

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 11, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated. Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I'm going to do two things on House business, Madam Speaker.

Pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin). The title of the resolution is Immediate Supports to Ensure Child Care is Affordable and Accessible.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak. The title of the resolution is Immediate Supports to Ensure Child Care is Affordable and Accessible.

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Ms. Fontaine: Madam Speaker, can you call Bill 212 for second reading debate this morning?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Bill 212 this morning.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

**Bill 212—The Mandatory Training
for Provincial Employees
(Systemic Racism and Human Rights) Act**

Madam Speaker: So, I will now call Bill 212, The Mandatory Training for Provincial Employees (Systemic Racism and Human Rights) Act.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I move, seconded by the member from Burrows, that Bill 212, The Mandatory Training for Provincial Employees (Systemic Racism and Human Rights) Act; Loi sur la formation obligatoire des employés provinciaux (racisme systémique et droits de la personne), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable member for St. Vital, seconded by the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar), that Bill 212, The Mandatory Training for Provincial Employees (Systemic Racism and Human Rights) Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Moses: I am pleased to be bringing Bill 212 into the House for debate today in second reading.

As we know, many people in Manitoba live through the negative impacts of racism every day in their lives.

I personally have experienced the harmful effects of racism in my life and in family members' lives, but then I know members of the Chamber have also experienced racism in their life.

But this isn't about me. It's about the people in our communities that often don't have the voice to stand up to racism.

This is about the people who, often, when trying to navigate a system find that it is so stacked against them that they have no hope, no chance of succeeding in trying to achieve their goals.

This is about us trying to break down those barriers today, to educate employees on systemic racism, on anti-racism strategies and to help to ensure that all Manitobans have equal opportunity in our lives.

On June 5th, 2020—less than one year ago today—on the steps of the Legislature, about 20,000 Manitobans gathered and rallied and marched in the Justice 4 Black Lives rally. Their voices were heard loud and clear, that they demanded justice. They demanded racial justice and equality.

And it's our job as leaders in this Chamber to listen to those voices, to ensure that they will be heard and acted on by all of us as leaders. And regardless of whether those people who marched and rallied in that Chamber were from my constituency in St. Vital, downtown in Union Station, up in Selkirk and Dauphin, from Brandon, Thompson, Flin Flon, any corner of this province, there are people who are affected negatively by the impacts of racism and systemic racism.

And so every member should have the responsibility to advocate for those—for their constituents who need to have their voices heard in the fight for equality. And until we realize—all of us realize—that as—individually, it's our responsibility to combat racism.

Every person needs to see—regardless of their skin colour or their heritage or their nationality and where they may have been born—that racism is a problem for them, and racism is a problem that they have a responsibility of solving. Until everyone can do that, we can't fully build an equal society in Manitoba.

And so today we have that opportunity, in this Bill 212, to say our priorities and say that we want to take a step in the journey towards bringing a more equal community in our province. This is an opportunity that we have today with this bill.

Yes, this bill would require regular anti-racism training for provincial 'poyees'—employees. It is a step on the path that we should take today, because we have this opportunity. And although I know many trainings are happening around—throughout the province and in the city, this bill would ensure that it becomes law, and thus part of the system that is now fighting against racism and fighting against systemic racism. It's good that some training does happen, but it's far better to ensure and guarantee through law that it will continue to always happen.

As leaders, we need to set ourselves on the path to ridding our communities of racism, and we can do that in this bill today.

In a few minutes we're going to go through debating this bill, and I know many members will have an opportunity to speak and share their views. And I encourage them to not just talk about that adversity that they've experienced in their lives or in their communities but to actually talk about racism, and to talk about anti-racism and what the positive effects that being an anti-racist can have on individuals' lives and on a community.

*(10:10)

And perhaps as leaders it would be great to share stories of how you have broken down barriers for others, or promoted people who are different than you and lifted them up in their lives.

And I hope that we can do that in—during this period of debate to show that—Manitobans that we are serious about ending racism in all its forms: individual racism, overt racism, systemic racism and even smaller, less obvious forms of racism that exist 'prevadently' in our society.

And I'm looking very much forward to the debate today, and I hope that we can all, as members, see the value of supporting this type of bill, the value that your constituents will see in supporting this type of bill, because we all want to bring a more equal society to each constituency that we represent.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Questions

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

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Can the member opposite expand on who they consulted with on the drafting of this bill?

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I thank the member for Waverley for the question.

We did a lot of consulting. We consulted with many equity, diversity and inclusion experts on this bill, namely from—folks from University of Manitoba, University of Toronto. We also consulted with many community stakeholders, people as—in the Black and

African, Caribbean communities and ACOMI, as well as individuals in the Indigenous community, and as well as individuals in—members of communities of colour, including the Filipino community in Manitoba; and they're all, you know, very unanimous in saying that this is a bill that would be beneficial for us to invest in—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Burrows have a question?

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Yes, I do.

Can I ask the member, how will this bill help address systemic racism within the provincial workplace?

Mr. Moses: It's a great question, because this bill will allow provincial employees to get training on anti-racism strategies and on how racism might affect the work that they do, break down those barriers, and make their workplace, for them, more equal and also open the door for more people to come in the future.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I want to thank the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) for bringing forward this very important bill.

The one question I had actually relates to the ability of people to make complaints or seek justice. We saw with the situation recently with firefighters and paramedics, there was an issue with members—paramedics making complaints and then not being taken seriously.

So I was wondering, do you also see a need or a potential, in addition, to ensure that there is a, sort of a whistleblower component, as well a possibility of sanctions, to add to this?

Mr. Moses: I think that racism can rear its head in so many forms. And we've seen that played out in very public settings, in the media—through media stories recently, and I think it's shameful that those situations occur.

They need to be addressed, they need to be rooted out and also they need—public needs to be sure, in those cases, that the services they can rely on, such as, you know, fire, paramedics, are trustworthy people and they're going to get the proper service regardless of who they are or what nationality or race they might be—might belong to.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Can the member please tell the House how—what is so unique

about this bill in comparison to what we currently offer in terms of mandatory training?

Mr. Moses: This bill specifically says that the training is going to be required on anti-racism training. Anti-racism training is very different than diversity or inclusion training. It is specifically regarding how to break down barriers on racism and systemic racism, which is very different from inclusion and/or diversity.

It also addresses some aspects of implicit bias, and those are unique issues which need and require its own training, which this bill specifies.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Thank you very much to my colleague for St. Vital for bringing forward this resolution to discuss this morning in the House.

I know government employees currently receive a significant amount of training, and I heard the member explain the difference between the two, but can the minister—or can the member touch on the respectful workplace and harassment prevention policy and how his proposal differentiates from that policy, specifically, that is offered to government employees.

Thank you.

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the member's faux pas and perhaps a bit foreshadowing of calling me a minister, so I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

And I do want to say that this is a specific new training bill. It requires annual training on anti-racism policies, including aspects of implicit bias training, and it's very different than, you know, racism prevention policy or other issues. This is a training bill, and it allows and it 'mandate'—mandates that provincial employees be trained on anti-racism.

Mr. Brar: May I ask the member why is it important to work to address systemic racism within the workplace?

Mr. Moses: Thank you very much for the question.

You know, the workplace is a space where we spend a lot of our time. For many people, it's most of their waking hours are spent with their colleagues at work. Having that as a safe space is critical to people's well-being in their lives and it's our job as leaders to ensure that those safe spaces exist.

By having anti-racism training, it will better allow for those safe spaces and anti-racism to exist in the workplace for individuals.

Madam Speaker: I would ask that if any members have questions that they indicate to the moderator that they wish to ask questions.

So, I'm just going to go back to my list and see if perhaps the honourable member for Waverley has a question.

Mr. Reyes: Can the member explain why his caucus members, and maybe even ask his fellow Indo-Canadian caucus members, why they kicked out a former member of their caucus of—who was the only Indo-Canadian minister from their caucus? Can he explain that, please?

Mr. Moses: Well, first of all, Madam Speaker, I will offer no explanation, because that is irrelevant to this bill. This is an anti-racism training for provincial employees. That's what this Bill 212 is and that's what it's for.

And I think that it's a disservice to this bill and to the people of Manitobans to distract with questions that are non-relevant. We—it's long overdue that we address racism and this bill acts as a step to do that, and so I invite any other questions to be focused on this bill and on fighting racism.

Mr. Brar: I like to be positive and I would like to ask this positive question: How will this bill allow marginalized groups to advance their careers as provincial employees?

* (10:20)

Mr. Moses: That's a great question.

You know, some of the roadblocks that marginalized groups—marginalized people—face in the provincial government is due to racism and systemic racism. Many of that happens during the hiring process, in getting jobs in the first place. And some of it happens once you're hired in the career path and being—able to be promoted and are facing roadblocks of racism in those systems. And so this bill aims to break down some of those barriers, to allow individuals to have a more equal path in their career as provincial employees.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): Thank the member for bringing this bill and raising this important issue.

Can the member opposite inform the House what steps the former NDP government did to address systemic racism while they were in power?

Mr. Moses: I think that this Bill 212 is focused squarely on education. And as we know with education and training, it's about building better

pathways for the future. So I'll focus on—instead of reliving anything in the past, I'll focus on how we can make life better for those ahead of us in the future. That's what Bill 212 does; that's what I'm going to focus on doing. And I think that all of us should be supporting Bill 212 as it's a great way to promote equality across our province.

Mr. Brar: Can I ask the member that what impact will this bill have outside the workplace?

Mr. Moses: Thank you very much for the question.

It's great to know that the—that—or, member from Burrows is thinking—the larger scale. And I think Bill 212 will have an—a greater impact. As provincial employees and as leaders here, it's great that we know Bill 212 will, you know, be an example for other Manitobans to take on anti-racism training, tackle racism in their own lives. And I think that it will only make—not just the provincial employees, but our whole community—a more equal place for all of us to live. And I think that's something that we should—eager to adopt, eager to jump on. And I encourage all members to support this bill, because I think it is a wonderful opportunity for you to go to your constituents and say that you fought—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The time for this question period has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Good morning, everyone, and thank you, Madam Speaker.

Before I begin, I just want to say that one year ago it was officially declared a pandemic, and that we all have had to adjust our daily lives for the better. Some of us have been affected personally, including myself, as I lost my aunt and uncle to COVID-19. We have had to adjust, as I said.

I would like to thank the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) for raising the awareness of racism through his proposed bill of the mandatory training for provincial employees, systemic racism and human rights.

It's a subject that I have experienced growing up as a child. The negative experiences of racism are mental incidences that I've grown up with. As an adult as I've changed careers of being part—a part-time banquet server to joining the Canadian Armed Forces, working as a civil servant, in business and now as an

MLA, you learn, you participate in mandatory training as mandated by the organization you work for.

Organizations are always trying their best—in my mind—to keep up-to-date with the current events, which filters into the training courses and programs to ensure employees, employers from top to bottom, are well-informed. The overall goal is to provide a comfortable setting at the workplace.

Speaking of the workplace, with regards to our provincial employees, I don't know if the member has really done his due diligence and research on the bill that he is proposing. I don't know if he already knows that our government has taken the necessary steps to improve the respectful workplace policies of our governments. And we will continue to make improvements when needed.

There are already ongoing learning and development opportunities are offered—that are offered to employees, to reinforce core values and key policies, including training that helps build more diverse, inclusive and respectful workplaces, which include the following mandatory course for all employees: The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, Inclusion and Diversity in the Workplace, Building Respectful Workplaces, Supporting an Ethical Environment in the Manitoba Government.

Let me repeat to the member: they are mandatory. This past year the Civil Service Commission also launched a new webinar learning series entitled Racism, Unconscious Bias and Discrimination that is currently being offered to all employees.

Madam Speaker, let's not forget also, it was our PC government that has advanced anti-racism approaches, and I can list some of them. On June 25th, 2020, our Premier (Mr. Pallister) endorsed the First Ministers' statement on anti-racism, which condemns all forms of racism, discrimination, intolerance and bigotry. The statement also expressed the need to focus on removing social and economic barriers and providing economic opportunities and leadership roles in the communities across Canada.

On November 27th, 2019, our Premier introduced The Religious Freedom of Citizens resolution, which is unanimously supported by all Manitoba MLAs. In July of 2019, the Manitoba government issued a full page advertisement in Quebec newspapers describing 21 reasons why you feel at home in Manitoba. This was in response to Quebec's controversial Bill 21, the so-called secularism law. The document remains on the provincial's government website.

Renewal of the Pathways to a Better Future, Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy was published in March 2019. The strategy is—response to the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and sets out to guide the government's action on addressing the negative impact of the residential schools, intergenerational poverty and rebuilding the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Manitobans.

The decolonization of service and program delivery is also taking place through the promotion of inclusive, respectful and mindful policies and processes. In 2019–2020, the Manitoba government invested over \$110,000 on a new and ongoing initiatives to train public servants.

Our society has come a long way. Unfortunately, racism still exists, will exist, and that is why we will continue to improve and enhance policies, procedures, regulations and the training needed to eliminate racism, not just in the workplace but in our everyday lives.

I'm proud to be part of a government that has done this and that'll continue to do this. I'm proud to be part of government that'll continue to listen to Manitobans. Remember, it was a PC government that created the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, allowing many immigrants from all walks of life, from different cultures and religions to immigrate to Manitoba, the home of hope.

And I'm proud to be part of government that represents many of these immigrant communities across our province, in Winnipeg, of—for sure, and I've had the opportunity to meet many of them.

For me, personally, being of Filipino heritage, I've always enjoyed meeting fellow Filipino Manitoban Canadians, who I've been to the—who I've seen in the many towns that I've visited: Virden, Neepawa and Minnedosa, to name a few.

I'm proud to represent the many ethnic communities in my constituency of Waverley. So I'm very, very cognizant to the people I represent and the reality of racism and discrimination. And I'm very proud that our government has and will continue to improve, enhance and take the necessary steps to combat racism, not just in the workplace but everywhere.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I need to correct the record from earlier, as I had misspoke. I should have said that this motion was moved by the honourable member for

St. Vital (Mr. Moses) and seconded by the honourable member for Burrows.

Continuing in debate, the honourable member for Burrows.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Thanks for opportunity to speak on this wonderful bill brought forward by my wonderful colleague, member from St. Vital.

* (10:30)

As we all know, that this is the topic we should be talking about actively at this point of time. And we should know that it's not enough to not to be a racist, rather we need to be anti-racism. I would share this with you, that my faith teaches us that all of us are born from a single light.

Punjabi spoken. Translation unavailable.

I want to say that my faith teaches us that all the human race is one. It's very easy to read this sentence. It's very easy to understand the meaning of all the human race is one, but the question here is are we able to practise this? Are we careful enough to respect all skin colours? Are we respectful enough to all ethnicities? Are we respectful enough to all genders? Are we respectful enough to other languages, cultures, festivals and so on? This bill attracts our attention to this important issue.

Why we are discussing this bill today? Because all of us realize that a lot needs to be done in this respect.

I appreciate all the governments in Canada and other countries who have taken steps to bring in policies of inclusiveness, but, Madam Speaker, I think that's not enough. We need to do a lot more in this direction. That's the reason we are discussing this bill right now, here in this Chamber today.

If everything was okay, no one would need to research and bring such bills. And I'm really impressed by my colleague and my caucus, who decided on this topic as a potential legislation. And I expect all the members in this Chamber to vote in favour of this bill, because this is beyond our partisan politics. It talks about humanity. It talks about all of us.

Sometimes I think, where this racism comes from? I understand this is a learned behaviour. No kid is born racist. So the first environment that a kid gets into is the family. So I think if somebody is learning to be a racist, it's a learned behaviour, and where they learn it from is from the environment they live in.

As parents, we need to teach our kids that all the human race is one. We need to bridge the gaps between different ethnic groups. Whenever we recruit in our organizations, we need to make sure to include people from various backgrounds. That's how we come closer, that's how we understand each other.

It's natural to have prejudices. Everyone has prejudices until you start talking to people who do not look like you. Once the conversation starts, you would start finding similarities between each other. You would start building respect for other people and you would start working towards harmony, love, peace in this society.

I was upset with the comments from one of the members who was trying to distract us—all of us—from the focus, from the main theme that we are discussing today. That tells us about the lack of seriousness to work together on such legislation which are so positive, so inclusive, so respectful.

Can anybody think that this legislation would be disrespectful to a single person on this earth? No, because it talks about love, harmony, peace, respect. Can we just keep our political ideologies aside and do the right thing?

That's why—that's what we have been elected to do. We have been sent as in—we have been sent here in this Chamber by the people who trust us, and they have expectations from us.

In the past, in this Chamber, we have discussed Quebec's Bill 21. We have discussed about religious freedom of our citizens, and the members opposite, they are praising our Premier (Mr. Pallister) that he did a great job on this resolution, inclusiveness.

I would be impressed if the people outside this Chamber say that loud, if the Manitobans, Canadians, say that loud.

Self-praise is a different story. If you are really doing great, you would be really inclusive. If the Premier was really, really working towards this religious freedom of Canadians sincerely, the honourable Premier should have allowed me to second that resolution.

We need to think positive. We need to think big. We need to think in a way that pleases the people who trust us, and we need to get up. We need to get up and we need to work together.

I hope all the members in this Chamber would vote for this bill brought forward by my colleague, member from St. Vital.

Thank you so much for the opportunity, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Just for the information of the House, when members speak in debate in another language, for the courtesy of others listening or reading this in Hansard, the member should restate the comments in English, and I believe in this case the member did.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on Bill 212, sponsored by the honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses). I believe that every Manitoban has a role to play in addressing racism and ensuring human rights are observed while strengthening collective networks and relationships that advance the benefits of diversity and inclusion.

* (10:40)

Now, I know members of the current NDP caucus don't like this topic being raised, but the fact remains that during their 17 years in government, the NDP had difficulty creating a respectful workplace for all employees, which I think everyone listening to this debate will agree is a basic human right.

In contrast, our government has committed to ensuring that all employees have access to a respectful workplace. The Civil Service Commission's report on harassment was a real eye-opener and showed that the NDP never took any concrete steps to solve the issues that created a toxic work environment in the Manitoba Legislature.

Under the NDP, there was no accountability and no concrete actions were taken when they had the chance. For years, talk of inappropriate behaviour ran rampant through the workplace, some that included very high profile members of the previous government, that included senior staff and elected officials. Reports that ministers acted inappropriately towards staff appeared in the news, but those who were responsible never faced any accountability for their actions.

It would be nice to give the opposition the benefit of the doubt and say that these were isolated incidents that took place, and that an investigation and swift action was taken against those accused. Unfortunately, this was not the case. In fact, many reports that came out during this time suggest that there may have been a pattern to this behaviour in the former government.

According to the statements from those who came forward, a common theme existed where many people—for the most part women—were left out of decision-making, and a fear of senior staff also existed. The report indicated others had a certain immunity around them, resulting in no meaningful action taken for the misconduct that occurred.

Arguably, the most disturbing part about the entire situation was the way in which senior staff decided to handle a situation. The women who came forward stated that they were told to suck it up and that no further action would be taken. This sort of dismissal of complaints was, and is, simply unacceptable.

It is extremely unfortunate that the NDP's own staff felt silenced when they came forward to their supervisors about these incidents. Their concerns were dismissed and swept under the rug. When staff at the top of the chain of command do not take steps to address such serious allegations, the culture is created that these sorts of incidents are acceptable and can occur without punishment or accountability.

In fact, the same report that investigated the workplace harassment claims stated that key members in the Manitoba NDP contributed to a toxic environment and a culture of bullying in the party. They also described this culture as over-sexualized, sexist and misogynist.

The NDP took no responsibility in—when it came to workplace harassment, and many of the issues that have been reported over the years went unpunished. Many stories came out about their mistreatment of staff after they lost government.

Now years after these incidents occurred with the NDP, one of their current members is coming forward with legislation in Bill 212, demanding that government address racism and these sorts of human rights issues that his own party failed to address for 17 years.

Madam Speaker, our government has taken the necessary steps to create respectful workplace policies for all staff and elected officials, and we will continue to make improvements when needed. Our government is very proud of the progress we have made on correcting harassment, bullying and racism in the workplace. Our government created the no-wrong-door policy and conducted a review in 2018 with the input of past civil servants to ensure that workplace complaints and harassment were dealt with efficiently and appropriately.

Madam Speaker, I certainly believe it is important that we see all people as Manitobans and Canadians and not judge or treat human beings any different based on race, religion or gender. Our government will continue to take the necessary steps to ensure a respectful workplace for all employees.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We are very happy to support this measure. I think it's incredibly important.

Just as a brief comment, I want to say that when it comes to what the members of the government are saying, they seem to be—have no idea whatsoever what they are talking about, because this is about systemic racism, and it's quite possible in a systemic racism system for people to be very polite and to deny people rights, jobs and even their basic rights in a way that's completely polite, in a way that's completely acceptable in the workplace, because it's happening right now under this government when they pass laws that strip children of the right to vote for money that was stolen from them, or when they pass laws or they propose laws that make it more likely for Indigenous people to be shot, which is what—another element that's going to be on the docket for this government.

So the one area that I will disagree with is I think we do need to talk about the past because part of the reason Canada and Manitoba struggle with recognizing damaging policies is that the extreme views of the past have not just been forgotten, they've been deliberately erased and they've been buried. As I said, it's quite possible to be very polite and still be passing and enforcing bills and policies that are systemically racist.

Now, a century ago, the views expressed by prominent figures that people looked up to today were shocking. And because they proved embarrassing after the fact, they've been glossed over. So there were members of the Famous Five—we have a statue on the lawn—they endorsed eugenics. The writings of J.S. Woodsworth about Indigenous people and Black Canadians are appalling. And there are still devastating impacts about these attitudes today.

Many Canadians are unaware that the Ku Klux Klan once had a strong presence in western Canada and that Alberta and BC had sterilization laws on the books until the 1970s. Thousands of people, women and men, were sterilized without their consent. And it happened because politicians strongly believed in race-based eugenics, permanently sterilizing people,

especially marginalized people, to keep them from having children. Now, there are cases of Indigenous women being sterilized in Saskatchewan and Manitoba in the last 20 years.

The Ku Klux Klan had a presence in Canada a century ago, and they attacked people not just because of a different skin colour; they launched terrorist attacks especially on Catholics. A church in Quebec City was burned; a stick of dynamite blew a hole in a church in Barrie, Ontario; and in 1922, after getting threatening letters from the KKK, St. Boniface College was burned and 10 students died.

In the late 1920s, the KKK in Saskatchewan had 25,000 members, with chapters in every major city. They recruited politicians and Protestant ministers. And in 1928, a man named Daniel Carlyle Grant moved from Saskatchewan to Manitoba to recruit for the KKK. He was called a capable organizer with the instincts of a shark. He set up in Brandon, he came to Winnipeg, and he delivered racist anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic speeches peppered with racist slurs. When he said he was going to go to St. Boniface, the priest in charge of the St. Boniface Cathedral, Monseigneur Wilfred Jubinville, accused Grant of being a coward and warned him to stay out of St. B.

The St. Boniface chief of police said drastic police action would be taken against the Klan. The mayor of Winnipeg, Daniel McLean, a businessman and a veteran, said Grant should be ignored. Grant, he set up some chapters, and he went back to Saskatchewan where he went to work for J.J. Maloney, the head of the KKK there, for the 1929 election. The imperial wizard of the KKK in Saskatchewan, attended the Conservative Party convention. And on the May long weekend crosses were burned—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

I'm just going to ask the member—he's strayed quite a long distance away from the bill that is before us, and I would ask the member to bring his remarks back to the bill that is before us. And I'm sure he's getting to that point. So I would just encourage him to get specifically to talking about this bill that is before the House, which is about mandatory training for civil servants.

The honourable—[interjection]

The honourable member for—[interjection]

The honourable member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Lamont: So, with the support of the KKK, the Conservatives campaigned to defeat the Liberal government of James Gardiner, which was pro-immigration, pro-Catholic and anti-Klan. And the future Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, was a Conservative candidate in that election. The KKK had Conservative mayors, MLAs, and at least one MP. And Duncan C. Grant got a job running the employment office in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. And that's the political environment in Saskatchewan that Tommy Douglas found himself moving into in 1930, also to Weyburn. And this puts Douglas's master's thesis about eugenics in a different light—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order, please. I'm not sure if the member's aware of what the legislation is before the House this morning. [*interjection*] And no—and I don't want people to be laughing, because this is serious. It's a serious bill. But the bill is speaking to asking for mandatory training, and that is where the—I would ask the member for St. Boniface to get to that point in his debate.

* (10:50)

Mr. Lamont: I will say, Madam Speaker, that this is the sort of content that needs to be included in training.

The fact that in 1935, when Tommy Douglas was running against a Liberal and one of the key people on his campaign was that Ku Klux Klan organizer, Duncan C. Grant, who'd been fired from his government job because Liberals don't want Klansmen in their government.

This is the same Duncan C. Grant who spreads hate across Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and he was one of Douglas' closest advisers. He coached Douglas on speaking, he raised money for the campaign and he got "Bible Bill" Aberhart, the Social Credit premier of Alberta, to endorse Douglas. And when the CCF grassroots objected, M. J. Coldwell, the future CCF leader, ignored them.

Now, I'm sure this is a surprise to many, but the fact is this is the history that we have to deal with, and it has been swept under the rug for decades. There is also an effort to bring eugenics to Manitoba in 1940, the Leader of the Conservative Party, an MLA from Portage la Prairie, said that sterilization was required to reduce the number of people with disabilities and to save money.

And there was an MLA there who did not need to travel to Nazi Germany in 1936, as Tommy Douglas did, to know that sterilizing people is wrong. It was

the Liberal MLA for Iberville, he was a Protestant lawyer, he was a double—World War I veteran, and he told the Conservative leader, we can get along without sterilization for—we've got along without sterilization for hundreds of thousands of years, and we can get along with it for a while longer.

The element of individual freedom still counts for something. He said an idiot may be born in the royal palace and a Lincoln in a log cabin; we can't generalize. And that MLA was my grandfather, John S. Lamont.

We need to recognize that every human being is more than the group they belong to; they're more than the status they've been assigned in society. As an individual, unique and worthy of dignity and rights.

And when they speak up, they have to be heard. And we need to be prepared to deliver justice on their behalf, and that is something that the members of this Legislature have too often refused to do. So I'm more than happy to endorse this. We are—we have to confront these biases, but we cannot 'shky' away from the truth and the history of the parties in this Chamber, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I thank the Leader of the Liberal Party for that history lesson. I was hoping that he might get past—I think he got up to 1940, if I recall. Obviously, he didn't listen to the sponsoring member, the MLA for St. Vital's request that we try to focus on the issues at hand, and obviously the promotion of Bill 212, The Mandatory Training for Provincial Employees (Systemic Racism and Human Rights) Act, is what we are here to discuss today.

I'll be frank, Madam Speaker, and to my colleagues, obviously, I acknowledge that I am speaking from a position of privilege, and it is from that position that I can share my thoughts and my perspective.

Madam Speaker, the issue of racism, the issue of any kind of -ism, whether it's homophobia, whether it is transphobia, whether it is sexism, whether it is racism, it has no place in any of our society.

Actually, I think it's very appropriate that we're discussing Bill 212 today, as today is the one-year anniversary of the beginning, or the acknowledgement, that COVID-19 was a worldwide pandemic. I recall, actually, a year ago, when that announcement was made, and unfortunately, if I recall

right, it took a couple weeks for the NDP to even ask a single question about COVID-19 when it was declared a pandemic. Instead, they just simply talked slowly and at length and, I'm not even sure what they were talking about at the time, but obviously not the priorities of Manitobans.

Earlier this morning, Madam Speaker, and just coincidentally, I'd had an opportunity—a number of my colleagues had an opportunity that I know, I understand, members opposite have as well, spoke to representatives of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg.

It's very appropriate that these conversations occurred, because what was noted by our guests from the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg is what starts, and this is their comment, quote, what starts with Jews does not end there, Madam Speaker. And we have seen a significant increase in the number of hate crimes, anti-Semitic hate crimes, which I would hope that the issue of anti-Semitism would be addressed in the member for St. Vital's (Mr. Moses) Bill 212, the mandatory training for provincial employees. They shared with us statistics that indicated that 20 per cent of Canada's annual hate crimes actually target 1 per cent of the population. I mean, that is an incredible figure. And should put this into perspective, we saw, obviously the explosion of hate or the, you know, the manifestation of hate, south of the border with the storming of the Capitol. We saw individuals wearing T-shirts that were racist, sexist and, in many cases, anti-Semitic, with, actually, T-shirts talking about tours of concentration camps.

So that kind of—I mean, obviously, not just the cavalier attitude of an individual that would wear such a T-shirt, but the fact that there is an entrepreneur who is willing to create and sell such a T-shirt, speaks to the necessity of all of us as leaders here in this Chamber to do what we can to address systemic racism in our society.

This is an issue that goes beyond party politics, as noted by the MLA for St. Vital. This goes—this is not systemic racism; it is not a white issue; it is not a Black issue; is not a brown issue; this is a human issue, and no one is immune.

Just recently, actually, in the city of Brandon we had an unfortunate situation where a Black man, Kevin Taylor, was brutally assaulted by five individuals in a—and unfortunately, this hate crime—and it was a hate crime—these five individuals videotaped the assault and actually used very hateful and racist language towards the individual as they attacked them. Now, unfortunate that situation is,

Madam Speaker, I think that we should use that situation as an opportunity to elevate the conversation and have an understanding of what it means to be different in our society, what it means to have a different level of 'melanin' in your skin and what impact that may have on how people interact with you.

I know, for example, Madam Speaker, that racism and unsubstantiated and, frankly, ridiculous views occur in every segment of society. I know I recall reading an article recently about the co-founder of Black Lives Matter in Toronto. And I know the member for St. Vital talked about the Black Lives Matter rally at the Legislature, and I was fortunate to be there. I saw the passion of the 20,000-plus individuals who spoke with positivity and spoke with anger, but it's—kind of anger that's used to direct change. But it is even within the context of a rally to address Black Lives Matter, to address systemic racism within our court system, within our judicial system, within our police system and such, even within that rally you saw evidence of sexism and homophobia.

In fact, I recall one individual had a large placard, and I believe it said—and I did take a picture—it said something to the effect that: Your daughters love every inch of us. Why can't you? And it's unfortunate that somebody would use a backdrop of a Black Lives Matter rally to promote and to perpetuate those kinds of sexist views when it comes to Black Canadians and Black individuals.

Madam Speaker, we need to work together, and I know that civil servants, as employer or employees of the Province of Manitoba, do receive a significant amount of training, training that is, indeed, mandatory, that we all need to ensure is there for—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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

* (11:00)

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 12—Creation of an Independent Seniors Advocate Office

Madam Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and the time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Creation of an Independent Seniors Advocate Office, brought forward by the honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu).

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I move, seconded by the honourable member from Union Station,

WHEREAS seniors and older adults have contributed in so many ways to make Manitoba into the amazing province it is today and they deserve support and high quality care; and

WHEREAS there has been immense neglect and disregard for the care of seniors and older adults throughout this pandemic, and their needs are worthy of an Independent Officer of the Legislative Assembly; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government completely failed seniors by not meaningfully preparing for the second wave of the pandemic and failing to address issues of understaffing; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has continued to cut long term care funding which has placed long term care homes in crises and left seniors particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS there have been several reports of elder abuse and long term care home neglect throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS there have been numerous, preventable deaths at personal care homes in the province throughout the pandemic, as the Provincial Government failed to provide adequate supports and refused to take over the Maples and Parkview care homes; and

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the need to create a Seniors Advocate to oversee senior care, specifically in the health care system; and

WHEREAS creating the position and the office of the Seniors Advocate would have the power to initiate investigations, publicly and transparently release and table reports of long term care home inspections and investigations, as well as oversee government services for seniors in Manitoba.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately create an independent seniors advocate to address issues related to the care of seniors in Manitoba, which will ensure that gaps in the services and care for in senior—in the promise is meaningfully reviewed, protected and acted upon.

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

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to immediately create an independent seniors advocate to address issues related to the care of seniors in Manitoba, which will ensure that gaps in services and care for seniors in the province is meaningful, reviewed, protected and acted upon.

Mr. Sandhu: It is my honour—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Sandhu: It is my honour to introduce a very important resolution that will affect the lives of seniors in Manitoba every day.

Seniors and older adults have contributed in many ways to make Manitoba an amazing province. The elderly today need our support and we need to understand their needs and concerns that will ensure their good health.

The Pallister government has not understood the importance and the value of our seniors and has neglected and disregarded their care throughout the pandemic. This needs to be resolved, and the Pallister government needs to create an independent seniors advocate immediately to address issues related to the seniors in need in—seniors in Manitoba.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Seniors display strong social value and behaviour such as volunteering and caring for others. In this modern age, seniors are the most vulnerable in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

Older adults play important roles—important social roles in assistance their children, taking on care responsibilities, performing household tasks or working as a volunteer in the community. Their contributions in providing wisdom and advice to younger generations, to the society as a whole, should be acknowledged.

Although all these groups are at risk of contracting COVID-19, older adults face a significant risk of developing severe illness if they contract the disease, due to physiological changes that come with aging and potential underlying health conditions.

In June 2020, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives published the Manitoba Health Coalition report, Why Manitoba Needs a Seniors Advocate, said that, I quote: The advocate could monitor the provision of a range of services designed for older adults, analyzing of importance to the welfare of

adult-older adults and generally advocate in the interest of seniors.

The independent seniors advocate would have the authority to launch inquiries, publicize the tables report of long-term-home inspection and investigations as well as administer the government program to seniors in Manitoba.

The Pallister government did not learn anything from the first wave of COVID-19 from Ontario or Quebec and has completely failed toward seniors by not preparing for the second wave of the pandemic.

This is very important at this time that we had ample time of preparing what is coming for the second wave. We could have learned easily from Ontario and from Quebec what our government needed to take steps in.

Staffing was one of the main issues at that time, Madam Speaker. The Maples care home and the Parkview Place Long Term Care Home are the two examples of a how preventable deaths at the personal-care homes occurred in our province throughout the pandemic, which is a disappointment for Manitobans, seeing how the government is failing to take care of our vulnerable seniors.

This is, again—easily we could have learned from those two provinces. Even our member from Union Station has raised the issue so many times with the previous Health minister, asked the question during debates. What are you doing it—what are you—what did you learn from the provinces such as Quebec and Ontario? Well, the minister has no response to those ones.

The pandemic has had a significant negative impact on personal-care homes, with a greater number of outbreaks being reported in care facilities all around Winnipeg, which is not only affecting residents, but care workers and the families.

One personal-care home that falls into my constituency is the Maples Personal Care Home, who declared a COVID-19 outbreak on October 20, 2020 and was declared over on January 12, 2021. And in that period of time, 74 members and one staff member and 157 residents were tested positive for COVID-19, and there were 56 deaths linked to this outbreak at this care home.

I was just recently just looking at the Free Press and imagining, we are 57 members in the House. Imagine losing 56 members. This is a terrible, terrible

situation. We could have done more for our seniors, but this government totally ignored it.

The major issue that family members faced at the Maples Personal Care Home during the outbreak was that there was a lack of communication from the care home and government to family members. I personally called the Maples Personal Care Home two times to see if they have any update for the family members, to see I can provide that, because people were calling me. The family members were calling me to find out what is exactly going on. There was no communication from the personal-care home.

I emailed the Health Minister. To this date, I have not got any response back from our Health minister at that time, nor from our new Health Minister, either.

* (11:10)

This broke trust with the family members. Along with that, clinical-care guidance for all ill patients was not really readily available. There was a lack of effective infection prevention and control expertise at the site to help control of outbreaks.

The Parkview Place care home also reported 29 deaths linked to COVID-19. The first outbreak was declared at the Parkview Place care home on September 15th, 2020, leaving 39 staff members and 119 residents positive for COVID-19.

We had 105 days to learn not only from Quebec, from Ontario—that was five months—but from—learn from even Parkview Place, 105 days, how can we protect our seniors? Again, our member from Union Station has asked so many questions on this: What are you doing to protect our seniors at this care home; and futurely, like, in further down, at the Maples Personal Care Home? There was no response from the minister at that time. Only thing—only response we got: these deaths are unavoidable. That doesn't cut it with the family members, Madam Speaker—

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

Questions

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

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Good morning to everybody.

Whenever we have bills into—whether they're private members' bills or resolutions coming to the House, one of the first questions that seems to always be asked is, you know, who did the opposite member consult with on the resolution. So I want to stick along that line and ask the member who himself, personally, did he consult with, and what were their recommendations?

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Sorry, I did—could not see your chair with my computer, and that's why I was saying Madam Speaker. Sorry about that.

To the question from the member from Brandon East, we have heard a number of seniors, older adult advocacy groups and especially the family members, Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker. The family members are really, really important at this part. They were totally ignored during what happened at the Maples Personal Care Home, what happened at Parkview personal-care home. So those were the most important people that I have consulted or our party has consulted.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I want to thank my colleague, the member for The Maples, for bringing this resolution forward and for speaking so eloquently to the importance of this issue and honouring many families I know that he has been in communication with and provided support to during this pandemic on these matters.

Could the member for The Maples, my colleague, let us know, specifically, what he's heard from folks on the front line, folks in health care, about the importance and necessity for the immediate development of a seniors advocate?

Mr. Sandhu: A very good question from the member from Union Station.

I guess—and I not guess, sort of. I think the government should have got some advice from the Union Station member how to prevent these deaths. But, again, Manitobans are frustrated and upset with the Pallister government handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in care homes. Before the pandemic, many facilities faced staffing difficulties, leading to workers burning out and compromising patient care, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for The Maples for bringing

forward this resolution. We are very excited about it, and we will be supporting the resolution.

We do notice, however, that the resolution is very directed towards the pandemic, and we're wondering if the member for The Maples could share with us other reasons outside of the pandemic and care homes why having a seniors advocate here in the province of Manitoba would be beneficial.

Mr. Sandhu: It is very, very important to have a seniors advocate. As we have seen during this pandemic, even before the pandemic, that this Pallister government is ignoring our seniors. They need to have one place, one—you can say—all the services under one umbrella where they can access all those services. This is really, really important. Even it is more important now because of the pandemic.

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): In bringing forth this initiative, can the member indicate what research he has done in regard to the eight demographics in Manitoba?

Mr. Sandhu: It is very, very important what this resolution is calling for. It's calling for a seniors advocate who can look after, even though the seniors cannot express—sometimes they cannot express themselves, but their family members and all the society need to make sure our seniors are taken care of. This is what the resolution is calling for, and 65-plus and even younger-age seniors can be under this resolution, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MLA Asagwara: Can the member for The Maples, our wonderful colleague from The Maples, please share what some of the benefits are of keeping an office such as this independent of the government?

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you for that question from member from Union Station.

Madam—sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this bill have no influence or interference from the government, which we have seen is a big problem under this PC government. Priority will be centred upon what's best for seniors and not a political power of the day: non-partisan research, focused and independent entities. The public can access the transparent report information. It's very, very important that we have no interference, not whatsoever, from the government. And this have independent—

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

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Well, I'd like to thank the MLA for The Maples for bringing this

resolution for a seniors advocate forward. Could the member tell us—or tell this House what would the establishment of this position cost?

Mr. Sandhu: Any cost, doesn't matter what it is, to protect our seniors is none to me, to our party. We want to make sure our seniors are protected. They have contributed so much to Manitoba, to Canada, and they have taught us so much. There's no value how we can protect our seniors, doesn't matter what it costs, this side of the House, we will care our seniors more than the money. What the PC is care about only the bottom line.

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

MLA Asagwara: Can the member—our colleague from The Maples—share whether or not he believes, or if he's observed seniors, older adults, being disproportionately impacted during this COVID-19 pandemic?

* (11:20)

Mr. Sandhu: This is a very important question. Yes, they were, and we know there have been a great proportion of COVID-19 deaths in the country are as—in personal-care home, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In Manitoba, even in The Maples, we have seen 56 during that time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They deserve better than what this Pallister government has been providing us. They need care. They need the plan. They must have a plan. The government must have a plan on this, how to protect our seniors.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Thank you to the member from Maples for bringing this forward.

Question with the responsibility for appointing the seniors advocate: How would you ensure that this appointment would be neutral, not just through the appointment, but in its practice as well?

Mr. Sandhu: Well, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have found out in BC there can be an independent person who can look after our seniors—those seniors who need care every day. So we can have, here in Manitoba too, our seniors who need care, we can definitely appoint an independent person in this chair.

MLA Asagwara: I'm wondering if my colleague from The Maples can share why it's important for the seniors advocate to develop annual reports that call for investigations.

Mr. Sandhu: This is very important to ensure up-to-date, timely information is available and informing decision and policy making that communicate with the public and 'ensance' strategic planning, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate is open. Any speakers?

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I do want to sincerely thank the member for introducing this resolution and giving us an opportunity to discuss it and debate it in the House logically and, you know, to really put our thoughts and processes behind what this resolution would do.

So I'm always pleased to rise—or, in this case, virtually—you know, address the Chamber from my office here. And for the simple reason again, it gives us all an opportunity to provide our thoughts on this matter.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very confident that you will find everyone in this House and on Zoom agrees that the seniors and older adults in our communities have definitely created an opportunity for each of us to live our lives and to be successful. The roads to our lives have been created by those who come before us, by those who have worked hard to ensure that we have a place to learn and grow. And now we all have an obligation to ensure that we carry this forward for our children, for their children and for all the children who will follow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do have to say, though, that I am truly disappointed in some of the comments or even the content in the member's resolution. For example, one of the comments that the members make, and I'm going to quote it here in one of his whereas, is: There has been immense neglect and disregard for the care of seniors and older adults throughout this pandemic.

And I will agree with a previous comment made by another member of the House that said most of this, if not all of this resolution, really gears towards the pandemic itself.

I know for a fact that thousands of employees from health-care workers to those who operate various modes of transportation, store clerk—clerks, pardon me—and thousands of family providers have cared for our seniors and our older adults throughout this pandemic. In fact, I had the extreme pleasure of

joining the store owner, Mr. Greg Gingras, from—and the great folks at Sobeys West in Brandon who—and helped them to deliver grocery orders to our seniors who were confined to their homes during the lockdown.

There is no greater feeling, believe me, than helping others in a time of need, and I truly believe that the human spirit—it definitely is alive and well towards our seniors and our adults, not just during this pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but each and every day of the year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I may only have known the member from The Maples from inside this House, but I am going to give the member some leeway, as I do not believe that he truly feels that a blanket statement, as is made in this resolution, is fitting for each and every Manitoban. And I'm sure that's not what he meant, even though that's what was put in the documentation.

So in reading the entire content of this resolution, I can see that the member is immense in the ill effects that COVID-19 has played on our society. I can easily say that the member is not alone in his feeling towards the pandemic. The lives of every Manitoban has been affected in one way or another. It is because of the hard work of every Manitoban that we see our rates coming down, that our businesses are starting to slowly reopen and a love of our seniors and older adults continues to grow.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it did not take a pandemic for this government to act. You see, I have the honour and privilege of being the legislative assistant to the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living from October, 2019 to February, 2021. During this time, I met with numerous advocacy groups, local groups, health-care organizations, seniors groups and members of the general public who are all providing for seniors and older adults in our community.

So to say that we need a seniors advocate because nothing is being done by, you know, for our seniors and our older adults, I think is a statement that just needs to be addressed. Again, you know, I've had the very thoughtful and meaningful conversations with Connie Newman of the Manitoba Association of Senior Centres. This is an association that does some incredible work facilitating communication, networking and planning among senior centres, along with assisting in the development of senior centres and other senior-serving organizations.

Miss Newman is also the past president of the St. James Assiniboia 55+ Centre and was a tremendous asset in assisting me, in engaging with Jim Evenrick [*phonetic*] with aging—pardon me—Active Aging in Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm definitely want—not one to say that I know everything. In fact, I truly believe that we all learn something new almost every day of our lives, and I appreciate the education from Mr. Evanchuk as he explained how Active Aging in Manitoba is dedicated to the promotion of active aging opportunities for all older Manitobans.

Their mission, if someone wants to go online and look at it, is right there and says that it is to enhance the health, mobility and continuing participation in their community. They also provide the provincial organization, the planning and implementation of the annual Manitoba 55+ games, for which I personally know quite a few participants, and I'm sure members of this House do as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the time I spent in my legislative assistant role, I also had the opportunity to have some great discussions with Amanda Macrae from the A&O: Support Services for Older Adults. For those of you who are unaware, this organization—they offer specialized programs and services to older Manitobans that support, enhance their social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual lives. And it promotes active participation in all aspects of community life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Michelle Porter from the Centre on Aging and her team at the University of Manitoba are doing some amazing things for older adults that cannot be overlooked. If you were to check their website, you would see that they're a multi-disciplinary research centre conducting age-related research while supporting the work of their research affiliates. They provide opportunities to students who specialize in aging, as well as providing community outreach through their events and various aging resources.

The key to the future of our seniors and older adults in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to remain in touch with the organizations throughout the province who are doing some tremendous work.

Since assuming my role in—as an MLA in 2016, I've had the opportunity to engage in some great conversations with Wendy Schettler from the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba. Some of you may remember back to June 2017 when my

own private member's bill, bill 214, The Missing Persons Amendment Act (Silver Alert), was passed in this House. It's a great deal of input and dialogue occurred with Wendy and her team.

* (11:30)

Seniors and older adults have a number of resources available to them in Manitoba, and Samantha Rodeck of the transportation option for seniors is a great contact to have. During our discussions I was able to understand the important role that organization plays in the lives of our seniors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we continue to discuss this resolution around the need and desire for a seniors advocate in the province this morning, I need to ensure that everyone in this House, in fact, every older adult in Manitoba, is aware that there are organizations out there who are ready, willing and eager to help in any way possible.

One of my conversations over the past 14 months was with Laura Watts at CanAge. For those of you who are unfamiliar with CanAge, it is an independent non-profit organization which educates, empowers and mobilizes people on issues that matter most to older Canadians. While they work collaboratively with corporate and non-profit organizations, the media and governments to amplify senior issues, they also provide education to MLAs like myself, which was, and continues to be, extremely valuable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is definitely no shortage of great people doing tremendous work for our seniors and our older adults. I am sure many of my colleagues know the work being done by Jan Legeros and her team at the long-term-care association of Manitoba, and even the outstanding job being done by Julie Maynard and staff at the Manitoba association of residential-care homes for the elderly. I can speak first-hand of the passion and dedication I have seen and heard from these folks and know that they have the seniors in our province, and I share their conviction and their foresight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know my colleagues also want to share a few words on this resolution as well, so let me conclude by saying thank you. Thank you to those who came before us. Thank you to my grandparents, Jon and Mary Isleifson, George and Nellie Elder; and to my parents, Bob and Doreen Isleifson, for creating an environment that allows me to grow and to thrive. Our future, as we become older adults ourselves, is brighter because of the path that they have created for us.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Thank you, my colleagues, for your very generous applause and support as I rise in the House today.

I want to address something that the member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson)—and I appreciate that the member has done a lot of work meeting with different stakeholders and building relationships. And I think that's really important. And I respect that the member for Brandon East really does recognize and value the importance of doing work in order to help advance the dignity of care provided for and available to access for older adults and seniors in our province. He seemed to take issue with a whereas in the motion—the resolution that was brought forward. And I want to address the points that he made, because I think it's really important for us to just name what this government has a tendency to do.

It's very clear, it's obvious, that this government has failed older adults and seniors throughout this pandemic and leading into this pandemic. And when we talk about the ways in which seniors and older adults have not been treated with the care that they deserve, we're talking about the failings of this government. We're talking about the failings of the former minister for Health. We're not talking about front-line-care providers; we're not talking about the people who this government, actually, has also failed to protect throughout this pandemic and has under-resourced before, during and, I'm sure, they'll continue to attempt to under-resource beyond this pandemic; we're talking about their failures.

And so I would encourage the member for Brandon East and the—his colleagues in his caucus to stop using front-line workers as human shields. Start—stop using those folks as a smokescreen for your failures and shortcomings when you're being called out for the things you haven't done. It's really tired, it's really redundant at this point, and it's unacceptable. We're talking about you, and what you failed to do. And it's important for you to be able to reflect on that honestly in order for you as a government right now to be able to advance the changes that our older adults and seniors desperately need in order to be healthy and happy and have positive outcomes moving forward.

You know, we see in the media this morning that Manitoba is one of the worst jurisdictions for

outcomes related to COVID-19; second highest in the country in terms of deaths related to COVID-19; preventable deaths related to COVID-19; despite what the former minister of Health said, that those deaths in long-term-care homes were unavoidable, which has been condemned across the board by experts across the country and still rings shameful to this day. And he still hasn't apologized for that, for those horrific comments, comments that when you reflect on the fact that the minister of Health had that mentality you can only also then reflect on what that means in terms of his own decision making during this pandemic and that of his government's.

I thank my colleague for bringing this resolution forward and I thank the advocates, organizations, families, individual Manitobans, who have made their voices heard consistently on this issue, folks who have been incredibly generous with their personal time and resource, ensuring that we have the information that we need as legislators to advocate for the establishment of an independent seniors advocacy office.

The member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) mentioned Connie Newman, strong, an incredible advocate on this issue and others, regarding older adults and seniors in Manitoba. I think of the Manitoba Health Coalition; I think of CARP, the Canadian association for retired persons.

I think about, yes, long-term-care association. I think about individual Manitobans like Larry Baillie, who lost his own father to COVID-19, a resident at Maples Personal Care Home. I think about his ongoing advocacy around these issues and wanting to make sure that no other family experiences the heartache that his family has gone through.

I thank all of those organizations, individual Manitobans, and legislators and members of this House who have been advocating for the establishment of this very important and what would be an independent office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about the reasons why an office like this is important, it is incumbent on us to acknowledge the ways in which we have not seen issues addressed in the ways that they should be.

A good example of that would be transparency around reporting and making publicly available reports. This is something that this office would be able to do. They could publish reports, make them accessible to the public. I had a really great conversation with a couple of advocates the other day

who talked about, you know, even those reports potentially being accessible online, as so many people can access information more easily that way, and just talked about an independent office being able to eliminate barriers to Manitobans accessing information. They can get it in a centralized way, in a transparent way, in a responsible way, in a way that is not interfered with or interrupted by the government of the time.

And, you know, we've seen during this pandemic the realities around reports not being transparent and readily available and the confusion and distress that causes Manitobans and families alike.

And, you know, a good example, a very recent example of a shortcoming in reporting that the—an independent office for the seniors advocate could be a good example of how to do this more appropriately would be this government really just not being transparent or clear around inspections in terms of our long-term-care homes during this pandemic, the fact that, you know, a lot of smoke and mirrors around what was going on at Maples Personal Care Home in terms of when concerns were shared and reported, in terms of why this government neglected to follow-up when concerns were brought forward on staffing issues, and the more recent report regarding Maples Personal Care Home, and ultimately the disappointing outcome of that report, not even being able to identify who is accountable for the mistakes made at that care home within a matter of hours where we saw eight residents die.

So, an office—an independent office of the seniors advocate would be able to provide clear, transparent, public reporting on issues that arise. They could call for investigations and they could make sure that the way we've seen this government work incredibly hard to avoid any accountability and responsibility in terms of their own failings during this pandemic and how their cuts leading up to it have affected seniors in this province, an office of the seniors advocate would ensure that they provide recommendations based on inspections and investigations and reports that benefit all Manitobans in terms of access to the information and being able to create informed, strategic planning so that we have a path charted that sees positive outcomes for older adults and seniors in this province.

* (11:40)

And that's really, really important. That in order to chart a path that is, in fact, fair, that is, in fact, informed, strategic and not just about election cycles; that we have a non-partisan, independent office that

can provide the research that supports what those plans can look like. And that is of great benefit to any government. It certainly, we know, would be of great benefit to this one.

And so this resolution is supported by so many organizations, in terms of these organizations consistently calling for the establishment of that kind of an office. I commend those organizations for doing so. I commend my colleagues who have also made their voices heard on this issue.

And, you know, I want to say, lastly, that we're still navigating this pandemic. We're still—despite the rollout of many vaccines, none of which the Premier (Mr. Pallister) invested in. He invested in the one that hasn't even been trialled yet. But that's a whole other conversation. You know, we're still in this pandemic, and I know that there are a lot of anxieties in our communities about how this ongoing pandemic is going to potentially continue to impact older adults and seniors in Manitoba. This is a really great step to take to ensure that we're collectively moving forward in a way that sees older adults and seniors in Manitoba receive the dignified, respectful care and treatment that they deserve. They have been immense contributors to Manitoba being what it is today, and we need to ensure that we give back everything that we can in order for them to have dignified lives and good relationships, and to be able to trust that no matter—whether it's in long-term care or out of it—they're respected and—

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

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): It's certainly a pleasure to be able to speak to this resolution. Before I make my comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to recognize the member from Brandon East. The member had indicated, in his former capacity as being the assistant legislator in Health and Seniors, I had a number of occasions to work with him and have discussions with many senior advocacy groups.

And in my capacity, at that time, as assistant to the minister of Finance, there were certainly a number of areas that my colleague and I were able to address and certainly had a—gained a very significant understanding of the issues, and certainly the needs of what these advocacy groups were bringing forward. So my colleague from Brandon East took a great deal of time and effort. And I know that the minister of Health, at that time, gave him a great deal of responsibility in reviewing and coming to terms with, certainly, the needs of our seniors in Manitoba. And

he certainly did an admirable job, so my compliments to him.

Madam Speaker, first let me start by saying our seniors have built this province. I think that that's been indicated by the speakers who have spoken previous to this, and it is so true. And our—you know, we as a community, we certainly have an obligation to protect our seniors. And Manitoba seniors contributed so much to our way of life. It's certainly—my grandparents and parents certainly shaped a great deal of how I take on life and life's challenges, and certainly we have a great deal of—our family certainly has a great deal of respect—and I know all families do—of the guidance that they've been given by seniors. And it certainly is beneficial to that.

The member from Union Station certainly makes a lot of points, some valid, some not. And, you know, the—what troubles me when I hear the member from Union Station continuing to talk about these current initiatives, it troubles me that it doesn't appear that she's ever gone back to look at why her own government, the government that—

An Honourable Member: Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Honourable member—order. Order. The honourable member—the Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

I would just remind members of this House to use neutral pronouns, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any other, on the same point of order on the other—on the government side?

It is a point of order that if—the member from St. Johns has a point, and if we can just—it's not a point of order but it's a point. It's—it should be addressed and that, you know, the appropriate neutral general—neutral—gender-neutral address, okay?

Mr. Johnston: Certainly, I do apologize. No disrespect intended at all. I certainly respect the position of the member from Union Station and certainly I apologize. There was no intention to create any disrespect. So I certainly take the caution that you give, Madam Speaker, so—or Mr. Speaker.

* * *

Mr. Johnston: So, back to the point the—so I guess the frustration that all of us on this side of the House

sometimes have is when we hear comments that the member from Union Station had made. There doesn't seem to be a great deal of reflection of the inaction that their government had taken, and their government was there for 17 years, so the opportunity to create this type of positioning was certainly there.

I mean, COVID or no COVID, the reality is that we do all respect the fact that seniors do need support, and so, you know, if this is so prominent within that party, then why didn't it come forward?

But anyway, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that any resolution to help seniors has merit. The question is is what course of action do you take to be able to address the needs of our seniors, and I really think that that's the question in front of us.

I asked the member who was bringing forward the resolution in regards to has there been any study or has there been any consideration of age demographics, and by bringing what I'm about to indicate forward, I'm actually probably playing into his position to a degree, and that's the need to certainly recognize that seniors are certainly a very—are going to—are a very prominent part of our community right now and in the future are going to be even more prominent.

A Stats Canada report indicates that on July 1st, 2000, baby boomers were in their 30s to mid-50s. On July 1st, 2020, individuals in the baby boom generation were between 54 and 74 years of age. Therefore, the number of people aged 54 and over was proportionately higher in 2020, at 33 per cent, than it was in 2000, at 22.9 per cent. So, in contrast, the number of younger 'people,' particularly people in their mid-30s to late-40s, as well as individuals from aged zero to 19, has proportionately decreased.

So when I was doing a little bit of due diligence in regards to reviewing needs here, it's very, very apparent that the—based on the demographic change, is that Manitoba, as well as Canada, and I would say a lot of parts of the world—are going to be challenged by the seniors population in the future. People are living longer and people's demands are therefore going to be higher. So, certainly any government of any stripe is going to have to address these questions.

* (11:50)

So, the Assiniboia community, my constituency, is home to one of the largest seniors populations in this province, so I take great pride in the efforts of individuals and groups in Assiniboia that consistently come together and advocate for seniors. Among

these—as I think has already been mentioned—is the St. James 55+.

And I've had an awful lot of opportunity to be able to deal with the St. James 55+. It's an organization that really extends from Polo Park to the outskirts of Winnipeg west, which includes Assiniboia and St. James, Kirkfield Park. And we deal with a number of initiatives that they bring forward to advocate on behalf of seniors. So there is a significant amount of advocacy that is being done by a number of organizations that do exist within the province right now.

And to give you some examples of what St. James 55 does to advocate is they bring form—bring home information to their own people and deal with problems that may exist on home services. They recommend lawyers; they certainly suggest dental care, or hairdressers that may be utilized by seniors; and they deal with complaints that may exist from that or pursue complaints that may exist from those services. They certainly offer support for seniors that are doing their taxes and recommend housing options as well as certainly advise on things like wills and estates. And when there's issues that come up, believe me, my phone's the first thing to ring. And I appreciate the fact that they feel confident enough to be able to bring it forward.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my time is getting awfully quick. I wish I had a lot more time. But point being, is that I do—we do believe that certainly seniors need support, and our government is prepared to to that. The question is, is what is the best way to do it going forward. Like, what is the best way to do our due diligence and ensure that what we are doing is going to have a long-term relief and support for our seniors?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to make some comments on this resolution.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to, again, thank the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu) for bringing this resolution. And can I just say, it is so nice to be back in these Chambers. I miss being in here. And I miss all my colleagues. And I just really want to express that gratitude.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, first and foremost, I want to point out that this resolution is such a positive testimony of persistence. I have been calling for a seniors advocate since 2016, and the NDP finally got on board; we've got their support. And now together

we can try to convince this Conservative government to have a seniors advocate here in Manitoba.

Now, I recognize I don't have too much time. So I do want to table just a few documents including the five, six, seven occasions over the last few years where I've actually called for and suggested a seniors advocate, here in the Chamber—or here in the province of Manitoba. You know, I'm sharing these documents in the hopes of broadening this resolution.

And I want to be very clear that the creation of an independent seniors advocate extends far beyond addressing what is happening during the pandemic. The need for a seniors advocate was really real before the pandemic. And this resolution doesn't seem to acknowledge that. But it is a step in the right direction.

So in short, the document that I just tabled, it dates back to November 22nd, 2016, when I first made a member's statement in this House, talking about how we could better protect and care for our seniors, and I first suggested that we broaden our scope. And a way that we could do this is by referring to the BC's seniors advocate. And again, this is a template that's lied out for us. It's been lied out for us, why are we not looking at it? Why are we not looking to it?

And you know, over the year—this is back in 2016—it wasn't recognized. So on 20–November 27th, 2018, I decided to bring it up again, but this time in response to the Throne Speech. And this time I used the opportunity to emphasize how personal-care homes is not the only problem with seniors, although this government thinks that it's just personal-care homes. And they think if they just build a bunch more personal-care homes, all of our senior issues are going to go away. That's not actually the case.

We have a lot of different types of long-term-care facilities. We have supportive housing homes. We have retirement homes. We have hospices. Unfortunately, a lot of seniors are staying in hospitals, as well. I'm guessing there's who are still living at home. But more could be living at home if we helped enable this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And you know, this government really, really misled Manitobans back in 2016. They ran on a campaign that they were going to build all these new personal-care homes. Except then they got elected and they said, well, we'll do it by 2025. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's a bit of a landslide there.

And so I also want to spend a little bit of time focusing on care—or workers—home-care workers. This is an issue that a seniors advocate would be able

to tremendously help us with. Currently, a lot of home-care workers, they have to be at one side of the city to another side of the city within a half an hour time span, while investing time in the homes. So this literally means a home-care worker has to run into a house, help with the person who is living in the house, be out of the house within 10 minutes to then get to the other side of the city, hopefully safely, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

These are issues, again, that a seniors advocate would be able to help us on. And we can talk about home repairs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Sometimes the smallest thing would be to enable a senior to remain in their home longer. And the example—I've shared this example many times because it seems so blatantly obvious to me—but why is there not budgeting to help seniors with home repairs?

If you were to install a rail so a senior could get up a couple of steps into their home, or maybe it's a rail from upstairs to downstairs, maybe it's non-slip—some sort of a platform in their shower or the bathtub—a lot of seniors who are on lower income cannot afford things. But if they had these things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they would be able to remain in their homes longer.

So as I continue to learn about the problems seniors face here in the province, I decided to make a trip out to BC. And I actually met with the seniors advocate and I had—I got the opportunity to speak with her first-hand and to learn all about her role out in BC, and the position that the seniors advocate plays and could play here in the province of Manitoba.

So after this meeting, I was all excited and so on March 19th, 2019, I brought it up in my response to the budget this time. So it's been in member statement, it's been in responses to the Throne Speech, it's been in budgets—and I got more, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just wait. And so I reiterated a lot of what I had already shared in the House when I brought it up in my response to the budget. But I had also learned more from talking with the seniors advocate. I learned more about the importance of transportation for seniors here in the province, and how often it's not safe, how often it's not reliable. And as government officials—as elected officials—we could be doing more to enable this safety, to enable accessibility.

The other thing that was happening, coincidentally, around the same time, is this government was doubling the fees for senior day programs. So we need to be encouraging seniors to be getting exercise, to hang out with their friends outside of their homes,

to be doing activities; whether it's swimming, whether it's organized games. And then this government goes and they double the cost, making it even more difficult for seniors to be able to have access to these opportunities.

So following this path—and you can tell I get quite passionate about it, Mr. Deputy Speaker—on November 25th, 2019, we talked about how we could follow—or I talked about it here in the Chambers, how we could follow the template of a seniors advocate—whether it's the template in BC—and, you know, the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu) was asked the question during the question portion of this segment,

and the question was; how would we actually go about implementing a seniors advocate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a children's advocate here in Manitoba. The same idea. An independent—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When the matter is before the House, the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux) will have three minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 11, 2021

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