pallister) has referred to it as that many times.

And then, just moving on through the resolution, I—he's got a phrase in here, but I don't think he knew what he was really maybe implying. So he says, the provincial government has repeatedly made decisions that make Manitoba Hydro less profitable.

And so I do agree with the member that a provincial government has made decisions that made Manitoba Hydro less profitable, but I think we might be thinking of different governments. Because, really, the government that has managed to make Manitoba

Hydro less profitable is the NDP government—the NDP government that saddled Manitoba Hydro with billions and billions and billions of dollars of debt.

You've got to pay interest on that debt. And guess what that interest does? That interest makes Manitoba Hydro less profitable. And it ends up costing Manitoba taxpayers one way or the other.

Now, those decisions that resulted in billions of dollars of extra expenses, you've got to understand that, you know, investing in infrastructure, that's a good thing. It can be a good thing, certainly, if it's a wise and prudent investment; if it's done in a cost-effective manner; if it's managed properly; and if there's controls in place to monitor how the project's developing and to see how the decisions are being made along the way; and to ensure that that project is, in fact, required, it's required in the time that's needed; and, in fact, that it's going to be beneficial. That's how good critical infrastructure is built.

*(11:50)

I commend the—my colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), for his leadership in building infrastructure here in Manitoba, for getting roads built that—you know, like Freedom Road—that the previous NDP government just couldn't seem to rank as high an important priority for them, but we got that done. And I think about all the other infrastructure projects, too, that had been put forward by this government and that have been completed by this government and that I think represent good value for money.

Now we compare and contrast that to the billions and billions and billions of dollars that the NDP spent on Bipole III and Keeyask. I think, you know, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) would say, well, we invested that money. And that's, you know, that's a fine sentiment. Investments generally are evaluated by their ability to produce a return on that investment, and the reality is, is that the money that was spent in Bipole III and on Keeyask, some of it is an investment but much of it was a waste.

It was—a similar product could have been built for a lot less money and, you know, if you're going to buy something and insist on paying an extra \$10,000 or 300 per cent or whatever it is for it, without actually getting an improvements to it, you're wasting money. And that's in fact what the NDP government did.

So I think Manitobans recognize that. I think they understand that. I think when it comes to who Manitobans should believe on Hydro, the

member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) should know that Manitoba—Manitobans need to believe not the member for St. Johns—no, I don't think so. Not the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew)—I don't think so there either. And the member for St. James (Mr. Sala)? No he's not to be believed either.

I believe that Manitobans have decided who they're going to trust. They've decided to trust us. That's who's making the decisions about how Manitoba Hydro is run from now on. We're making wise decisions and we're going to keep making wise decisions.

Thank you.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I do agree with one thing that the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) says: he has been wonderfully honest and forthright when it comes to revealing what was actually happening with those 19 bills. He deserves some credit for that, for actually revealing the truth that the bills that this government tried to pass—or introduce last November were actually not ready at all, that they were just basically no better than folders full of shredded newspaper.

Look, we can say immediately, I have no hesitation in saying we don't think that Hydro should be privatized. When I ran for Leader of the Liberal Party, one of the main things that I said was that there would be no privatizations. The member from McPhillips is completely right when he says the NDP privatized and sold off the land titles to a union in—to a union pension fund in Ontario.

The fact—the member for St. Johns is absolutely correct when she says that MTS was sold off and that PC supporters and donors and members benefitted, made millions and millions of dollars from it, even as Bell MTS and Bell—sorry, MTS paid no income taxes whatsoever for years.

The fact is that there are also other things we could be talking about. We could be talking about vaccinations, homelessness. We could to—be talking about the economy or unemployment or education. But it's worth looking—going over the history of this a little bit because, in 2003, the NDP premier, Gary Doer, was also very angry and upset with the Public Utilities Board because they had just lowered rates for hydro.

So he said this isn't proper or acceptable. They had actually lowered rates. So the then-NDP premier told the media that he needed to see a change. He wanted to overrule the PUB, and that's no different

when—than what the PCs are doing right now. They're going to gut the PUB, they're going to strip it of its ability to do serious oversight, not just of Hydro but all sorts of other utilities.

And the fact is the PUB exists not just to protect Manitobans from price hikes, from Hydro, MPI or anyone else. It exists to protect Manitobans from their own government. That's what the PUB is for. The NDP tried to undermine it back in the 2000s and the PCs are now trying to gut it in a way that's completely unacceptable.

The fact is it was also known in 2007 that the entire Wuskwatim dam did not have to be built because that equal amount of power could be generated through efficiency. That was known in 2007. I worked on the 2007 election and as soon as that election happened, Premier Gary Doer announced that it was the—that the electorate had decided, because it was part of the NDP platform, that they were going to move the bipole transmission line.

There was no question the bipole transmission line had to be built; that was a result of the—that was the finding of the Boston Consulting Group. It was the finding of Brad Wall. Brad Wall said this needed to be built back in 1975. If it wasn't built we were at risk of facing a \$20-billion loss to our economy, if there were a serious storm, and people without power for months. That is completely unacceptable.

The idea that somehow this was unnecessary, that the bipole line was unnecessary, is ridiculous and reckless. The fact is it needed to be built. The question is whether it needed to be built where it was.

And there is no question whatsoever that the NDP government of the day did not want to deal with the First Nations on the east side of Lake Winnipeg so they decided to spend an extra billion dollars to put it—route it somewhere else.

And when we talk about price hikes and rate hikes it's—this government completely steamrolled the PUB by putting price hikes in the budget that every PC member voted for. So we can't talk about—that is brazen political interference in a Crown corporation. It's brazen. And the only thing about it is that it is so brazen and unacceptable, that it is so brazen people can't actually believe that—well, if it's so brazen and out in the open, they can't believe there's anything wrong with it.

The fact is, it is not just a question of cost overruns on dams; that both parties, the NDP and the PC

in government, have been plundering Hydro by hundreds of millions of dollars for years.

The reason Hydro's debt is so high is because these governments have both been taking out absolutely colossal amounts of money in a debt guarantee fee, water rentals and a capital tax. There is a—they have an incentive to overbuild and an incentive to force Hydro to borrow, because the more Hydro gets into trouble, the better it is for the books of these two parties.

The debt guarantee fee in 2009 was \$74 million, now it's \$207 million. The water rentals in 2009 were \$123 million, now it's \$126 million. The capital tax was \$64 million, now it's \$112 million. But the interest on the debt at Hydro in 2009 was \$471 million, now it's \$861 million a year.

When you add it all up, Hydro is paying \$1.3 billion of its \$2.6 billion in revenue—more than half of its revenue is going to the Manitoba government and to interest because both parties have been willing to load Hydro with debt to the point that it risks going under. That is why Sandy Riley and the rest of the Hydro board resigned.

When Sandy Riley said we need increases of 7.5 per cent, it is because the Premier (Mr. Pallister) would not meet with him. The Premier would not address the fundamental issue that Hydro does not have enough capital because both governments have been running up its debt.

And it wasn't just a question of privatization, it's a question of whether Hydro continues to exist or not. It's an existential questions. And I'm quoting Sandy Riley on that.

The risk for Hydro is not that it's privatized, because no one wants to buy it. The risk is that it will take us all down, because it is a \$2.6-billion corporation with more debt than the entire Province. And the PUB, on May 1st, 2018, said put some of that money back.

We don't have to privatize. We don't have to have higher rates. We don't have to do the things that this PC government wants to do. We need to reinvest in Hydro and all of this can be presented.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): It is truly an honour to speak to this resolution virtually today. I do welcome all my colleagues back and look forward to the next session.

You know, I do find it interesting listening to members opposite, particularly the NDP, lecturing our government on how to manage and run a Crown corporation, when, in fact, NDP proved themselves, over 17 years, of mismanaging the economy, overspending and then raising taxes on hard-working Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the record is very clear on that. On our side of the House, we prefer to keep taxes lower, we prefer to respect Manitobans' hard-earned money, and the NDP do not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP's poor performance is—and still continues to be—well known. If I recall

correctly, a newspaper of record quoted, during the dying days of the NDP government, was that the NDP couldn't even run a lemonade stand. And I think that they certainly proved themselves incapable of running Manitoba Hydro when they were in government. And some of the comments made today by NDP members have continued to—

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 4, 2021

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