

First Session – Forty-Third Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| AL TOMARE, Nello, Hon. | Transcona | NDP |
| ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon. | Union Station | NDP |
| BALCAEN, Wayne | Brandon West | PC |
| BEREZA, Jeff | Portage la Prairie | PC |
| BLASHKO, Tyler | Lagimodière | NDP |
| BRAR, Diljeet | Burrows | NDP |
| BUSHIE, Ian, Hon. | Keewatinook | NDP |
| BYRAM, Jodie | Agassiz | PC |
| CABLE, Renée, Hon. | Southdale | NDP |
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| <i>Vacant</i> | Tuxedo | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Good morning, Honourable Speaker. Can you please call second reading of Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

And, should Bill 212 pass second reading, Honourable Speaker, can you please call second reading of Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act.

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will proceed with second reading of Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

And, if we pass that prior to 11 o'clock, that we would then proceed to second reading of Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS**Bill 212—The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)**

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar), that Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Chen: Honourable Speaker, I rise today to speak to The Asian Heritage Month Act.

This new commemorative legislation isn't just words on a piece of paper. It is the recognition of nearly 150 years of Asian-Canadian contributions to our province right up to today. Asian settlement in Manitoba began at the same time that Manitoba joined the Confederation in the 1870s, with railroad workers from China literally building the connections that made Manitoba thrive.

Since those early days, Asians from across the continent joined our community here in Manitoba. In broad terms, people have come from East Asia, South-east Asia, south Asia, central Asia, from the Middle East and more.

Manitobans of Asian descent have helped build this province and continue to do so. For many Manitobans of Asian descent, the road to settlement in Manitoba has been a challenge. Our ancestors in the early days faced discrimination at every turn, whether the Chinese Exclusion Act, the internment camps for Japanese Canadians or the Islamophobia faced by many in the early 2000s and even now.

Many Manitobans of Asian origins have also had to flee conflict and came here to build a better home and life for themselves and their children, whether as refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the 1970s, or from Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine and Iraq in recent years, including from the Yazidi and the Kurdish communities.

Today, we honour those who came before us by proclaiming that we will carry on their legacy and continue to build vibrant and welcome communities

in Manitoba. Nearly every community in Manitoba has Manitobans of Asian descent, and this act serves not only to recognize past regulations and struggles, but to unite us all together in our sense of what it means to be both Manitoban and of Asian origin. This act will also help us share with the broader community our love for culture, food, faith, language and family.

As the first Chinese-Canadian MLA in Manitoba's history, I look back to all those who came before and who struggled to make Manitoba home. But I also look to my own children and the many young families in Manitoba today. I know that by proclaiming The Asian Heritage Month Act, we will leave a path for our future generations to continue to learn about their heritage, honour those who came before us and celebrate all the accomplishments Asian Canadians in Manitoba have achieved and continue to achieve.

So why now? In 2002, the Government of Canada announced that May would be designated as Asian Heritage Month at the federal level, an opportunity for Canadians to learn more about the diverse culture and history of Asian communities in Canada. Recognizing Asian heritage month in Manitoba would do exactly the same, only it will empower and encourage Manitobans, specifically, to participate in acts of remembrance, festivals and ceremonies and education right in our own communities.

Honourable Speaker, last week, we welcomed the members of the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba to the Legislature to launch the 2024 Asian Heritage Month celebrations. The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba was also founded in 2002 and for over 20 years has been bringing Manitobans of Asian descent together to celebrate and learn together. The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba's work has built a strong, vibrant and thoughtful community of leaders in the province who have dedicated themselves to empowering our next generations.

The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba has included presidents of esteemed Asian descent. Mr. Art Miki, who was witnessing the introduction of the bill yesterday, a member of the Order of Canada and served as a citizenship judge, is a Canadian human rights champion who fought to ensure that Japanese Canadians in internment camps received redress.

* (10:10)

Past-president Ms. Yenny Trinh, who was witnessing the introduction of the bill yesterday, was the first Vietnamese female lawyer in Manitoba. Current president, Mr. Fortunato Lim, who was witnessing the

introduction of the bill yesterday, is a prominent principal-teacher at Margaret Park School in Winnipeg.

Since 2017 until my election, I have been a member of the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba and would help in planning and organizing Asian Heritage Month to ensure we are empowering Asian Canadians and celebrating in our achievements.

Leaders, like Art Miki and many others, helped to inspire me along my journey in politics and always reminded me to never forget those who paved the way—the path before me. This includes political leaders of Asian regions like the honourable Philip Lee a member of the Order of Canada, who served as the first Chinese-Canadian Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. I also look to educators and academics, like Dr. Tina Chen, the first Vice-Provost of Equity at the University of Manitoba, whose work challenges systems of oppression.

As the first Chinese-Canadian MLA in Manitoba's history, I hope to inspire those who come after me the same way. I, myself, was inspired by those who came before. And that's what this is all about: empowering our future generations through memory, celebration and connectiveness.

All across Manitoba, Manitobans of Asian descent will be encouraged and empowered to think about their experiences, not just as Canadians but as Manitobans, and even their connections to their own communities across our province. The Asian Heritage Month Act serves as a foundation for organizations like the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba and so many other groups to continue the important work, including education programming and culture events.

As a former school trustee and vice-chair in the Winnipeg School Division, I know just how important the Asian Heritage Month education program is for our community's youth. Education programming touches on both the challenges of the Asian experience in Manitoba, but also the amazing people who have helped make this a great province to live for Asian Canadians.

As a parent, I believe that our children and youth should feel inspired by the culture identity and within Manitoba. We have to ensure that we continue sharing the diversity of Manitoba and remind each other that Asian heritage is a part of Canadian history.

Honourable Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to this new bill and I hope that members across party lines will support The Asian Heritage Month Act

and join me in celebrating the rich Asian communities that call Manitoba home.

Thank you, xiè xiè [*thank you*], merci and miigwech.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held—a question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions—let's just start that over again.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): My question is: What initiatives or events is foreseen being organized to commemorate Asian heritage month?

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): I want to thank the honourable member for—the member opposite for the question.

Recognizing Asian heritage month in Manitoba will empower and encourage Manitobans specifically to participate in acts of remembrance, festivals and ceremonies, and education right in our own communities. We have organizations like Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba who was founded—who has been founded since 2002 and has been organizing Asian Heritage Month activities since 2002 for 22 years.

So having organizations like Asian Heritage Month—Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba will continue this important work every year and to educate the broader community and our next generations that their ancestors' history and for the future generations—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for Fort Richmond for bringing forward this really good piece of legislation.

I remember, prior to politics, seeing the member for Fort Richmond at many events celebrating and participating in and with the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba, and I was hoping she could share with the House, and those who may be watching, just how others could get involved with the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba, if they wanted to.

MLA Chen: I want to thank the member for Tyndall Park for the important questions.

And over the past, many, many years, and I have had the pleasure to be part of the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba and Asian communities, every year to organize and help to achieve Asian Heritage Month activities. And I have certainly seen the member for Tyndall Park and other members of opposite participating and be part of this celebration.

So Asian heritage is Canadian history and we have not only recent Asian immigrants coming to Manitoba, but also we have second, third and even fourth generations of Asian descent—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I want to thank the honourable member for bringing forward this very important piece of legislation.

And I was wondering if she could tell us: What are some of the key highlights or features of this bill that you think will have a positive impact on our community?

MLA Chen: I want to thank the honourable minister for the question.

And the thing that I want to say, the atmosphere was very positive and the Asian communities are very excited about this bill.

The Asian heritage month bill will serve a foundation for organizations, like the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba and many other groups to elevate their hard work and—that they do in providing education programming and cultural events for the community.

Every year they organize events and high school symposiums, and festival showcases are some of the highlights and the features—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Can the member opposite explain a little bit more about, personally, what this bill will mean to her and to the Asian community?

MLA Chen: I want to thank the member for Dawson Trail for this question.

As a first-generation immigrant myself, I came to Manitoba and I know many immigrants like me want to find a sense of belonging in Manitoba and in Canada. And celebrating Asian history, the long and rich Asian history in Manitoba and in Canada is an important way to feel that sense of belonging.

And that impact—affected me and I'm sure our future generations will also appreciate that we have this opportunity to celebrate our long and rich history in Manitoba and Canada.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I would like to ask the member opposite from Fort Richmond: Are there any challenges or obstacles you anticipate in implementing Asian Heritage Month, and how do you plan to address them?

MLA Chen: I want to thank the member opposite for this question.

Certainly, the Asian communities—not always offered a welcome in the early history in Canada. However, the best way to counter any challenges or discrimination is through education. And this Asian heritage month serves exactly this purpose which is to help at providing education programming to our future generations and to the broader community.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

* (10:20)

MLA Cable: I was hoping that the member could outline some of the achievements that Asian-Manitobans have brought to the province for us, while we're on the conversation of Asian greatness.

MLA Chen: Thank the honourable minister for the question.

From the early Chinese railroad workers who literally built the rails that connected Manitoba to the world, to the restaurateurs and the health-care workers who help make Manitoba a great place to raise a family, Asian Canadians in Manitoba are integral to the past, present and future prosperity of our province.

Leaders like Art Miki, Honourable Philip Lee, the past president Yenny Trinh and Fortunato Lim that I just named in my speaking, are some of the leaders in the Asian communities that—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): My member opposite, thank you for bringing this legislation forward.

How do you plan to ensure that Asian Heritage Month is inclusive and representative of all diverse Asian communities in our country?

MLA Chen: I want to thank the member opposite for the question.

Over the past 22 years, since the Government of Canada acknowledged May as Asian Heritage Month,

committee members in Manitoba have been organizing and coming together each year to celebrate their history and achievements that Asian communities have made in Manitoba.

And so we have a foundation of organizations like the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba to help bring us together each year and bring the community together to celebrate and also make sure that future generations—

The Speaker: Time has expired.

MLA Cable: I know the member who introduced this bill is a parent, and I would like to know what this means for her as a mother and how it will impact her children and this—how she's able to talk about being a proud Asian woman to her children.

MLA Chen: Thanks to the minister—honourable minister for the question.

First of all, as an Asian immigrant myself, I look to people who came before me, who paved the way and who inspired me in—along my journey in politics.

And so I hope that the—a bill like this and all the—that everything that we do in this month will also serve the exact purpose for our future generations and for my children and everyone's children. Like I said, Asian heritage is a part of Canadian history.

Thank you.

Mr. Schuler: My question is: What is the plan to see Asian heritage month evolve and grow in the years to come?

MLA Chen: Thanks to the member opposite for this important question.

So I think over the past 22 years, the Asian communities in Manitoba have been coming together to celebrate the long and rich Asian community's history in Manitoba and in Canada.

So we have organizations, great organizations, that are doing the groundwork every year to bring people together, and they are—and I have confidence to those organizations that they—this bill will serve the foundation for the organizations like them to elevate their hard work each year.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Good morning. I'm pleased to be able to get up and put some words on the record in response to the bill for the member—from the member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen) brought forward in this House.

I'm always happy to speak on such uplifting, positive bills that are brought forward in the Chamber by members, and I'm pleased to speak to Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act, a bill that sees a—seeks to positively recognize contributions of Asian—the Asian community in Manitoba. Manitoba should be proud of the delivery we have in recognizing May as Asian Heritage Month. It is really showing our stance as a province on equity and inclusion.

In 2001, the Senate of Canada designated May as Asian Heritage Month and in 2002, the Government of Canada signed an official declaration to announce May as Asian Heritage Month. Since May 2022, the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba has been organizing Asian Heritage Month.

Bill 212, the Asian heritage month, is an important bill as are all other bills that are commemorating the diversity we have in our wonderful province. Commemoration days are observed to recognize and to honour various social, historical and cultural issues. To commemorate means to recall and show respect for something or someone.

Honourable Speaker, I have said this before and I will say it again: Commemoration days should inspire us all to advocate for human rights, to step up and act when needed, and to work together towards a just, compassionate society. It is important that we as people foster a sense of unity, that we stand together and support one another. It is important that we celebrate one another and celebrate and appreciate what different groups, different cultures, contribute to our province and to our society.

The theme for Asian Heritage Month 2024 is Preserving the Past, Embracing the Future, Amplifying Asian-Canadian Legacy. This is a theme that celebrates the rich heritage and contributions of people of Asian origin in Canada and in Manitoba, while also looking forward to the future with optimism and hopefulness.

Bill 212, Asian heritage month, is a wonderful way to celebrate the contributions of Asian Canadians to our province. Asian Canadians have enhanced the diversity of Manitoba and have introduced so many amazing things to our province. Asian Canadians have introduced a broad and rich variety of languages, cultures and traditions to our province.

Now, commemoration days are inspirational, but also sombre—sombre because they usually signify a time when sacrifices were made for a cause or a fight for equal rights, also for justice. Many past laws in Canada were not welcoming and were not kind and accepting to the—to Asian and South Asian workers, dating back to 1885, where there were laws in place that were cruel and wounding to Asians. There were Japanese internment camps during World War II, the Komagata Maru incident and more recently—excuse me—Islamophobia and COVID-19-related racism and hate crimes that have very serious, very harmful consequences for Asian and South Asian Canadians.

I have a hard time speaking and bringing such things up because for Bill 212, the Asian heritage month, we want to celebrate the culture, the contributions. But it is also of the utmost importance that we discuss the dark history to ensure such history is never, ever repeated.

Asian Canadians are integral part of our society and the contributions they make should be celebrated socially, culturally, economically and politically. Asian Canadians have given so much to brighten our society. There are amazing organizations in our province that celebrate Asian Canadians, such as the Asian Heritage Society, the Japanese Cultural Association, Southeast Asian refugees, the Korean Society of Manitoba, the Manitoba Academy of Chinese Studies, Manitoba Chinese Community Centre, Manitoba Filipino Business Council. The Canadian museum of human rights often hosts events and learning sessions regarding Asian culture and history.

I encourage all Manitobans to take note of the wonderful events that are taking place throughout the month of May to celebrate Asian Heritage Month.

* (10:30)

Some of the events that will take place are: the Asian Heritage Month Comedy Show happening on May 11; the Asian Canadian Writers Showcase and the Asian Heritage High School Symposium, both on May 23; the Asian Canadian Showcase at Taste of Asia on May 25 and 26. Also in Winnipeg, from May 24 to 26, the FascinAsian Film Festival, celebrating Asian perspectives, cultures and integrity in film and media.

Diversity and inclusion in a workplace is important as it creates fairer, more accessible workplaces for all, allows for exposure to different perspectives and problem solving leads to innovative thinking and allows

companies to hire the best employees from diverse pools that lead to increased customer satisfaction.

Diversity and inclusion in schools allows all students to be able to access and gain equal opportunities and helps to create a culture that celebrates diversity and builds on the strengths of each individual student.

Diversity and inclusion in our society as a whole is an 'essential'—an essential driver of innovation, empathy and societal well-being, creating a rich landscape of perspectives. It ensures that all individuals are present and actively involved, integrated and valued in all aspects of society.

The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba is an organization that truly embodies what Asian Canadians stand for. The goals listed for the AHS of Manitoba include: to bring together members of the Asian-Canadian communities in Manitoba to participate in the projects to celebrate Asian Heritage Month; to acknowledge the contributions of Asians and Canadians to Canadian society through the arts, culture and heritage; to share the Asian Canadians' art, culture, cuisine, faith and traditions with all Manitobans; and also to actively engage in fostering relationships, understanding and collaborations with Indigenous communities to contribute to the ongoing spirit of truth and reconciliation.

Together, as Canadians and as Manitobans, we need to lift one another up. We need to work together to foster relationships and understandings with one another to collaborate with all groups and to work to resolve to reconcile all past wrongdoings.

So again, thank you to the member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen) for bringing forward Bill 212, the Asian heritage month, to the House.

I'd also, on a personal level, like to thank her, because it is incredibly important and a great reminder, as I've mentioned in my speech, to us to not repeat the wrongs of the past and to look forward to a bright future together.

Thank you for allowing me this time to speak this morning, and I'll allow it to go to other people on the floor.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

MLA Mike Moyes (Riel): I want to thank the honourable member for Fort Richmond for bringing forward this bill. I'm happy to rise and speak for a few minutes. I won't take too much time, but I do want to put a few words on the record.

This bill is personal to me, particularly personal, because of my Taiwanese heritage. Not too many people that—if you don't know me well, you might not know that about me. It's not something that I speak about too often, and, in fact, when I was bringing greetings last week on behalf of the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the honourable Minister for Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism at the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba's event here in the Legislature, that was the first time that I spoke about it since being elected.

I believe that I am the first Taiwanese MLA elected to Manitoba. My mom was born in Taiwan and immigrated to Brandon where she met my dad as a teenager. And the reason I bring this up is not so much because it's about me, but because representation matters. I am so proud to be a part of a caucus that—and a government that I believe is the most diverse in Manitoba's history and perhaps even in Canada's history.

It matters because I believe a government should reflect the people that they represent. I believe that people of all different backgrounds bring different perspectives, and that means that we're going to be able to make better decisions.

I also remember—this is also—this bill in particular is important to me, because I remember being a young child and being embarrassed of who I was. I remember hearing racial slurs being thrown around. I remember being in elementary school and just hearing different rhymes that talked about my mom's background, and so that was troubling to me.

And so when I see a bill like this, it speaks to me. It means that we're going—we're moving forward, that we're making progress as a province. It's sad that young kids sometimes feel embarrassed about who they are, about their identity, about where your family's from, about what you look like, if it's different than other folks.

And I think that this bill is important. Anytime that people are judged, not based on who they are or the strength of their character, but rather on their ethnic background, their religious background, on their identity, on who they love, I think that's a significant problem, not just for that individual but for our society as a whole.

It was actually a very close friend of mine that encouraged me to speak more about, perhaps, being the first Taiwanese MLA and to speak about my Taiwanese background—not so much because of—that it's important to me, which it is, but because it might

be important to the young person that might look like me or might have a similar background to me, and that maybe they can see themselves being here one day when we're all gone.

It's because of this that I think that this Asian Heritage Month is quite important. I think it's a way that we can celebrate the rich tapestry of the different Asian cultures. I think it's a way that we can learn about the different cultural groups and for all Asian-Manitobans to feel a part and make sure that they're included.

We've seen anti-Asian racism spring up particularly around COVID in the connection with, you know, with the origins being in China and whatnot, and that continues today. There's been some studies that suggest that there continues to be anti-Asian sentiment in the population and that's something that we need to combat, both as a government and as a society.

I think that there's still so much left to do, and I think that these bills, these commemorative bills of all kinds, I think that they really mean a lot to the communities, and I think that they do mean it's a step forward for the people of Manitoba.

I think that it adds to the one Manitoba that our government is working toward, that we can be inclusive, that we can be welcoming, that all people can live to their potential, regardless of what they look like or where they came from.

I'm really looking forward, particularly in seeing more Manitobans learn about the different Asian cultures; it's not a monolith despite what sometimes gets thrown around. But I think that that will be important for us to learn about the different particular groups.

And I also think it's important for Asian Manitobans to be able to stand proud and showcase their heritage and to build this great province together.

I'll just conclude, Honourable Speaker, with a message to Asian Manitobans across this province: that you matter, that your government stands with you, that we value you, that we see you and that we're going to work really hard to ensure that you, your kids, your grandkids know that you're a part of this province, and that the province is better with your presence. And that our diversity is actually our strength.

So, thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): It's always a good time in the Manitoba Legislature when we talk about the various communities that constitute this great province. Manitoba and our capital city, Winnipeg, have always been a good place for immigrants to land.

Case in point: When William Hespeler went to Europe, to eastern Europe and encouraged settlers to come—and it was the Mennonite communities; it's over 100 years ago, he encouraged over 6,000 to come to Manitoba when Manitoba was just a fledgling place.

And—although, as with all newcomer groups, it is with hardship that individuals come. And if you want to know the hardship that was faced by those who came over 100 years ago, I would suggest going to the Steinbach heritage museum and looking at some of the prairie huts and the way that new Canadians had to establish themselves and figure out how to survive.

* (10:40)

I won't go into detail and try to take away any of the—or the history, but some of it was very grim and by today's standards would be considered appalling, and yet, that's how they came. And they learned how to survive the climate here in Manitoba. Somehow they got through it and helped—everyone helped to contribute in the building and the development of this great province.

In fact, members of the Asian community have contributed greatly to politics, culture, I would suggest medicine, business and yes, of course, the culinary experience that we have here in Manitoba across this great province and many, many other areas. You could put education in there, and the list goes on and on. The problem is when you start listing one or two, then you always seem to miss somebody, and I didn't mean to miss anyone here. There has been great contribution across all sectors of this great province.

In fact, recognition started in large part when the Senate of Canada designated May as Asian Heritage Month, and that was done in 2001. And that began the process, and it was a good start. And then Asian Heritage Month has been celebrated, actually, since the 1990s, even before the Senate designated May as Asian Heritage Month. In December, again, 2001, the Senate adopted a motion proposed by Senator Vivienne Poy to officially designate May as Asian Heritage Month in Canada.

In May 2002, the Government of Canada signed an official declaration to announce May as Asian Heritage Month. The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba has been organizing a Asian Heritage Month

of May since 2002. And, in fact, in 2017, it was the Pallister government of Manitoba who formally recognized May as Asian heritage month.

And as you will find with many of these things, whether it goes across Europe–European–individuals from Europe or basically any country, usually when we deal with these issues in this Chamber, it tends not to be political or divisive. We tend to agree that these are important times and important remembrances.

In fact, and I do this at my peril; I don't wish to just single out a few individuals, but I do want to put a few names on the record of individuals that I've had the opportunity to work with, and I could never live with myself if I didn't mention Kenny Wong. In fact, I just had coffee with him a while ago. And if anybody knows Kenny Wong, he is just the most dynamic and energetic, chronically aging, wise individual—very wise.

In fact, I pointed out to him that I remember watching his career as a city councillor in the city of Winnipeg, and we ended up spending a lot of time, and he told me some stories which I cannot tell here today, because they were very interesting how things were done at City Hall.

And I remember watching him as a young student in—attending Elmwood High School at the time, and I always followed him. And he and I have worked together a lot on cultural things, on business things, on political things, although he is an avowed liberal. We still work together. And just an amazing individual representing the Asian community incredibly well.

And, in fact, he is very involved also at the University of Manitoba with the Asper business school and somehow got my oldest daughter Brigitta, who was attending at that time, and she actually went to Hong Kong to study with the exchange program, which is another speech for another day. I got to take her and we visited Asia. We traveled from Hong Kong to Ho Chi Minh, took the train to Cambodia, flew to Thailand and back.

And when he found out that my daughter Brigitta was in fact my daughter, and as he referred to as Brijitta [*phonetic*] and he absolutely loves her. In fact, for the Chinese New Year, she helped with organizing of the dinner with him, and she even got her husband to come along and help organize.

And Kenny Wong is just one of those features in Manitoba—and I would suggest, while there's still time, to any new legislator, if you want to know Winnipeg politics, and you want to know about community politics, there's an individual to sit down with. Cost

you a cup of coffee and about two and a half hours, and you will know more than you've ever known in your life about the way the city of Winnipeg used to work.

And he knew everyone; all the characters, how it worked, and how to make it work. And I will declare here for this House that yes, he is one of my heroes. So to Kenny Wong, we thank you for coming to Manitoba and for making this the great place it is.

The name's been mentioned once before, but I'm going to mention it again: Art Miki, who's just a dynamic individual; very involved in the Japanese community; very involved in Folklorama, which is how I got to know him. He was also then a citizenship court judge and just a solid, outstanding, great individual.

And I would suggest again, if you want to know a whole bunch of history of the way Winnipeg and Manitoba operates, sit down with Art Miki. He is a thesaurus, he is an encyclopedia of information and is probably one of the most generous and the most welcoming and kind and friendly individuals. I would suggest sitting down with him as well. And Art, we thank you so much for how much you've contributed to this great province.

And there are others, but I cannot move on without speaking about the Honourable Philip Lee who I knew previously from Folklorama and my involvement in Folklorama on the—involved on the board and all the rest of it in the communities. He has done this province proud.

And just love Mrs. Lee. She is just the most energetic and amazing and dynamic individual. And she is the only person I know who—I don't know this for a fact, but I think she has 50,000 pictures on her phone and she can find the exact photo of you from eight years ago when we met on a bridge walking across to Osborne Village. She knows everything. She is just dynamic and I just love her to pieces.

And to the Honourable Philip Lee and to Mrs. Lee: you have made this province and you have made this country a far better place because you are here. And to the communities that make up Asia, we thank you very much for being here.

I didn't even get into the culinary delights. I'm not allowed to mention individual businesses like, say, Cilantro's, so I won't. And I just happened to be there last week. What a great place to go and eat in North Kildonan. And it goes on and on and on.

We thank you for all the contributions, from politics on down, and just mentioned a few names and I'm sure there are many, many more all of us could mention.

And thank you for this opportunity.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen) for bringing forward this piece of legislation, as well as just recognize how cool it is that we have our first-ever Chinese elected MLA here in the House. That is very neat to be a part of, and I want to congratulate her on that position and she's doing a great job. We're seeing that. That's very evident here, today.

I also think it's very cool in listening and learning from some of my colleagues, here, speaking in the House, that our colleague from Riel is also, if I'm correct here, of Taiwanese heritage—half-Taiwanese. And our first Taiwanese MLA here in the House as well, which again, is just—it's so incredible. And Taiwan: one of the most beautiful places I have ever had the opportunity to travel to. I recommend all of my colleagues do it. So you come from a beautiful country, Honourable Speaker.

* (10:50)

We're so lucky here in Manitoba as our Asian community is growing rapidly, and it's why it's so appropriate that we're discussing this legislation here today. Here in Canada, the month of May is recognized as Asian Heritage Month and used as a time to highlight, celebrate and recognize all the contributions that people of Asian origin have contributed to our country and right here in Manitoba.

Just a little bit of background on Asian Heritage Month: It's been celebrated since the 1990s, and in December 2021, the Senate adopted a motion designating May as Asian Heritage Month. And a few months later in May of 2002, the Government of Canada signed an official declaration.

And, Honourable Speaker, this is Canada at large. But, in my opinion, celebrating Asian heritage is amplified here in Manitoba. And, of course, I recognize I'm very biased. I suspect many of my colleagues would feel similarly, but you see it throughout our diversity. You see it throughout work ethics of our Asian community, Honourable Speaker. You see it through literal legislation here today, and hospitality.

Over the last two centuries, immigrants have come to Manitoba from East Asia, southern Asian—Asia, western, central, Southeast Asia and more. And

these individuals have brought so much joy, heritage, language, representation and religious traditions.

You know, learning about the religious traditions is one of my favourite parts when I think about learning about Asian heritage. And I say this because during my undergrad, which is now about 10 years ago, Honourable Speaker, I had the opportunity to study Asian religions, and the main objective through them all is treating people with kindness, being a good person.

And we have so much to learn here in Canada from these religious notions, from these objectives, Honourable Speaker. And that's why in Manitoba, we're so lucky to have the opportunity to be learning more and why we take opportunities such as this and May as Asian Heritage Month to really spread that education and to share with one another personal experiences, where a person may come from, things that perhaps we could be doing differently, Honourable Speaker.

Here in Manitoba, we're lucky to have the Asian—or, Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba, whose goals are to bring together community members, and all month long—one of the questions earlier today was, how can we celebrate? What can we do to recognize Asian Heritage Month?

Well, we had an opening ceremony here at the Legislature just a couple days ago. On Sunday, there was a Japanese cooking demonstration. And upcoming we have comedy shows, we have Asian-Canadian writers being showcased, we've got the Taste of Asia food trip and film festivals. There's lots going on throughout the month of May, and I want to encourage all Manitobans to participate.

I want to thank the Asian heritage society for the incredible work that you are doing—it is so reflective in our community—and the member, again, for bringing this legislation forward.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for—the honourable member for Agassiz.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act.

Manitoba is a province that celebrates various cultural heritage days, highlighting the unique contributions and history of different cultural backgrounds. A few of the special days or months that are recognized in Manitoba include Louis Riel Day on the

third Monday of February. This day honours the life and legacy of Louis Riel, a Métis leader. Ukrainian cultural heritage month. This day celebrates the traditions, music, dance and cuisine of the Ukrainian culture. Filipino Heritage Month is celebrated in June. Indigenous Peoples Day is celebrated on June 21. This day recognizes and celebrates the language and traditions of Indigenous peoples in Manitoba and honouring their contributions and rich heritage.

And, of course, the month of May is Asian Heritage Month, and, again, this month is dedicated to showcasing the diversity of the Asian cultures and traditions and the history of Asian Canadians.

The Senate of Canada designated May as Asian Heritage Month in 2001. The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba has been recognizing Asian Heritage Month in May since 2002. And in May of 2017, the government of Manitoba formally recognized May as heritage month.

Over the past decade in Canada, many Asians have begun to celebrate their heritage, particularly during the month of May. In order to make the heritage month a success each year in Manitoba, the Asian heritage society was formed to orchestrate events and get community involvement. The organization is comprised of representatives from the Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Indochinese, Korean, Filipino communities.

Every May, Canadians are invited to reflect and learn about the contributions of Canadians of Asian descent. We are so blessed to live in a country and the province of Manitoba where we have the freedom to celebrate the rich cultural diversity and the many great contributions and achievements of the great folks who choose to come from other countries and make Manitoba their home, and in particular those that come from the Asian communities from around the world.

These communities have made a significant impact in a variety of aspects in society, both globally and in our own local communities. Contributions from Asian scientists and researchers have greatly influenced and shaped the scientific and technological landscape of our world, providing new discoveries.

Physics and astronomy is another area where Asian physicists have played a significant role in groundbreaking discoveries in areas such as particle physics, quantum mechanics and astrophysics. The work and involvement has helped unravel the mysteries of the fundamental forces of nature and the origins of the universe.

We all love good food and we know the Asian cuisine is known for its diverse flavours, techniques and culinary traditions. I myself have become more familiar and gathered more experience with Asian cooking and have learned to make spring rolls, both traditional Chinese and experiment with different flavours, seasonings. Experimenting with different soups, like lion's head, sweet and sour and many other traditional recipes including shumai. All of these are very good to eat and it takes some time for someone like myself, who doesn't have the expertise of wrapping won ton wrappers and folding the proper way, but I love to learn and most of all enjoy the finished product.

Asian designers and architects have brought many innovative and sustainable concepts and approaches to the industry. Their styles and traditions have inspired and influenced architectural designs around the world.

In rural Manitoba and in Agassiz constituency, we have seen an increase in Filipino population. Having a pork industry such as HyLife in Neepawa, we have seen tremendous growth in the community and with this growth comes many new opportunities, opportunities for new businesses and an introduction to the new cultural experiences.

We've seen the contributions of new Filipino community members in many areas of the town. They are quick to volunteer and always willing to help out. The previous government did a health-care recruitment to the Philippines and Manitoba has benefited with nurses now working and living here in Manitoba because of the work and effort of the previous government. We see great contributions made by these individuals who choose to come to Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Also next month we will celebrate Filipino Heritage Month and we will enjoy the many festivities across our great province. Parades and traditional dance and costumes that are amazing in colour and vibrancy. It is an honour to be a part of the festivals where we can come together to celebrate, learn, interact and exchange these cultural experiences.

The diverse cultures of Manitoba communities is evolving and ever-growing and we have all been enriched with new cultural experiences from various ethnic backgrounds.

We have many opportunities to learn about different traditions, languages, foods and customs. The tapestry of Manitoba is woven with influences from Indigenous communities, European settlers from

countries like Ukraine, Germany and Poland and immigrants from—

* (11:00)

The Speaker: —please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have four minutes remaining—[interjection] Order, please.

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 12—Respecting Seniors

The Speaker: The hour is now 11 o'clock and the time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution brought—is a—the resolution on—No. 12, Respecting Seniors, brought forward by the honourable member for Radisson.

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): I move, seconded by the MLA, the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham)

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has set aside \$22.3 million to provide better care for seniors through more direct hours of care for seniors in personal care homes and a new Safe and Healthy at Home program to support aging in place; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has set aside funding for a new Seniors' Advocate to protect seniors and Elders in the province from harm; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has created a new tax credit for seniors and funding for senior's accessibility upgrades so all can live their retirement in dignity; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government announced that a new 95-bed personal care home will be built in Lac du Bonnet so that seniors can age in their community with dignity; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is adding staff for over 60 lower acuity beds, which will support seniors and Elders who are waiting for a space in personal care homes; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has been listening to healthcare professionals across the province, including staff at personal care homes and home care staff; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has laid out a plan to help seniors get the care that they need by pledging to hire 1,000 new healthcare staff which will in turn reduce emergency room wait times, increase diagnostic capacity, and open up surgical slots right here at home; and

WHEREAS the previous PC Provincial Government cut supports for seniors care homes and allowed affordable seniors housing to be sold off; and

WHEREAS the previous PC Provincial Government promised to create 1,200 new personal care home beds, but the bed count dropped when they were in office.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Legislative Assembly urge the provincial government to respect and make life more affordable for seniors and elders as they age, and undo years of reckless cuts and mismanagement of the former PC government by fulfilling its plans to fund accessibility modifications to age at home and build personal-care-home beds.

Motion presented.

MLA Dela Cruz: I am honoured to rise in this Chamber to present my first resolution, and I am doubly honoured to rise as the youngest woman ever elected in Manitoba to present a resolution that lifts up seniors and elders in Manitoba.

Respecting seniors and elders is a value that must never go compromised, and the background that I bring to this Legislature is one that I am so sincerely proud of. I was, you know, raised by Filipino front-line immigrant workers and proudly from a culture, a Filipino culture that loves our elders, that respects our elders and, in fact, actually puts them at the, you know, epitome of leadership in our communities.

Not only do they have years on us and experience on us, but the wisdom that they carry into our communities is truly unmatched. You know, just to share a little bit about the Filipino culture in this moment, too, every gathering that you'll go to, whether you're familiar with our culture or not, you'll probably hear the word *po* [a politeness particle] or *mano po* [requesting elder's hand to touch to one's forehead] going around in our and at our events.

And that's because it's a long-standing tradition to ensure that, no matter how old you are, you go to somebody elder than you at that event and ask them for a blessing and make sure that you say goodbye on your way out.

And I think that's an attitude that we ought to carry into this Legislature as legislators, and I really thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and our Minister for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care for giving me the opportunity as a legislative assistant to explore and champion seniors issues as well as health care in this new role.

You know, it's funny, Honourable Speaker, when I was appointed to this new role, I was provided a transition binder; a transition binder that had this large stack of health-related things that we had to decide upon immediately, but only three papers when it came to seniors.

And so I dug into that, and the reason for that—and it was truly disheartening that up until, you know, up until they needed their vote, the previous failed government had reduced seniors to a single bullet point in their mandate letters, speaking to how restrictive they were on seeing seniors as whole persons in our communities.

There's a need to bridge generations and, as I mentioned, I'm here as the youngest woman ever elected in Manitoba. Youth are the future and there is no question in the senior community around that, though the opportunity at a brighter future is one that would not be there if it were not for our elders. While we look to build up our health-care system and build up our economy, it is essential that we honour the work done by our elders to build up our communities in the first place.

Despite the way that the previous government approached senior issues, aging is not an illness. In fact, we are a government that lifts up our elders as whole persons, whole people with the right to transportation, education, opportunity, dignity and autonomy. From advanced education to home-care services to affordability, this is the lens that we are applying across government.

Now the previous failed Heather Stefanson government and the members opposite who continue to glorify the work, or lack thereof, that they did, disempowered seniors until they needed their votes. By restricting seniors issues to a single bullet point in their mandate letters, a bullet point that only saw seniors issues reduced to personal-care-home beds that they couldn't even deliver on. Not only was this disrespectful, but it was violent. While this alone withheld much-needed support and conversation around the true needs of seniors, they still failed to deliver.

While they promised 1,200 personal-care-home beds to win their first election, Manitoba didn't even

see a net gain during their tenure. In fact, their tenure resulted in a net loss of 149 personal-care-home beds. Meanwhile, on health care, you know, they hollowed out human resources and resorted to funding agency instead of investing in our public system. Their ideology left us not only ill-prepared for the pandemic, but for the demographic trends and needs that predated the pandemic. Their ideology cost us lives.

They privatized home care, Honourable Speaker. Up until Heather Stefanson and many of her former Cabinet ministers opposite, Manitoba had the most successful and oldest home-care—public home-care system in all of Canada. They also refused the loved ones of seniors having faced abuse, or having lost their lives to abuse, while in care. They refused them closure by—through their complete ignorance of the PPCO, the Protection for Persons in Care Office investigations that dated back to 2018, with zero reports on investigations made publicly since then.

Despite their lip service, Heather Stefanson and her supporters have never put their money where their mouths are. The PCs opposite underspent \$23 million of—in a single year from the Seniors and Long-Term Care budget when they were in government. They withheld federal health transfers for Manitobans in need and instead signed cheques off to Cadillac Fairview and other out-of-province corporations.

Despite this, now the—that Heather Stefanson has resigned, the PCs have a chance to start anew. Budget 2024 made it clear that caring for seniors in this province is one of our NDP government's top priorities. We have introduced a tax credit for seniors, seniors who—many live on fixed incomes: \$1.5 million in funding for our new safe and healthy at home program; \$22.3 million in funding to provide more hours of direct care in personal-care homes; as well as a new personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet.

Last but certainly not least, community has been asking for years for the establishment of a seniors advocate office and we can proudly say on this side of the House that we are making that happen in Budget 2024.

So members opposite have the opportunity to do the right thing, to send a strong message to seniors across Manitoba that every single elected official in this House is committed to offering them the basic respect and dignity that they deserve. I implore upon them the urgency and importance of this matter. It isn't too late for them to finally get on board.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of 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 question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Can the member please explain why their government would completely shut down the surgical task force prior to embarking on the endeavours that they claim they will be undertaking?

If they—as their minister suggests is the key to fixing health care is to reduce surgical wait times, why would they shut down the task force designed to lower these times prior to establishing any necessary changes?

* (11:10)

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): I thank the colleague across the way for this question. You know, the question just paints how evident it is that they are continuing to recycle Heather Stefanson's playbook.

You know, over their tenure and under the member's watch, as well, they privatized our home-care services, they hollowed out our health-care resources and we will not take lessons from members opposite on what to do when it comes to health care in Manitoba.

The PCs decimated home care with their neglect and cuts. Our NDP government is taking a different approach and one that will lift Manitoba up from their rubble.

That's why we're delivering on bringing 'clare'—care close to home, by bringing two new ERs and a new care home in Lac du Bonnet.

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): Our NDP government is accomplishing many things. We're rebuilding health care, and we're lowering costs for Manitobans. By doing this, we're ensuring that everyone, especially seniors in Manitoba, can age with dignity. We're making progress, and the work will continue.

So I ask my colleague: What are we going to do to support and respect seniors in our province?

MLA Dela Cruz: I thank my colleague, the member for Seine River, for that very important question and

for finally asking, you know, about the work that we're doing as government.

You know, while we're talking about building up health care and we're talking about building up our economy, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, it's important that we talk about the people that built our province in the first place. Thanks to them, we're able to live good lives, and they have set us on a good path here in Manitoba.

That's why our NDP government works hard every day for them by ensuring them educational opportunities, transportation, saving them money with a new tax credit that helps lower costs and bringing them health care close to home.

By doing this, we're bringing a new level of respect that seniors deserve in our province, something that members opposite never did when they were in government.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): I just want to say that I am disappointed that 10 minutes of conversation—all that could be talked about seniors in that conversation was just smacking the party across the aisle. And when we're here to stand up for seniors, all of us are on the same page here.

So why did the NDP cut the department and—minister Scott Johnston dedicated to seniors and long-term care?

MLA Dela Cruz: You know, I have a lot of respect for my colleague across the way, the member for Morden-Winkler. It is truly unfortunate that the folks that surround her are people who have decimated our health-care services and seniors care across their span of seven years.

And when it comes down to, you know, to the seniors department, if we really look at it, the very first seniors minister was—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Dela Cruz: —introduced under an NDP government. Not only that, but under their tenure, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, they reduced seniors in Manitoba down to one bullet point in their mandate letters. Seniors are multi-dimensional—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Cross: Due to their cuts to health and seniors care, the previous failed PC government left older adults struggling. Instead of offering support or even

words of encouragement to them and their families, they shifted blame and created animosity toward seniors.

I ask my colleague: What were the comments made by the failed PC minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care made at the height of the pandemic?

MLA Dela Cruz: I thank my colleague for that question.

While we're on the subject of members for Morden-Winkler, I have to point out how the previous member for Morden-Winkler, the former failed minister, accused health-care workers of trying to stir the pot, of saying, quote unquote, questioning the motivations in the first place of people who are bringing forward concerns: concerns about abuse, concerns about things that seniors needed amid the pandemic.

As the NDP government, the new government, we are taking a different approach and we are taking no lessons from members opposite.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I'd like to ask: Why is the NDP not committed to—or, fulfilling and delivering the Manitoba seniors strategy that—where the government had consulted over 10,000 Manitobans and was praised by local senior organizations across the province?

MLA Dela Cruz: Just like their promise to add 1,200 new personal-care-home beds, the PCs never follow through. Community members know that they don't follow through. And, in fact, they neglected seniors in Manitoba until they needed their votes.

That's why this long outside of an election, we are ensuring that seniors have a voice at the table where decisions are being made in government. We are finally funding a seniors advocate office that they have been asking for and that members opposite denied them in that strategy.

MLA Cross: The members opposite have the chance today to begin the work of apologizing to seniors for their disrespectful behaviour during their days in government by supporting this resolution. Unfortunately, their disregard for seniors continues.

I ask my colleague if she could name some of the ways the PCs continue disrespecting seniors in Manitoba, now that they're in opposition.

MLA Dela Cruz: It really is shameful that the PC's disrespect for seniors persists into their days as—in the opposition, while our NDP government is trying to make life better for all Manitobans, especially seniors, regarding this—or regarding this motion and fix the

damage of the cuts and chaos the members opposite created.

The PCs blocked legislation, like I had mentioned in my previous response, to create an office of the seniors advocate. In fact, until the very last day that they had the opportunity to, they hadn't signed on the way that every other major party in Manitoba—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Dela Cruz: Playing games with—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Dela Cruz: —people's emotions to score political points isn't new for the members opposite, but Manitobans can rely on us to do the right thing when it comes—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): In the mandate letter of the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara), and I quote: Your goal is to make it easier for every Manitoban to access health care at every level, no matter where we live.

Will this include an MRI in Portage la Prairie to serve our seniors and others?

MLA Dela Cruz: Right now, the northern regional health authority is the only region with MRI services. We're changing that by investing in a multi-year plan to install MRI services in the North.

So while we're talking about, you know, rural and remote communities as well, it's important to acknowledge as well the \$22 million that we are investing in medical transportation, which will serve people who need care in rural and remote areas, especially.

Not only that, we are investing in creating the Eriksdale ER, opening the Eriksdale ER and topping up rural and remote communities when it comes to the safe and healthy at home program by \$1,500 each.

Our elders care is multi-dimensional. This government gets it, and it's time for the opposition to get on board.

MLA Cross: One of our NDP government's core priorities is taking care of those who built our province. They have worked hard. They contributed to our economy. They worked to make a better life for their children and grandchildren. The very least we as Manitobans can do is ensure they are supported as they become older adults.

My question for my colleague is: How does our government ensure seniors age with dignity in Manitoba?

MLA Dela Cruz: I thank the—my colleague for Seine River for her question on the actual merit of the—what we're here in government doing. Rather constructive, unlike members opposite.

And to answer your question, we will do this by ensuring that seniors have the services that they need, and that means bringing more health-care workers into this province, more hours in direct care and long-term care and delivering on new personal-care homes, including the one in Lac du Bonnet.

* (11:20)

This is just to name a few of the things that Budget 2024 does to support older adults in Manitoba, and I implore the House to get on board.

The Speaker: The time for questions has concluded.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is now open for debate.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Thanks for the time to present here today.

The member for Radisson (MLA Dela Cruz) well knows that their government pulled the funding for personal-care homes in a desperate attempt to save face, they—after stalling the one in Lac Du Bonnet, they funded it, causing the community to have to come up with an extra \$6 million.

So the—another question that could have been asked was the delays for Arborg: How much is that going to cost the town of Arborg to have yearly delays—never mind a few months, but years?

And the member also knows that the department of seniors and long-term care was developed by a Progressive Conservative government and it introduced many initiatives that would bolster the support and increase the efficiency of programs for seniors.

Obviously, that was slashed by the NDP government—completely gone, out. Not even a minister representing them. The top five initiatives that were undertaken, of course, by that department, first of all, was—the department was formed.

So, in January of 2022, the government of Manitoba announced the creation of that department of seniors and long-term care. The department's focus was the implementation of the seniors strategy, which

was announced in February of 2023, and it also included the implementation of the Stevenson's review.

The formation of this department highlighted a Progressive Conservative commitment to our aging population and our commitment to show older Manitobans that they are valued and an important part of our province.

The seniors strategy, of course, in Manitoba, is A Great Place to Age. The provincial seniors strategy was developed based on an extensive province-wide public consultation. That's something that the NDP government doesn't understand; they don't go to the public. As a matter of fact, they're trying to take the 45-day consultation period and shrink it down to 30. Next year it'll probably be gone, Honourable Speaker.

Now, the strategy has seven strategic focus areas. These are all near and dear to our hearts and especially seniors. Safe, Inclusive, Accessible Communities; Navigation; High-quality Services; Financial Security; Reducing Ageism; Indigenous Engagement and Co-design; and there's also Collaboration and Accountability.

Honourable Speaker, \$15.9 million was allocated from the 2023 budget to advance initiatives in the seniors strategy and support a full spectrum of community-based services to help seniors live healthier, more connected, independent lives. This strategy and our investments focus on making Manitoba an ideal place to age and maintain our independence. A full Aging in Place campus is so important for our seniors.

More than \$16 million to increase staffing in personal-care homes—that's an implementation of the Stevenson review. Check, done, PC government.

As part of the Stevenson review, the government of Manitoba committed more than \$16 million in new funding to expand staffing and training in personal-care homes. As I mentioned earlier, the PC government hired 2,200 health care—nurses, doctors, staff—over the last year. They're nowhere near their 1,000 net new. I would even suggest they are net negative since they've taken government.

This funding was supporting a recruitment and hiring of more than 350 health-care aides alone to increase the amount of daily direct care for residents; 72 new nursing positions and staff recruitment incentives.

Budget 2023, which I'll remind you was a PC budget—we're talking about all the good things that the previous government has done here for seniors.

The Budget 2023 allocated \$23 million to implement all recommendations from the Stevenson review. This includes addressing staffing in personal-care homes, renewal of personal-care-home policies, and a whole lot more. Six new personal-care homes were announced in 2023 and three of those six were funded. That funding I might add, Honourable Speaker, was pulled by the NDP government, slashed, gone.

These—well, let's list them. The only one that has been moved forward on is the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home. With a six-month delay, it added an additional \$6 million to the cost for that community, with that short delay. Arborg was another one that was given \$50.4 million—cut, slashed, from the NDP budget, no longer. Oakbank, cut. Stonewall, cut. Bridgwater and Portage Avenue, also cut. These new care homes represented approximately 670 new beds in the province, and \$15 million had been authorized just for the plans. Then, over and above, three were selected to move forward last budget year. That's Bridgwater, Arborg and Lac du Bonnet.

So they cut it. They cut Lac du Bonnet and then re-announced it six months later and wanting to get all the credit. Do you know what happened? An additional \$6 million had to be come up with from the community to ensure that the project moves forward.

Two more personal-care homes in Brandon and Winkler would have constructed an additional 42 beds for seniors in need of highly specialized care as a result of complex mental health and/or behavioural needs, very important. That is the great work that the Progressive Conservatives moved forward.

Now, in my 10 minutes, I definitely don't have enough time to go over the entire list, but let's start with a few more things that we have done for seniors.

Hearing aid grant: in March of 2023 as part of the provincial seniors strategy, a provincial—a PC government created a new \$12.6 million grant program to assist eligible older Manitobans experiencing hearing loss to cover the cost of testing, fitting and purchasing new hearing aids. We also did this through consultations, another thing that the NDP government just does not do. We understood that the hearing loss is a priority for aging Manitobans. So the hearing aid grant that had come up from a Progressive Conservative government is \$2,000 is available to all Manitobans who meet the eligibility criteria. And, once again, that's because of this PC team on this side of the House. Of course, there were some restrictions: 65 years of age; family income below \$80,000 per year; obviously,

documented hearing losses and the hearing aids needed to be prescribed.

Now, we did a lot of other things, including expanding the Self and Family Managed Care program with \$12.6 million in '22-23 and an additional \$1.3 million in '23-24. This expansion would enhance benefits for the 1,200 then-current and increasing access for new clients over and above.

* (11:30)

Palliative-'clare'-care services received \$1.3 million in the '23-24 to support the first phase of expanding Manitoba palliative-care services, which began in the Southern Health region.

I have so many more words to put on the record. I see my time's running short. I do want to thank all seniors for making Manitoba what it is today. We wouldn't be able to have our freedoms as we do. We wouldn't be able to stand up and debate in the Legislature without your historical—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I guess I want to start by talking about the word respect. We just listened to the member from Interlake-Gimli talk about the PC's greatest hits while in government. And they're happy to take credit for all of those; I think I'm right on that.

Now, why don't they take credit for everything they do? I'm going to say this because I didn't get an opportunity to yesterday. When we talk about respect and respecting seniors, I want you all to know that includes Indigenous seniors who are women.

Everybody—every member opposite yesterday wore a red dress pin on their lapels and they should be ashamed of themselves. They all were elected under a campaign of hate and division against Indigenous women, and you shake your head, but you have no idea what it feels to be an Indigenous woman.

So I don't agree that they understand how to respect seniors, either. They don't respect average Manitobans. They don't have respect for the average person. So how could they understand how to respect seniors?

First and foremost, we need to respect the people that built this country and we need to respect those that came before us. One of the first lessons you learn as a child is to respect your elders, respect their wisdom, respect their knowledge. That means that we have to

take care of them. We have to listen to them. We need to learn from them as much as we can.

Members opposite had seven years to prove they had respect for Manitobans. We never saw it. And that's why they are sitting on the opposite side of this Chamber. Now, Manitobans gave them the message. They shipped them to the other side where they belong. Manitobans want change and they're going to get that change from us. When you look at this side of the Chamber you see representation of Manitoba.

Members opposite are heckling because you know what? They don't want to own their truths. They only want to take credit for what they think is, you know, socially acceptable to Manitobans, like, oh, we did this. But they won't take credit for the hate they caused, the pain they caused. And they caused that pain to seniors as well.

So when you stand up and talk about respecting seniors, it's all seniors from all walks of life, not just the ones you choose to respect. And whether they like that or not, it's the truth.

You know, we're going to honour the generations that raised us. We need to give them better care. My parents are seniors. My grandparents are long gone, but they didn't have the respect that they deserved. They didn't always have their needs that were being met.

I'm worried about my parents. What's going to happen when they can no longer stay in their home and care for themselves? My mother is 70 and has stage 4 emphysema. She's at a point where she's going to start needing to have oxygen full-time and may no longer be able to live in her own home. And so I worry about, where is she going to go? Who's going to look after her?

Seven years they had an opportunity to build for the future. It's not a surprise that the baby boom generation is aging and they need supports. But where was the preparatory work that was being done? It wasn't, because it wasn't a priority, but it's a priority for us. And unfortunately, we're having to be reactive, simply because there was a lack of foresight on the part of the members opposite.

We will always stand alongside seniors on this side of the aisle, you know, by bringing forward a seniors advocate to ensure that they have a voice at the table. That is critical.

We're trying to fix the previous government's mistakes, but it takes time. Nothing's going to happen

overnight. I often hear members opposite saying, you've been in government seven months. Seven years, folks; things don't change overnight. That's equating one month of work to one year of damage they put forward. It just doesn't work that way.

We're investing \$22.3 million in new funding to enable older Manitobans to stay in their homes. This investment will provide more hours of direct care for seniors who need support. Seniors deserve dignity and they deserve respect.

You know, I think about the generations, and I hope that everybody in this room understands that we are on a path to becoming seniors ourselves, and I often try and live by the rule that I treat others as I—how I would want to be treated. Hold me accountable if I do something wrong, if I say something out of turn. You know, keep me accountable.

But in the same note, we have to be accountable for every generation that we are looking after in this province. We are all going to be seniors. I want to know that I have a safe place to age. I want to know that I will have the care I need without being a burden to my children or my grandchildren. They deserve to live their best lives without having to look after an aging parent.

You know, our new safe and healthy at home program will support those who want to age at home. This is a \$1.5-million initiative to assist seniors with the cost of home accessibility and safety upgrades. This is just one part of our plan to support vulnerable seniors.

You know, simple modifications can make a home much more safe. I mentioned my mom is suffering from stage 4 emphysema. One of the things that they've had to do, and luckily they were able, as Métis people, they were able to apply for a grant through their Métis government to do some upgrades to their home.

My mom could no longer cook in her kitchen because the fumes made it very difficult for her to breathe. So one of the upgrades and modifications happening to their home is a commercial-size ventilation system so that she can cook again, so that those fumes are taken out of the home. They are also putting a new ventilation system in the—their bathroom because when the shower is going, it also makes it extremely difficult for my mom to breathe.

And so, modifications are the key to helping people age at home, but not every senior has the means to pay for those modifications. For my family,

fortunately, they were lucky that they had a grant program, but not every senior has that opportunity.

We have seniors living in remote areas. We have seniors that have lost family members, and they're completely on their own. They need to know that they can count on a Manitoba NDP government to make sure that they're taken care of.

You know, having a seniors advocate, I think, is huge. People need a voice to represent them. Not everybody has the ability to speak up and advocate for themselves, and so a seniors advocate is there to do just that, to listen and bring forward any concerns that these citizens might have.

You know, we're going to continue to increase hours of care for patients in long-term care, bringing hours of care in personal-care homes with a goal of 4.1 hours per resident per day for direct staffing. This would include registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, health-care aides, you know, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, rehabilitation assistants.

I'm in my 50s. Some of my friends that I grew up with, their parents are even older than my parents, and so they have parents who are now in personal-care homes. And I listen to their stories, and I hear how hard it is for people working on those front lines and how they are depending on our government to turn things around for the safety of patients, for their own mental health and workplace safety for staff in these places.

They have huge responsibilities on them. They are caring for human beings. And we need to make sure that we care for the workers who care for human beings, to ensure the best possible quality care is being given to our citizens.

You know, we're building a new care home in Lac du Bonnet. Member opposite talked about all these cuts that our government is making. How can you cut something that didn't really exist? Funding wasn't in place. Just because you make promises on your way out of government doesn't mean that you've allocated the proper amount of funds.

We're taking a balanced approach. We're taking a responsible approach. That is our duty to the citizens of Manitoba. We're not going to make promises we can't keep. We are going to be measured in our responses, measured in our approach. I just want to remind folks for the record, you cannot build something that—or, cut something that didn't actually exist.

Manitoba seniors need to know we're coming to help. We're here. We're listening. Member opposite insinuated we are not a listening government, and I have to chuckle at that because that is completely false.

* (11:40)

I have been to so many events. I have been to so many meetings. I have been to so many places listening to folks specifically share what is going on with them. You know, it's funny that members opposite, you know, kind of heckled and said some things.

Be accountable for the work you do. I'm accountable for the listening I do. You know, it's one thing to listen but it's another thing to take action after you listen, and that's who we are. We don't listen and pretend and, you know, act like we're going to do something and just not follow through.

We have the follow-through. You can count on us; we're here for you.

Thank you.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): First, I just want to remind all my colleagues that we, as legislators, are here—are all here because we want to do our best work for our constituents, communities and our province. And that means seniors, as well.

I've had the opportunity to tour many of the care homes in Winkler-Morden area. I've had opportunities to tour many of the seniors complexes with—that have assisted living floors in them, and they're doing great work. And I just want to say that we meet with—I meet with my seniors.

I've had the opportunity to give certificates out and take pictures and just visit with 100-year-old seniors in my community. And it's extremely exciting to do those things and to honour them and value them, because that's what we're here for.

We are all here to help ensure that seniors are able to age in place with dignity, having what they need to live comfortable, successful lives in their communities. That should be all of our goals, and that should be the focus of this conversation here today.

Most of us in this room have seniors in our family. And part of our lives that we love dearly and would do anything to make sure that they are healthy, happy, having what they need to age in place and where they want to be.

My mom, Helen Hildebrand, is a beautiful 74-year-old senior, who I love dearly. She is the glue

that holds our family together and has given so many years of her life to help take care of us, as well as others in the community.

She has loved us unconditionally. She has worked hard for her whole life and still volunteers and gives so much back to our community. She enjoys breakfast with her friends, sitting on her driveway in the sun with a lawn chair with the rest of the seniors in her retirement community that she lives in.

I will do all that I can to help her stay in her home that she loves as long as I can. And we are all committed to that across this—over on this side of the aisle.

She deserves and expects, as do all the seniors in our province, for us legislators to do our best. I am deeply disturbed to listen to the MLA across the aisle talk about me and my colleagues like we don't care about seniors. But the member of Radisson took her 10 minutes to boldly talk about—or to talk about what things that the PCs didn't do. Meanwhile, we should be here to focus on the seniors and that's what I actually thought was going to be happening today.

You were talking to my mom, a senior watching here right now. It's offensive and shows low character. I want to challenge all of my fellow MLAs to start talking with integrity and putting our constituents and our province first.

The past PC government has done a lot of good things for our seniors. As long as the PC—along with my PC colleagues, I believe in taking care of our seniors and those that help to take care of them also. I deeply appreciate all the staff that work with our seniors.

I want to say thank you to all of those who are working with our seniors every day. Along with my PC—I want to say thank you for taking care of the seniors that we have in our homes, through health care, through home care, through palliative care, through our hospital systems, our care homes. There's just so many people working to keep our seniors safe and take care of their needs, so thank you for that.

In 2022, the PC government created the department of seniors and long-term care, the first of its kind: a department specifically and solely for seniors. To me, this is not a fail. To me, this is really a great thing. I think we need to build on things like that, things that have put us in the right trajectory to continue to care for the seniors in our lives.

In February of 2023, the government released Manitoba, A Great Place to Age, a Provincial Seniors Strategy, a full, detailed and comprehensive plan that would provide supports and assistance to seniors in the province to get help that they need. From this strategy, \$30 million in two years targeted key investments and initiatives for our seniors.

I want to focus on the things that are good and I want to focus on the things that have been done. We need to continue to work toward the things that need to happen. We need to continue to support those that are in care, those that are going into care homes, and those that are at home still to continue to work hard. We need to be of integrity and we need to work together, all of us, to do the best we can for our communities and for our seniors.

Thank you.

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): Like my colleague from Morden-Winkler, I do agree that every member in this House does respect seniors personally and I don't—I think it's important for us to remember when members opposite are making general comments about the opposition's record in government, it's not to be taken personally and to respond with personal jabs about someone's character.

But I will agree with you on your sentiment about everyone's personal feelings towards seniors and especially how hard we're each working in our communities to respect seniors. The seniors have built our province. You know, that's something we can all agree on and we absolutely need to thank them for their hard work and sacrifices.

We're going to do our part to take care of them each and every day in our communities and here in government. Our government is committed to honouring the generations that have raised us with better care for seniors, no matter where they choose to age. Manitoba seniors built our province. They worked hard and sacrificed to make life better for their children, grandchildren, and now it's our turn to care for them.

Seniors are critical members of our communities and they deserve to be heard by their government. And so we're going to stand alongside them, which is why we bring—are bringing forward our seniors advocate, like some of my colleagues have mentioned, and, so that seniors can have a strong voice here in our province.

Budget '24 made it clear that caring for seniors in this province is one of our top priorities. Our budget

includes a new tax credit for seniors and funding for seniors accessibility upgrades so everyone can enjoy their retirement with dignity. Seniors deserve the basic dignity and respect of choosing where they want to live for as long as they can safely do so.

It's crucial that we take a good look at the system and how it currently functions. A comprehensive analysis of the current state of Manitoba's long-term-care system is currently under way and it will inform our next steps while we take time to fulfill Manitoba's health-care needs.

We must remember that caring for seniors in our community goes beyond the health-care system. It's also ensuring that everyone in Manitoba has the capacity to thrive and live in this province. That's why we're making targeted investments to improving the quality of life for all Manitobans.

Just this past week while we weren't here at the Legislature, in my local community, while we were in constituency week, and we actually called it specifically seniors week in Kildonan-River East. We were in a different seniors block each day visiting and meeting the seniors where they're at and hearing from the seniors in our community to see what their various needs are and to see what we could be doing as a community to be better serving our local older adults.

And you'd be surprised. One building to the next, right next door, the buildings from the outside look identical, but everyone's got something different to say and we were hearing the good, bad and the everything in between and, you know, making notes and reporting back to see how we can improve.

So I urge folks to be doing that in their communities and seeing how we can better serve our seniors. And then this past Sunday, also in Kildonan-River East, we had a spring search for Mr. Earl Moberg.

* (11:50)

Some of you might have heard of this tragic situation. It's—he's an 81-year-old senior in our community that went missing in December, and the family has still yet to have closure. And so it was a beautiful sunny day where neighbours from our community and across the province gathered to help the family, and it was a really beautiful moment.

So I believe very truly and agree, like I mentioned, with our colleague across the floor, that I know everyone in this room and many from all across the

province truly care for seniors, and that was evident in our community the other day.

So I really appreciated this opportunity to share some words about what we're doing in our community and how much our government is really committed to seniors.

So thank you.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this subject today, because I am very close to becoming a senior. *[interjection]* I know it may not appear that way.

The one thing I do want to talk about here as well, too, is, I can't change the past, but I hope I can be a rod to move the future along too. And seniors are such an important part of our community.

When I—when it was talked about of who are we speaking to here—last week, actually, I was hoping this would come forward, because it gives me such an opportunity to tell you about some of the people that I got to speak with in my constituency last week, actually, about seniors.

Number 1, I speak to all seniors groups in the Portage constituency on a quarterly basis. Last week, I also had the opportunity to speak to Long Plain, Dakota Tipi, Dakota Plains, Sandy Bay, Swan Lake First Nations as well, too, even though some of those people aren't in my constituency.

I want to bring forward as well, too, the issue of the—you know, one of the things that we run into with seniors is accessibility. And a lot of them no longer have licences or are able to drive to get to appointments, to buy groceries or anything like that.

So our seniors and—are part of the most vulnerable people out there that are feeling the effect of this carbon tax on groceries that this NDP government continues to support, and those people are getting affected by it. The members opposite talked about the tax relief. Well let's be honest about the tax relief: it's \$28. You know what, \$28 per year for a senior, that's not going to cover the carbon tax.

So the one thing that I do want to talk about here is this resolution really reminds me of a Paul Simon song, and I believe it went: 50 ways to forget about seniors; let's hop on the bus, Gus. The member from Radisson talked about looking at transportation to get people to appointments out there.

I want everybody in the Chamber to close your eyes, and let's think about those seniors that are going

to travel from Long Plain to an MRI appointment in Morden, Manitoba. So No. 1, it's about an hour and a half each way, so that's three hours, and the appointments are 45 minutes. A hospital administrator from Southern Health suggested to me, let's load these busses up with seniors, let's load them up to get their MRIs done in these places.

Think about it: people that are in vulnerable situations, like these seniors, you're going to put them on a bus for a whole day. These people could be suffering from cancer, they could be suffering from knee issues and that. But no, we want to make sure that we have them travelling. So no, the idea of putting them on busses, is that a real idea?

You know what? It's time to make a new plan, NDP, just like the song says. You're going to have an opportunity here in the next one to two years of announcing a great big, beautiful hospital, the Portage regional hospital, in Portage la Prairie, one of the largest infrastructure projects in Canada. It's going to create extra beds. It's going to create extra dialysis beds. It's going to also contain places where seniors and some of our most vulnerable people can be.

So let's make a new plan and how about an MRI in a new hospital that treats seniors with respect, our most vulnerable people, instead of putting them on buses for days on end, that they might get to an appointment or they might not get to an appointment?

So let's think about our seniors when we talk about these issues here. There is no plan as usual for that. So don't let this be another plan to leave our seniors on buses and not give them an opportunity.

We want—on this side of the House, we want to stand up for seniors. We have seniors that are waiting in one assisted living facility in Portage. We've got people that are waiting six to eight months for MRIs. What's happening? Let's put them on a bus. Let's put them on a bus for a few days. That's the answer. We cannot disrespect our seniors by doing that.

Thank you so much for your opportunity.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): It is my pleasure to talk about the legislation or the result—resolution brought forward by the honourable member for Radisson (MLA Dela Cruz).

Coming from a rural background and acknowledging the seniors in the province of Manitoba, I'd like to share some of the personal life experiences we had—I had—*[interjection]*—given—I'll bring that up shortly.

But I do want to say, you know, the beauty about living out in the rural areas and talking about the importance of everyone in the province of Manitoba who are seniors, and dedication to what they've done. And agriculture's a prime example of the hard-working people that showed up from other parts of the world.

Well, let's go back 100 or some odd years ago. My family farm was recognized for over a 100 years of being in the family. And respecting our—the great-grandfather that showed up. And let me just build a bit of a story about how they came across as we can only imagine. And back in 1897, when they landed in Halifax—

An Honourable Member: Did they have buses then?

Mr. Kostyshyn: No bus. No jets, either, Jeff. But go ahead.

But the fact is, if you would respect the elders, the elders coming on a train, travelling, and back in those days—and the opportunity, to not know where they're going to land up and in fact, our relative, there was a six-month-old baby, my great-grandfather, that was coming across in a train, and this was 1897, and they landed up in Manitoba in the month of September. And they landed on the fact that they had this quarter of land, they had to build a house or some form of a residence, prior to the winter storm coming in. And then the opportunity to respect those people for what they sacrificed under that.

I know the members opposite are trying to make a joke of it and I totally—we really would respect that they would show acknowledgement to the seniors, to the heritage people that brought this across to build this country, in Manitoba. So, in all due respect, please respect the people that came from other countries—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kostyshyn: —and built this province and built agriculture what it is today in the province of Manitoba. And I do have that time to—the give them respect—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kostyshyn: And I know the member from Portage la Prairie chooses to want to grandstand. I give him the opportunity. Go ahead. But all respect, please respect the elders that have showed up here in this country, in this province of Manitoba.

And I do want to continue to 'resignate' on the importance of the fact that, you know what, we—they were in government for seven and a half years. What kind of respect did they provide to the seniors in our province of Manitoba? They chose to close down the care home—*[interjection]* Sorry?

An Honourable Member: Yes, sit down.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Sit down? *[interjection]* I will. I will. Okay.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Swan River.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Thank you—

The Speaker: Order please.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

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