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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLEIN, Kevin E., Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
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, Hon.	Seine River	PC
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NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
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PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
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SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
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WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Morden-Winkler	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 25, 2023

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.

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

Good morning, everybody. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Good morning. Would you call from 10 to 10:30 a.m. Bill 223, the Manitoba assistant amendment act (Adult Education), and from 10:30 to 11 a.m., would you please call Bill 221, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act (Overdose Death Reporting), both for second reading debate.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second readings of Bill 223 and 221 this morning.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 223—The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act (Adult Education)

Madam Speaker: So therefore, I will call second reading of Bill 223, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act (Adult Education).

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Well, thank you, Madam—oh, sorry.

I move, seconded by the MLA for St. James, that the Bill 223, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act (Adult Education); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les allocations d'aide du Manitoba (éducation des adultes), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Marcelino: I'm really, really honoured this morning to be able to bring this bill forward. This bill amends The Manitoba Assistance Act. The director must consider whether undertaking adult education is the most appropriate employment enhancement measure for an assistance recipient.

Let me just take it back quickly to the origins of this bill. I was a very, very new MLA trying to work on the lead contamination in soil issues in my constituency. I was trying to organize a community meeting so that parents and kids and neighbours could come out to listen to a presentation by a soil scientist from the University of Manitoba to discuss how we could mitigate the effects of lead contamination in soil in our community.

I went to a school in my constituency to ask the principal to send a letter home, and the acting principal at the time told me that they do not send notes home because our parents can't read. It opened my eyes to how widespread functional adult illiteracy is in my constituency. It brought to my attention the need to work on this topic.

I then reached out to some folks that I knew who were leaders at adult literacy centres, and they told me what it was like being in adult education, and how poorly underfunded this sector is.

It—I also reached out to Jim Silver, who is an emeritus professor at the University of Winnipeg. And Mr. Silver is—has spent a lifetime, a career working towards overcoming poverty for sections of Manitobans. He agreed to take on a project to kind of get the state of where adult education is in Manitoba.

The results of the project that he did was—he focused a lot on northern and rural communities and also the major urban areas here in Manitoba. But the report that he was able to come up with was called

Unearth this Buried Treasure in January 2022. And the following year, he also came up with a list of recommendations for our Province to pursue, as it relates to adult education here.

One of the major findings that we had altogether in discussing all the findings that he had was this very particular barrier that this legislation this morning is trying to address, and that is that the current assistance—Manitoba employment income assistance program that we have, there is a major barrier there for folks who want to access adult education.

If you want to access adult education—you want to work towards getting your grade 12 diploma, you want to get more literacy or numeracy programs so that you can even get to the point where you can get into an adult education program where you can get your grade 12—if you are on EIA, you will not be able to get that program unless you can be okay with getting your EIA cut.

This has been identified by many directors across the province that this is happening. There is an exception: if you have children aged two to five years old, then you will have the opportunity to access adult education. But if you do not fall into that category, your EIA will be cut.

This has been identified by Mr. Silver and by the directors, and they have brought this forward to me as something that needs to be remedied by this Legislature.

My first recourse was not to come up with legislation. Our first recourse was to make the minister and the staff aware that this was happening, and they assured me that this was not happening, that this was not part of, you know, the overall plan here.

* (10:10)

But this is very contrary to what folks on the ground are telling us is happening, and if you do take a look at the Manitoba employment assistance manual, it will say that adult education is a program of last resort. And that's a quote: a program of last resort.

So, again, this really calls to mind that this is very, very unfair, that this is not going to get us to where we need to go as a province.

By the Province's own research that we have, about 197,000 Manitobans who are functionally illiterate. By other research by Mr. Silver, that number goes up to 300,000 Manitobans who are functionally illiterate.

This is a very, very important topic to address. These are folks that have the potential to be part of a human resource strategy that our province really desperately needs. If they could only get educated in—to the point enough that they could have access to those good jobs that we need, especially in northern and rural areas.

So, it just goes contrary to all the priorities of our province to lift people out of poverty so that they can have a chance to work meaningful jobs, and also to assist us in where we need to be, having a robust labour sector, especially in our rural and northern areas.

So, this is something that we can address today by moving this bill forward. We would really like to see that the Province will put this bill forward, that we can take the next steps with this bill and address this—what I hope is just an oversight, but if not, what we will need to do is just—almost like a reorientation to what adult education can do for our province.

It does not make sense that, you know, we put all of our resources only for folks—for children up to the age of 18 years old, and then after they're 18 years old, well, you know, we don't really have any more resources for you now to complete your grade 12.

It doesn't make sense, because different people, especially if they're facing different kinds of challenges, they're not going to be able to finish just right there at that time.

And the Province's funding for adult education is abysmally low. Right now, from K to 12, it's about \$13,000 per child that the Province funds for their education. But for folks that are trying to get adult education, it's only about \$2,000 per student.

And so, just right there you could see that there's a big discrepancy on how our Province prioritizes the needs of people who need education past a certain age.

And, again, this is something that is a—I believe a major priority for us. And if you take a look at what our priorities are, especially for truth and reconciliation goals as a province, there are many, many—it's a disproportionately higher number of Indigenous peoples that would like to get access to adult education, but they're not able to, especially in northern and rural and remote regions of our province. The resources for adult education are even less in those areas.

So, with just those few words, I'm happy to take questions, and happy to work closely with this government to address the needs of our communities as they try to obtain adult education.

Thank you.

Questions

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

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): This year, our government disbursed over \$20.3 million towards adult learning centres and literacy agency operating 129 sites throughout Manitoba. These funds assist approximately 8,000 adult learners annually, including those on E-A-EIA.

Is the member aware that adult learning is currently available to EI clients to develop and gain skills and abilities in their journey towards financial independence?

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I'd like to thank the member for that question.

I would like to also just put on the record here that the funding for adult education has not increased in over 17 years. That has been frozen funding for more than 17 years. It does not keep up with the demand for the needs for adult education.

And unfortunately, the member is wrong. I have been told by many directors of adult learning centres and by the researcher who has undertaken this work over the last two years that EIA recipients will get their funding removed if they choose adult education.

And it is only parents with children ages—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to thank my colleague for bringing forward this really important bill and all the work that she's done in preparing it and bringing forward it today.

I would like to ask her, it seems like these changes could unlock a huge amount of potential for a lot of Manitobans.

Could she share a little bit about the potential impacts for a Manitoban who can get access to adult education?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that question.

I have actually—our caucus has actually spoken to folks that have been able to receive adult education. I remember very distinctly there was this one young woman who came forward. She had children—three children—and before that, she and her family were living on EIA assistance.

But after she was able to get her grade 12, she was able to become a counsellor and get off of EIA assistance. And now she's like a wonderful role model for her sister, as well, who has decided to go into the—in her footsteps and also receive adult education.

And they are off EIA now and she has a very—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to thank the member for bringing this important bill forward.

I'm just asking for some clarification. You—part of this bill will allocate to the director the decision as to whether undertaking or participating in adult education is the most employment enhancement measure.

And the question is—I mean, that could be a barrier to getting in or it could be an opening to get in to adult education, but it could also be a barrier if the director says no.

So, how do you make sure that people are actually going to get the adult education that they need?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that important question.

Currently, barriers abound in the manual for EIA. Currently the only folks that are able to access adult education are parents who have children the age two—with ages two years to five years old. Then they can then have their employment income assistance plus get their adult education as well.

The—if you take a look at the rest of the legislation, it just talks about what adult education really is. It's access to literacy programming, access to numeracy programs and access to your grade 12 education. Currently under the act as it reads—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I want to thank my colleague for bringing this legislation for discussion this morning. As we all know, obviously, literacy is the great uplifter.

The member cited a statistic indicating a functional adult literacy rate of 30 per cent, which I found quite shocking. I'm wondering if the member can advise if that—if I did indeed hear that 30 per cent accurate, that Manitoba has a 30 per cent functional adult literacy or functional literacy rate.

And more importantly, how does that compare to other jurisdictions and are there any lessons there that we can learn from that?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that question.

I don't recall citing a 30 per cent number. I said that the government's own evidence is that we have 197,000 Manitobans who are functionally illiterate. But that's—Jim Silver's report cites up to 300,000 Manitobans that are functionally illiterate.

* (10:20)

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I'd like to thank our colleague from Notre Dame for bringing this very important piece of legislation forward. I know she's worked very hard to do the research around this.

And I'm wondering if the member can share with us, based on everything that she's researched and the conversations she's had if, you know, the legislation that she's brought forward isn't passed, these efforts aren't made, then what can we expect to continue to happen in Manitoba in this really important area and the impact on families?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that question.

It'll just be more of the same. And even worse, because we know that life in poverty, actually, as time goes on, the income inequality gets worse.

So, I would just have to speak even just like on a personal basis, like, for my own grandmother, who is illiterate. She never had a single day of schooling in her whole life. She had to go through such tremendous barriers. She was not able to ever work or have a job.

And just for that—and she had many, many children, and because of that they're—they lived a life of abject poverty.

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

Mr. Michaleski: Again, I do want to thank the—my colleague for bringing this subject matter into this House. It is indeed an important subject regarding adult literacy and learning.

Can the member opposite explain how Bill 223 would impact the current EIA transition programs?

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that question.

Currently, if this bill passes then adult education would be included as one of the options that an EIA recipient could have. So, and it will—currently they have access to jobs and skills training but not to adult education. That is, again, unless you're a parent of a child or children aged two to five years old.

So, this will be another option that would be available to EIA recipients to get them job ready, and again, it would be a better job than what they would have, to be—because, currently, like, right now—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Sala: Currently right now, as we know, folks in this House know our economy is struggling to find workers in a number of key areas where we need skilled folks. And those folks often require high school degrees and maybe, later, post-secondary education.

In my last question, I asked the member about the impacts on the individual. I'm wondering if she can share a bit about how she feels that these changes may actually impact our broader economy and that bigger opportunities to help advance our economy in Manitoba.

MLA Marcelino: Well, I'd like to thank the—my member—the—my colleague for that question.

You know, I am the critic for Labour and Immigration and wherever I go, whether it's meeting with business owners, or meeting with workers, or meeting with unions, this topic of this labour shortage that we're currently in the throes of is really, really limiting our economy and our ability to meet the demands of whether it's just, you know, building bridges or building new expansions to our hospitals.

I was sitting with the vice president of Manitoba operations here of PCL and he's saying that this is the most—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Martin: The member made reference to Jim Silver and a report that he made that was the part of the

inspiration to the member's legislation that we're viewing this morning.

I'm wondering if the member has a copy of that report to table into the House as part of the permanent record, because I think that information would be excellent to have so that all members, both today and going forward, can review it.

MLA Marcelino: I'd like to thank the member for that question.

The member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) actually tabled that very same report and the second report, including the recommendations, to the Minister of Advanced Education two weeks ago during the Estimates process.

But he could also just google it. It's under the CCPA. You could google the words Jim Silver and adult education and unearth the buried treasure and this report will come out on his computer.

Thank you.

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

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to stand up and put a few words on the record regarding Bill 223, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act.

Again, I thank the members opposite for bringing this bill forward. It is indeed an important subject matter: the ability to communicate and learn and be job ready is an important matter in this province. And of course, adult learning and literacy is pretty key.

And I can speak from experience. In my region, there was also some people that was predominantly communicating in English, but there was barriers where people didn't have a good understanding in a language.

And right now, it's again—getting renewed again with—as a result of the Ukraine issue and the refugees or the people that are affected by war that are coming into our region. Again, they need some help for them to be able to develop and be part of the Manitoba economy and have the opportunities afforded to them. So, it is an important subject.

Protecting our adult education system will ensure adults can develop the skills needed to participate

fully in the community and contribute to growing our economy, which of course is—has been a primary focus of the government for seven years in—as a solution to many issues affecting government is to have a strong economy with opportunities for everyone.

So, you know, adding supports to adult education systems is, in fact, a key part of that. And with investments in adult learning programs, we can ensure people in Manitoba have the right skills, talent and knowledge at the right time to rebound from the effects of the pandemic and to support economic resilience and growth.

And, Madam Speaker, of course, you know, I think you only have to turn the TV on to know that, you know, we've—and we've all lived it. You know, we've had two years of disruption through pandemic. We've had disruptions in markets with inflations and supply chain issues that are affecting economies around the world.

And it's also creating a shift in where people are working, or where opportunities are going to be available. So, this act, this bill really does—is foundational work to those people that are coming in, to the ones that are here, that we get their skills up to—as high as we can get for them, and offer to them, so that they can, again, participate in growth and opportunity in the province.

Manitoba's adult literacy centres serve all populations in Manitoba, including Indigenous, newcomer and francophone learners. Adult learning and literacy centres provide learners with the opportunities to learn the skills and credentials to participate in post-secondary education and the workforce.

Now, again, I'll repeat: our government's goal is to ensure that Manitobans have the opportunities for a hand up, you know, to help people get—take part in the Manitoba economy and to take part in the opportunities that are presented to them. And this is really foundational, again, to a pathway towards greater financial independence.

Our government has taken—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

* (10:30)

As indicated earlier, we will be moving to the second bill this morning, but when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have five minutes remaining.

**Bill 221—The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act
(Overdose Death Reporting)**

Madam Speaker: I will now call second reading of Bill 221, The Fatalities Inquiries Amendment Act (Overdose Death Reporting).

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I move, seconded by the member from Union Station, that Bill 221, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act (Overdose Death Reporting), now be read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Smith: This bill amends a fatalities amendment act to require the Chief Medical Examiner to post a report on a government website setting out the number of drug overdose deaths in Manitoba for each month. The report must also identify the type of drug that is suspected of causing or contributing to each reported death.

Right now, Madam Speaker, across our province we're experiencing high number rates of overdoses. These are preventable; we've, you know, worked with the City; we know that paramedics, Winnipeg police officers and many others on the front line are collecting data.

We know we have a government that is not doing their job and ensuring that we as Manitobans know the accurate number that people are dying in this province, and even the drug that they're overdosing on. We have no idea. Winnipeg police once in a while will put out a report. I know there's other groups, organizations on the front lines that are also giving out information about the drug—bad drug supply that's out there that is taking lives.

But we have a government who isn't doing their job, isn't taking responsibility, isn't helping to save lives here in Manitoba. This is the second time I'm bringing this bill forward and, you know, I've said this in this House before: my own father died of a drug overdose, almost 21 years—August 15th will be 21 years that my father died of a drug overdose. And we're still having Manitobans die in this province of overdoses.

These are preventable deaths. If we would just put the resources in and the supports, and help educate Manitobans on the drugs that are out there, and ensure that folks are getting the resources, the supports, access to safe consumption sites, which have been proven all across Manitoba to save lives.

But this government continues to take an ideological approach, and, you know, look at Manitobans who are struggling with substance abuse as just, you know, pull your bootstraps up, get into detox, you-can-do-it attitude, when we know that it's rooted in trauma; that Manitobans are facing, you know, so much trauma from so much—you know, whether it's the pandemic and being isolated, or whether it's, you know, being scooped as a child and taken and put into another family; whether it's, you know, having abuse in your own family that's unresolved.

Like, no one is immune to trauma in this world. We all walk with trauma. It's how we deal with it, and whether there's resources and services there to help walk people through to get to the place they need to do. And right now Manitobans don't have that opportunity under this government.

Madam Speaker, this government hides the numbers from Manitobans. They hide the numbers from organizations who are trying to do the work. They hide the bad drug supply from Manitobans by not releasing what bad drugs are out there that are taking lives here in Manitoba.

And I want to outline some of the numbers because they're alarming numbers. Like, these are Manitobans. These are someone's loved ones. These are community members. And it just doesn't affect the family that this person comes from, it affects the whole community around them, whether it's their friends, you know, whether they live in a smaller community, let's say, you know, Winkler, or a little, you know, community like a First Nations.

The whole community is impacted. And they don't have the resources at their fingertips to be able to know how many people are actually dying.

So, I'm going to tell you some of the—what has resulted as a—the lack of action from this PC government.

So, in 2016, when this government took office, in that one year alone, 142 fatal drug overdoses between April and December. So, this PC government was elected in April—142 Manitobans, 142 loved ones lost their lives to drug—to a drug overdose.

In 2017—and this number continues to rise—201 fatal drug overdoses. That's almost 400 people that have lost their lives here in Manitoba in a year and a half, under this PC government. Still no action, you know, not doing what they need to do to make sure that these numbers are not increasing, that Manitobans aren't dying and that we're not continuing to, you

know, see families join Moms Stop the Harm or overdose Manitoba.

Because these groups are made up of family members and friends who have lost loved ones. And they've been on this—these steps. They've been in this very building, and I'm sure they've been in the minister's office. But yet, still we see no movement in terms of making sure that these numbers are accurately reported or that the community has access to what the drug is that they're overdosing on.

In 2019, 191 Manitobans died of a drug overdose. Again, trending up.

And this—in 2020 it jumps; it almost doubles—372 Manitobans lost their lives. And we know that the pandemic was happening. You know, we know that things had shifted, and, you know, people were isolated and there were more people that were having to do drugs in their homes alone.

But what did this government do? They scaled back services. They scaled back services, Madam Speaker. The wrong thing to do, which resulted in almost double the amount of Manitobans dying.

Detox beds were decreased by half. So, Main Street Project had to scale back their services. When this government talks about recovery, how are you supposed to get into recovery when you can't even get into a detox, when there's no beds available?

And this government, you know, do they listen to these organizations who are saying, we're—we need to, like, scale up; we need more beds, and if we don't have the space here we can find the space. But we do need the resources from the government. And this government didn't listen. They did not listen and it resulted in 372 people dying.

Let's go to 2021: 432; again, doubling the number. Almost—you know, that's an atrocity. That's this government's record on addictions, on substance use disorder in this province.

And have we seen any movement from this government in terms of a safe consumption site, Madam Speaker? Eighty organizations wrote to this minister—well, not this new minister. I had hope with this new minister that this new minister would move in a new direction and maybe start listening to front-line organizations, start listening to the experts who have been telling this government—and even experts who have written reports on safe consumption sites—that they save lives, that they help decrease the number of STBBIs.

We know that we have a rise of HIV here in our province. We know there's a number of babies being with—being born with congenital syphilis. These are preventable. If we had a safe consumption site and people were able to go and use in a safe manner, get safe harm reduction supplies and have access to primary-care providers—it's not just about going into a place and using drugs, but it's actually about accessing the services.

There's medically trained staff in there. Sometimes people will be seeing a doctor for the first time in these places. I know when I went to Vancouver and I visited InSight and I talked to many of the staff that were there—they actually let the community know how many people are dying of overdoses. They also let people know what the drug is that people are being overdosed on.

* (10:40)

They also have people who are working in these places that were in those very situations; that were using drugs, that their lives were saved by that safe consumption site and have now turned their lives around to help others, to be where they are.

So, you know, I want to say to this government—and, again, this is the second time I'm bringing this forward—this is the right thing to do. I hope this minister is listening and that they will do the right thing, support this bill and be transparent with Manitobans. Help educate on the bad supply that's out there.

Let's help bring these numbers down. Let's help save Manitoban lives. And you have a responsibility; you're the government. And come election time, Manitobans will have the chance to vote for a government that actually cares for Manitobans, and I look forward to that day.

Miigwech.

Questions

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

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I want to thank my colleague for bringing in Bill 221 for discussion this morning. Part of Bill 221 is the 90-day reporting period.

I'm wondering if the member can advise whether that 90-day number is a result of consistency through other jurisdictions in Canada or is a result of discussions, say, with the Chief Medical Examiner, as terms of best practice?

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): The Chief Medical Examiner says that there's no backlogs, that they would be able to report within 90 days. They have been reporting to families who have actually gone to their office to get those numbers.

We often hear these numbers from the media which is, you know, not the way that Manitobans want to hear. They want to hear from their government. They want to have a transparent government, a government that's responsible and that will actually let Manitobans know what the actual numbers are, what the drug is that they're overdosing on.

And, certainly, you know, the Chief Medical Examiner is doing their job. We need the government to do theirs.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I thank my colleague for bringing forward this really important piece of legislation.

And I'm wondering if she can advise us of—she's done a great job, so far, I would say, of already doing so—but if she could reiterate what the benefits are of having timely and accurate data on overdose deaths, specific to Manitoba.

Mrs. Smith: I thank my colleague for that question.

You know, certainly, organizations have told us that it'll help guide the work that they do. And, certainly, they've also told us that those numbers should be help guiding this government in the work that they should be doing, in terms of, like, opening up a safe consumption site in our province, making sure that Manitobans know what bad drug supply is out there because a lot of our young people are using drugs and they don't know, you know, what's out there.

We know that there's a really bad drug out there that's called down. It's a pill. People can just take that and they can overdose. My brother-in-law overdosed on that and, you know, these are some of the very reasons why this government should be letting the public know.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I thank the member for Point Douglas for bringing this forward.

It's an important bill. This 90-day access to this information should have been available for years, and we need to move quickly on this.

One of the questions which has come up from time to time is that it may take longer than that to check on things that are found at the autopsy or blood levels and so on. But in many other circumstances, we report statistics and if there's one or two found later on, they can be added in.

So, it seems to me that that shouldn't be an argument against doing a 90-day effort.

Mrs. Smith: I didn't hear a question in there, but I will take this opportunity to, you know, outline.

We are almost in June and we still don't know the full scope of the numbers from January—well, I'd say February to June. We just got the numbers for January, and we're almost six months into the year. This isn't the way that this government should be letting the public know, certainly letting organizations know.

And we—you know, paramedics were here yesterday. And speaking with them, the amount of calls that they're on because people are taking drugs and they don't even know the drug that they're taking. And they're overdosing on it.

So, we need to make sure that the public knows about the bad, toxic drug supply.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): The chief medical officer already provides preliminary data on drug-related deaths on a quality basis on a new online dashboard which is accessible to everyone. This data will be preliminary as will stand—require—able—still require final medical examiner verification.

So, can the member opposite not agree that this side of the House already acts in the spirit of transparency by publishing timely data related to drug-related deaths?

Mrs. Smith: I would disagree that this government gives timely data to Manitobans.

This government has a history of being not transparent with Manitobans, hiding, you know, the data. Hiding the very drugs that people are overdosing on. That's the one thing that we could be doing is actually letting Manitobans what—know what drug they're overdosing on.

So, we know that there are 418 fatal drug overdoses in 2022. We know that that number's probably going to be higher once, you know, everything is gone

through by the medical examiner. But we could publish preliminary numbers, and this government should be doing that. And Manitobans will understand that those numbers may increase a bit.

MLA Asagwara: I'm wondering if the member could talk a bit about, or provide her perspective on the realities that substance use, addictions, experimenting with drugs of all kinds happens across all communities in Manitoba.

I know that in my experience as a psych nurse and addictions specialist, I've worked with kids and families who—you know, young students in high school, you know, college-aged kids who are going out partying with their friends and trying a substance that they think is safe and fun, for the first time, having no idea that it could be, you know, laced with something that, you know, can end their life.

And I'm wondering if the member could talk about the realities of how substance use affects folks across all communities.

Mrs. Smith: I thank my colleague for that question. Certainly important.

I was a high school teacher. I know the realities that kids face. And I know, you know, going to a party and being introduced to something and the peer pressure that's out there as well.

And, you know, I talked about this trauma, right? I was a young person. I used drugs to mask things that had happened to me. And we as a society, as a government, have an obligation to let these young people know, to let these families know the drugs that are out there.

And I said this—I shared this story. My own daughter overdosed a few—or a few years ago. And it was devastating.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Martin: Again, I thank the member for this legislation being debated this morning. In the legislation, the member makes reference to the phrase drug.

I'm wondering if the definition of drug would require any regulatory amendments to capture anything that isn't already included that she desires within this bill.

Mrs. Smith: I think that would be up to the medical examiner to, you know, outline what the drug is that folks are overdosing on. That certainly is in the bill that—the government releases the toxic drug supply that people are losing their lives on.

So, I'm not sure if that's what the member was alluding to or he wants to know the different kinds of drugs. And if he does, I would suggest that maybe he does some research on it and, you know, visit maybe one of the front-line organizations that are doing the work that actually put out the information when you walk into their building and are helping the public know about those, which the government should be doing.

MLA Asagwara: The member was sharing, I think, a pretty important personal story before she ran out of time in her last response. So, I just wanted to give the member the opportunity to share additional information if she so chooses.

Mrs. Smith: I was starting to share about my own experience with my own daughter. My daughter's boyfriend turned 18. They decided to do what they called zani bars, I guess, at the time.

* (10:50)

I was actually a legislator at the time. I was at an event. My husband called me. I had to rush home. And we had to call the fire paramedics. My daughter had to be rushed to Children's Hospital, and she did overdose on fentanyl and she could have lost her life.

So, this is why it's so important. Doesn't matter where you come from, where—you know, whether you're living in the south end, the west end, Winkler, Steinbach, doesn't matter where in Manitoba you are living: nobody is immune to this.

And this government has a responsibility to let parents, to let kids, to let educators and the community know what drugs are out there.

Mr. Michaleski: I know the government believes in the advice of top medical professionals, and evidence that is evidence-based, I would say. That's why our addictions strategy has been based on the findings of not just the VIRGO report, but also the Illicit Drug Task Force.

Can the member opposite please explain how this legislative change differs from the information that is already contained in the VIRGO report, which our government is currently using to report on this issue?

Mrs. Smith: I wish this government would take an expert approach and, like, would start listening to, you know, the very folks who have been calling on this government.

Their VIRGO report actually had opening up a safe consumption site here in Manitoba. They took it

out because of their ideological way of thinking, and thinking that Manitobans can just do it and pull up their own straps; but this government is failing on all levels to support the addictions crisis that's happening here in Manitoba.

Manitobans are losing their lives because of this government. And this new minister, hopefully she changes course and she helps to save lives and start supporting and listening to the expert advice that's out there.

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

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): As always, it's a pleasure to rise in this House and be part of the democratic process, and be part of a process discussing a very timely and important issue that the member is bringing forward in terms of drug fatalities.

Now, I know the member in their comments did make reference to British Columbia, and I know British Columbia is currently sitting about 120, average, overdoses per day, which is a new record high. While the member uses BC as an example of what we should be doing, obviously the reality and the actual facts coming out of British Columbia would be contrary to the minister—or, the member's assertion that somehow making this change would result in fewer overdoses here in the province.

But that's not to say that we shouldn't be providing that information. The member does indicate, quite validly, that a lot of what is being referenced here in terms of overdoses, and in terms of the use of drugs, whether it be alcohol or drugs—although alcohol is a type of drug—is rooted in trauma.

And the member is absolutely right. Many, many individuals across this province have found themselves at their end, and have turned to drugs as a means of escape, for lack of a better word, or a means of comfort, and that.

And in too many instances, and the member is absolutely right, every loss of life is somebody's family member, is somebody's son or daughter and husband and cousin, and that. So we, as a government, we as all MLAs, need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to support these individuals.

And so, we need to look at not just the information that is being provided by the Chief Medical

Examiner in terms of the overdoses within Manitoba, the drugs and the drugs that are related to those overdoses, but obviously we need to take a more holistic approach to the issue of drug abuse and addiction.

This is obviously something that has been with us, as the member noted, and I give the—share my sympathies to the member who indicated the loss of her father some two decades ago. And I don't use that as a political comment; I use that as a statement that has—addiction, unfortunately, has—is something that our society has struggled with for years and years, and will continue to struggle with as a society.

That's not to say, though, that we as a government and we as MLAs can't be doing more. We need to, obviously, ensure that there is a reality and, you know, the federal government imparted that, led the charge to decriminalize and essentially legalize marijuana and cannabis sales here in Canada as part of their larger drug strategy in terms of, obviously, undercutting the black market that provides those drugs and the illicit crime that goes with it.

And also, part of their argument was that they want to ensure that Canadians had access to a safe supply if that was their choice. Now, I know, obviously, the member isn't suggesting that we here in the province or we here in the country start opening up or expanding the options of what pharmaceuticals may be available at cannabis stores.

But we need to ensure that those individuals that are participating in activities that do themselves harm—and in many instances, those people who suffer from addiction may not realize the impact. And simply, as the member noted, they may not be simply aware of what's in those particular drugs—and we've seen many, many instances of parents suddenly waking up and learning that their child has died because they were out at a party.

And, you know—oh, my child would never do that. But they happened to, that one time, you know, experiment, and in that instance, unfortunately those drugs were laced with something that caused a fatal consequence, Madam Speaker.

And so, the member's right. I mean, the ability for us as a government and us as MLAs providing that information of working with the Chief Medical Examiner, working with—whether it's Winnipeg Police Service or RCMP to ensure not only do our medical professionals—whether paramedics and doctors and nurses—have that information so that they're aware of

it, but also that all Manitobans who are interested in this issue—and I think we all need to show more interest in the issue—have access to that information so that they can make those choices.

Because while we may not—and for a variety of reasons, that individual may not be at this time dissuaded from saying—using an illicit drug, and that we may be able to, at least at a minimum, steer that individual into, for lack of a better term, a safer option, one that may alleviate their trauma at that time—and that's for them to make that decision—but more importantly, doesn't impact their mortality.

And I think that is, obviously, the goal. I mean, any government and any agency will tell you that information is power. And these agencies, obviously, are collecting data, along with police services and the Chief Medical Examiner, so that they can form, again, that holistic strategy.

Because that's what we need to look at, Madam Speaker. We need to look at why are individuals participating. The member rightly noted, I mean, and cited some examples of trauma, whether the '60s scoop and, obviously, the individuals that were traumatized in that. The pandemic had a significant, significant impact on the mental health of Canadians coast to coast to coast; the isolation that some individuals felt did result in a statistically higher level of addictions during that period.

And so, we need to look deeper, Madam Speaker. We need to ensure that we're offering a suite of services. I myself have spoken before on safe consumption sites and, in my view, I think they are a component of a larger program to ensure that we are providing those services necessary to individuals who wish to make sure that they are able to leave that addiction behind. But it is, in many instances, a lifetime addiction.

And so, we need to look at more than just ensuring that people have a safe drug supply. We need to ensure that we as legislators, and that we as family members and friends, are providing, again, those services. Earlier today, we debated a bill by the member, dealing with adult education; obviously a very important component of any addiction services.

We need to look at whether it be any kind of emotional trauma that needs to be counselled, financial trauma that needs to be counselled, physical trauma that needs to be counselled, Madam Speaker. There are almost an endless number of services required, but we cannot, as legislators, as government

and as individuals, allow the enormity of the challenge—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

* (11:00)

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

The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution—oh, the—I will come back to this.

I will now recognize the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

House Business

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie). The title of the resolution is Calling Upon the Legislative Assembly to Support the Acknowledgement of the Outstanding Achievements and Contributions of Reggie Leach.

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 the one put forward by the honourable member for Keewatinook. The title of the resolution is Calling Upon the Legislative Assembly to Support the Acknowledgement of the Outstanding Achievements and Contributions of Reggie Leach.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 17—Calling on the Provincial Government to Prioritize MMIWG2S* by Implementing the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice

Madam Speaker: And now we will move on to the resolution. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on calling on the provincial government to prioritize MMIWG2S by implementing the national inquiry's Calls for Justice.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I move, seconded by the member from St. Vital,

WHEREAS for far too long violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited has been ignored and action has not been prioritized by previous governments; and

WHEREAS abuses and violations have resulted in the denial of safety, security, and human dignity to Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people for decades which led to the creation of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; and

WHEREAS urgent action is needed now to address the crisis of MMIWG2S but the Provincial Government is not prioritizing it as an issue; and*

WHEREAS a man was recently charged with the murder of at least four Indigenous women in Manitoba: Rebecca Contois, Morgan Beatrice Harris, Mercedes Myran, and an unidentified woman who was given the name "Buffalo Woman"; and

WHEREAS these recent murders have reinforced the urgent need for immediate action to end the violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited; and

WHEREAS when asked in an interview to list a single Call for Justice that her government has implemented from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Premier was unable to do so; and

WHEREAS the Calls for Justice includes the call for all governments, "in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, to develop and implement a National Action Plan to address violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people."

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to take action to end the violence against Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited, by providing a clear timeline for implementing the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S Calls for Justice.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Smith: I'm very honoured to, you know, rise in this House to put some words on the record regarding, you know, the lack of action, the lack of anything from this government when it comes to MMIWG2S here in our province of Manitoba.

We just, you know, had the third serial killer here in Manitoba take four lives; four women, one of which we call Buffalo Woman, that we don't know whose loved one that is. And this government has still done nothing.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I know that there was a group of advocates that had to come forward, once again. You know, it's

always left up to the families and those that are on the front lines to hold government to account, whether it's, you know, this City, or the Province or the federal government.

And, I want to give our mayor, Scott Gillingham some credit when it came to making sure that a feasibility study happened here in our province, to look at whether the landfills in our province could be searched specifically, here, around Winnipeg.

Members will know I have a sister who's missing. She's been missing for 15 years come this July. We don't know where she is. And this government has done nothing to help our family.

You know, prior to 2016, we had a special adviser to women's issues, Indigenous women's issues that worked here in the Manitoba Legislature. And you know, I'm so proud of my colleague from—the member from St. Johns that worked in that role, that worked with our families, that fought hard, that advocated, that came to meetings after meetings, that worked to make sure that our loved ones were not forgotten.

I look at the monument at The Forks. That was a result of the work of the NDP. That was a result of a government that cared, a government that actually put action into supporting families.

And what did this government do? This government cut that position, that very position that supported families. And one of the calls to action is about that very support to families, which this government doesn't have anyone in this building that supports families, doesn't have anyone at a table that can help move these calls to justice along.

This government instead, you know, blindly turns an eye to what is happening to lives being taken in Manitoba. And I just finished, you know, speaking about the addictions crisis here in Manitoba. It's at epidemic levels here in our province. And this government's response: again, turn a blind eye while Manitobans die. These are someone's loved ones.

I look at the Yukon. The Yukon has already created their plan. Soon as the calls to justice came out, they immediately started that work. And I know if our NDP government was still in government, and this PC government hadn't taken government, that there would have been actions in place that reduced the number of loved ones being taken in our province. We have no safety strategy at all.

I as an Indigenous person can walk out my door and be seven times more likely to never be seen again.

I'm a grandmother. I'm a mother. I have a daughter. I have three granddaughters. Am I afraid for them? Absolutely. Should I be afraid for them? No. I shouldn't have to worry about them.

But—yet I have to because this government has done nothing to address the calls to justice. And I actually am going to table the calls to justice because I don't even think the other side, you know, they've even looked at them, that they've even thought about Indigenous women in our province.

You know, it's mind-boggling for me. It's hard for me to speak about this because, you know, I look across the way and everyone's talking and—talking to one another. This is a very important issue. This is people's lives. This is my life. I'm in here as an Indigenous person. I walk out my door every day and take a chance coming to this building.

And this government should be looking at some of the other provinces who are leading the way. The Yukon. And the Yukon got all of their governments, all of their First Nations, all of their leaders to actually sign on to say that they would actually start working, whether in was in their organizations, whether it was in their government. Wherever it was. A whole lot of organizations signed on to support this. And I don't see that response from this government here. I see actually no response.

Yes, we, you know, we have domestic violence in our province and, you know, we're funding that and that's good. We need to be funding that. But we also need to look at safety plans for our province. I brought in MMIWG2S licence plates to this very House and this government didn't support it.

This government instead directed MPI to create the plate. We as leaders in this place could have stood up and said that we support those families, that we stand up against all forms of violence. And that we are going to stand up with MMIWG2S.

Instead, what did this government do? They didn't show their support. They didn't show their leadership. And that speaks volumes to Manitobans. Especially to our families. How disrespectful of them to disregard that, to not stand up and support them. And to not even take these calls to action.

I want to also bring—and I'm not going to table these because I think, you know, the government should be doing their job and actually going and looking at what other provinces are doing. Alberta—I was in Alberta a few months ago. They were unveiling their plan. They had hundreds of families there that

were directly affected. Community members. Community leaders. Government were there, supporting their plan to implement the 231 calls to justice.

* (11:10)

This government has done nothing, absolutely nothing. You know, when we stand in this House and we ask the minister, what are you doing to address the high rates of violence here in our province against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit, they have no answer.

We've asked the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), what have you done? You know, as a woman, what have you done to support other women in this province that are experiencing high rates of violence? And not just here in Winnipeg, in Manitoba, all across, you know, the province. Nobody is immune to it.

And, you know, I get so frustrated at this because it's like, they have an opportunity. They have a great opportunity to help support Manitobans, to help make a change for Manitobans. And it's in this document. It's in this document. I tabled the document. There's a road map. This road map was created through families' tears, through their hardship, through sharing their stories. I don't even think they even read this.

You know, I remember when the national inquiry came here to Winnipeg. Our family didn't participate because we just weren't in a place to participate. We asked for a parallel system that, as actions were identified, that they were put in place immediately. And this government has it right here, and they can start implementing it.

The MMIWG2S licence plate, that's one of the calls to action. Creating education for the community, that was a good opportunity for this government. But instead they had to play politics and make it about, you know, me as an NDP party member instead of me as a family member bringing that voice forward into this House for families.

So I—you know, I really hope that this government supports this resolution, that they stand with the families and that they are going to tell us exactly when they are going to start to do the work on this, because this work is long overdue. It's years in the making. It's off of families' tragedy. It's off of our tears.

And, you know, you have a—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Questions

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

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I want to thank the member opposite for bringing this forward. You can tell that it's true meaning; it's not just verbiage, it's actually true meaning and something they're very passionate about.

So, I thank you for being open, and I feel for you.

I'm wondering if the member can, aside from the 231 recommendations, if the member thinks there's anything else that is more maybe Manitoba-specific that we can have a look at as well.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I would invite the member to actually read the calls to action. These came from family members right across the country.

And you know, my family's story isn't just my family's story. This happens to many other families, whether it's, you know, the media, the way they portray your loved one. So many of our loved ones have been dehumanized.

Whether it's, you know, dealing with the Winnipeg—or not the Winnipeg police, but the police in general, and how, you know, our families don't receive the same response. Whether it's, you know, dealing with governments, and governments not putting the resources into keeping MMIWG2S safe in our province. It's—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I want to thank my colleague, the member for Point Douglas for bringing this important PMR forward.

I note that we do have students in the gallery witnessing this very important debate this morning. This is a very important issue, and I do know, Deputy Speaker, that my colleague has brought up the important—why is it that a timeline is very important so that we get the release of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Why is it important that we have a timeline to implement those recommendations?

Mrs. Smith: I thank my colleague for that question.

And, you know, this implementation is long overdue. We're years into the 231 calls to justice coming out, and yet we've had nothing from this government.

You have other provinces that are leading the way that have actually put those calls to justice into action, and it's super important and timely because women are continuing to be murdered at high rates here in our province. We just had another serial killer that took four, you know, beautiful, sacred loved ones from us.

And, again, we see no response from this government. It's like, how inhumane can you get when you have people dying and then you just do nothing about it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Point Douglas for bringing this important resolution forward. The calls for action speak to all governments in many places in this report, and make many substantive recommendations. That includes annual reports.

And I would ask the member: Has the government of Manitoba produced, yet, an annual report in the four years since the calls to action were issued, and is there even a provincial plan to address the calls to action in an effective and timely manner?

Mrs. Smith: I want to thank my colleague for that question, very important question.

And the government has not produced anything when it comes to the 231 calls to action. They have not produced one report; they've not, you know, met with family members.

And I know that because I work with a lot of family members. I'm directly connected to family members, as the member from St. Johns is. We're in constant contact with them. None of them have been approached, none of them have been asked to come and meet with government.

No—none of the families have been asked for any of their input into any implementation, because we know that this government hasn't even thought about how they're going to implement—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Cathy Cox (Kildonan-River East): I would like to extend to the member from Point Douglas my sincere, heartfelt sympathies to you. And just extend to you—I can't believe, or I can't understand your hurt; for me it's 'unfathomable'—unfathomable because I've never been there to experience that.

And I want to say to you that I'm so sorry that you have to endure that sadness, that grief. As women, we stand together.

And now to my question: With regard to the calls to justice and action, is there one—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Smith: You know, I—that member was the Status of Women minister. That member had the opportunity and the power, and could have actually started to create a plan to bring families together, to implement something that would keep women safe.

And again, we just had four women who, you know, were murdered. Perhaps that could have—you know, perhaps they would have been here today. And this is what I'm talking about: it's life-or-death situations here. And I know the members are opposite are going, oh—it is that serious.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I want to thank my colleague for bringing this resolution forward and for all of the work that she does beyond this Legislature on this really important issue.

I want to acknowledge that we do have students in the gallery. And, you know, this is an issue that kids in our schools are learning more and more about. I didn't learn about MMIWG2S when I was growing up and going to school.

* (11:20)

If the member could maybe take this opportunity to explain why it's so important that the government take a lead and make sure that these actions are taken and implemented, so that students benefit from it.

Mrs. Smith: I thank my colleague for that question.

And as an educator, I know how super important it is to, you know, give the information to youth to help them make decisions, I guess.

And I always talk—when I talk to kids, I always tell kids, if you are going out and you're mad at your parent, it's okay to be mad at your parent. Because my daughter has been mad at me. But she's also left and not told me where she went, and that's very problematic. Or, going out, you know, in—with a friend, and making sure that you're safe and someone knows where you are.

And certainly to help guide the next generation in changing what's happening, because it's going to take all of us, and, you know, they're our next generation, and they're going to be the change—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I thank the member for bringing forward this resolution.

As part of the issue when we talk about MMIWG, is obviously—and the member's own trauma speaks to that—is the desire for resolution.

I know there is been conversation about the need for searches at some of the landfills and that. I wonder if the member can share with this House the importance of fulfilling those reviews and those searches in order to provide that resolution for families.

Mrs. Smith: I didn't hear the question. I'm sorry, it's hard to hear. So, maybe if the member could speak up a bit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will allow the member to restate the question if he could do so briefly.

The honourable member for McPhillips, sorry.

Mr. Martin: I was saying that we hear on the news and we've read, obviously, a significant component of MMIWG is, obviously, families and, as I acknowledged the member's own trauma, that resolution that families need.

And obviously one of the topics, unfortunately, that we're discussing here in the province of Manitoba, and the federal government has been involved in, is that review of landfills.

I wonder if the member could share with this House the importance of families able to find that resolution to the trauma of their lives when it comes to the search of potential burial sites of MMIWG.

Mrs. Smith: I thank my colleague for that question.

And I think that we should be doing everything we can to help locate, find and, you know, bring home loved ones who either are missing—bringing people to

justice that are responsible. And the member from St. Johns and I have often talked about this. Like, there's maybe one person that's responsible, or many persons that are responsible, but these people are getting away with it.

And women continue to go missing and be murdered while this government continues to sit on their hands, you know, close their eyes to what's happening, plug their ears. And it's talking lives, and they have a responsibility.

So, I hope—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The time for questions is over.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Again, I do want to pass along my thoughts to the member opposite. Obviously, I have not gone through this personally, and, you know, it takes courage to stand in this House and share personal stories. And so, I just want to let the member know that her voice has been heard.

There are some things in the resolution, however, that I'm going to say are—just don't meet what the government is doing. They don't reflect on the actual work of the government.

And sure, these last number of years have been extremely hard here—especially here in Manitoba. And I know in the resolution, the member talks about Rebecca Contois and Morgan Beatrice Harris, Mercedes Myran and the unknown woman, I think—I believe the name was—Buffalo Woman was the name that was given.

And again, even in debates that we had yesterday, where I had a bill on the floor, two actual bills, where I said the number of people who have—in my case, in my bill—the number of people who were killed in the line of duty was too many. I just mentioned four names. Those four names are too many.

And we need to do more. We all need to do more to stop this terrible event that is happening right across our country; 231 Calls for Justice on MMIWG is a step forward. But again, I personally don't believe it's something that we're going to see a conclusion to in the very near future, unfortunately. Lots more needs to be done, for sure.

So I do want to, while I'm standing and having the floor this morning, I do want to offer my condolences to the family and the loved ones and anyone else that has been affected by those who have been lost or gone missing.

Again, I do thank the member opposite. It is—for bringing this forward. It is a very important topic. And the time to discuss how we can work together—take the partisanship out of it and work together to make life better for all of us here in Manitoba.

I know there was one thing, and I want to just—let me throw something on the floor here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where the member opposite, in her prelude, had mentioned that our government has done nothing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to remind the member, because I was very fortunate on September 26th of 2022 to emcee a ceremony with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen) at the Brandon Correctional Centre, which we announced the establishment of two healing lodges, one in Brandon and one in The Pas. This comes down in my opinion, when I look at the calls to action of education, of working with Indigenous groups. And so things are being done.

And I certainly have a list of things that we've done. And I also know there are things that still need to be done, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The member held up a book with the calls to action. And I can honestly say to that member that, yes, I have read every one of them.

I actually have it on my desk in my office. It's sitting on the desk, not in the desk. On the desk, because it is something that I truly believe we need to work on. And we need to continue working hard to move forward. And maybe I will give the member some latitude and say, maybe we can work harder in some areas. But to say that nothing is being done is not correct.

I don't want to spend the next six minutes going through list by list of what we've done. I have in front of me 14 calls of justice that have been either completed or under way at the current time. And that's as far as I looked. I didn't go through all 231. But I do know that, again, the realm of people going missing, people being murdered in the community, regardless of status, must end.

And we must work with our counterparts across this country, even those as the member mentioned, in the Yukon. I actually was fortunate enough to spend—my daughter lived in the Yukon, so I was fortunate to spend some time up there visiting and I visited the

Legislature up there as well. And yes, they do have a smaller population, but at–still, it's on their forefront.

The member also mentioned Alberta. Alberta is basically, you know—they've put their plan together. I'm not sure if it's come out yet. Maybe it has. I haven't seen it come out yet, but I applaud them for their work and I applaud our groups that are working, you know, under this realm as well.

I know there are some specific initiatives being held by Indigenous relations and northern affairs. Again, I won't go into the details all of those because they are online and they can certainly have a look at it. But the important thing is that—to know, contrary to previous verbiage that was put online, that our government does take this serious. We are responding to the calls for action.

And as I said before, I don't think we'll ever see a conclusion because as things change, we need to change. We need to change the actions that we're doing to fit the means of the time that these actions are taking place, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I know in March as part of one—again, one of the Calls for Justice was the investment and support of Indigenous-led organizations. And we have done that. As I will always say, whatever government is in power, we will always have work to do in this area. We must all work together.

And as one of the members said, that the students in the gallery, here's an opportunity; there's our future. They can hear what we're doing. They can see both sides of what's happening in the House, what we're talking about. They can check on their own because they are our future, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But again, I just want to go back to Velma's House, which is a low-barrier 24-7 safety space for women here in the city. Again, \$1.53 million was invested into that. Again, it's not just, here's money. We've met that criteria; let's move on. It's—here's funding, let's continue to build relationships, let's continue to support. It is a call to action.

* (11:30)

That call to action, because we've invest in Velma's House, doesn't end. It doesn't mean we've met that call to justice and so we can wipe it off the plate and say, let's move on to the next one. It's one that's going to sit there, so that we continue to invest in our community.

And it is—it's our community, our collective community from all groups that reside in Manitoba. So we

need to continue to work on that. I mean, it's unfortunate; unfortunately, there's a lot, still a lot—and I can't explain why, but there is a lot of 'prejudism' and racism in our country still.

And I was just looking for some quick notes that I made, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a young Indigenous gentleman in Brandon, Nicholas Sam. I call him Sam. Sam is a young—again, young Indigenous male who I was proud to put his name forward and have him receive the queen's jubilee medal for the work that he does in our communities.

He is a full-fledged dancer within the Indigenous community. He has some amazing—I'm not going to say costumes, but he has an amazing wardrobe that he wears when he goes out. But that—he just doesn't go into communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He actually goes into the schools and he teaches in those schools. And I am very proud to stand with Sam as he does this. It shows that there is community behind what he is doing.

And to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the same as this call to justice. We must all continue to work together to move everything forward. We have—again, we have completed a number of these calls to justice, contrary to what the member has said in her opening statement.

However, we have more work to do. And again, it's something that I wish tomorrow we could hit a switch and shut it off and say there are no more missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people in, not just this country, but in the world.

But unfortunately, I don't see that happening in that time frame. But I think we can all commit to work together to do our best to ensure we work towards that goal.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I want to thank our colleague, the MLA for Point Douglas, for bringing this very important resolution forward this morning.

I am hopeful, I am hoping that all members of this House, certainly on this side of the House, will support the resolution, but I hope that the members of the PC caucus also support this resolution. It's a very critical resolution that is talking about the provincial government prioritizing MMIWG2S by implementing the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice.

You know, our colleague, the MLA for Point Douglas, has talked at length in this House since being elected about the importance of this government taking real action on behalf of and in conjunction with families who have had loved ones murdered and missing from Indigenous communities.

And it is a very valid statement for our colleague to say that this government is not doing enough. And so, this is a life or death matter. This is a life or death issue. And I don't need to repeat the examples; unfortunately, the many examples that our colleague has provided that drive that message home.

I was disappointed to see members opposite have a strong reaction to our colleague saying that this government not doing enough has a direct impact on the safety and the well-being and outcomes of Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited in Manitoba.

You know, an accountable government is a government that can hear that feedback and receive that openly, and recognize that they can do more. Even if that's a government, which it is, a PC caucus that thinks, apparently, they're doing enough.

To not be able to receive that kind of feedback from, not only an advocate, not only a fellow legislator, but actually a family member—an MMIWG2S family member, to me, is an example of just how far this government is not willing to go to implement these—not only the calls to justice, but to do what families have been pleading for them to do, which is more, do more.

Yes, take action that will save lives. I want to commend the Indigenous women in our caucus who have been doing heavy lifting, transformative work on this issue, not just in the Legislature, but out in our communities for decades—literally decades.

You know, and as I said earlier to students who were in the gallery before, when I was growing up, I didn't learn anything about MMIWG2S. I didn't know about colonization, all of that, and the ways that you all are learning about it now.

And it's so important that as legislators, we do our part to not only listen to Indigenous leaders, women who are at the forefront of doing this work, including members of our NDP caucus, but that we amplify the work that they're doing; that we take very seriously their efforts—yes, including their criticisms—and we action what it is that their communities, that Indigenous communities, that inquiries, the calls to justice are telling us need to be actioned at a legislative level.

The other thing that I will say is that our Legislature—since being elected myself in 2019, I have witnessed anti-Indigenous racism in this place in ways I have not witnessed it out in my other workplaces.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done in that PC caucus, there is work that needs to be done as a whole in the Legislature to make sure that we are doing our part to improve what's happening in our own building.

You know, the work—the implementation of the National Inquiry Calls for Justice isn't just work that we need to action and to see happen in our communities, it is, in fact, work that we need to action within this building.

And, you know, sometimes it sickens me to see the ways in which Indigenous women in our caucus have been treated by members opposite. And I sincerely hope that they reflect on that and they make efforts to do better, because the work that we do here and how we behave here does impact the policies that we decide to prioritize here, and the ways in which, you know, we as legislators represent our communities out in the world. It matters.

You know, I want to share that years ago, long before I was elected, I went out one evening with a group of friends. We went to a concert, a show, at an establishment in the Exchange District. And at the end of the night—it was late—at the end of the night, I was walking out of the show with a group of my friends, predominantly Indigenous women.

And I said goodbye. I said, have a great night, that was a great show, you folks take care, you're good to get home. And I didn't even pick up on the fact that this group—there was probably about six of them—were huddled together at the time, making a plan for how they were each going to make sure that the other got home safe.

I'm somebody—I've navigated racism my whole life. Yet, I left that venue feeling pretty comfortable being able to walk to my vehicle and get home safely. And the group of Indigenous women I was with—at that time we were probably all in our 20s—they were making a safety plan, figuring out who's going to contact who to ensure that they made it home alive.

* (11:40)

That's the reality that we're talking about that many of us, in many ways, have never had to experience. Government has a very real role to play in making sure that all peoples in Manitoba can go to a

show with their friends and leave and not feel—not know they need to make a safety plan to get home safe.

Fundamentally, implementing the calls to justice—government taking real action here in Manitoba—fundamentally, it will positively impact all communities. Taking those steps, of course, will directly impact MMIWG2S folks and families and communities.

We also need this government to finally deeply understand that this an equity issue, that doing this work will benefit all families across Manitoba economically, socially. This is work that, if done the right way, is sustainable.

And that refusing to do that work, refusing to do the bare minimum and put out an annual report—if this government, which they've done, claims they're doing so much, where is the report? Where is the evidence of that?

They should be holding pressers, as they love to do. Sending out press releases, making announcements with these reports. They've done none of that. That is the bare minimum.

I had the privilege of attending a series screening this week—earlier this week for a show that's debuting on APTN and Crave called Little Bird. Our colleagues, the MLA for St. Johns and the MLA for Point Douglas, were there. And it's a show that is based around the '60s scoop and the impacts of that. It's a show about truth telling.

In just that one screening of the pilot episode, I learned things. This government has a responsibility, based on the calls to justice to support efforts and initiatives which amplify the truth and the ability for Indigenous communities to tell their stories.

There are many things this government can do. There are many ways this government can invest and they've been laid out in black and white. They've been brought forward in countless, many ways and this government refuses to do enough.

This resolution this morning should be supported by all members of this House. That would signal to Manitobans—it would signal that this government is accountable; they take this issue seriously, that they're listening and that they're humble enough to listen to Indigenous leadership in this very building to receive the feedback and do better.

And so, I hope that they support the resolution, given the pattern and the history of this caucus—

PC caucus. I don't think that they will. I'd love for them to prove me wrong today.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Cathy Cox (Kildonan-River East): First, I want to offer my condolences and prayers to all of the families who have lost their loved ones to gender-based violence. I want to thank the member from Point Douglas for raising this important issue in the Chamber today. When we talk and share stories, we are also sharing our vulnerabilities.

Many of us here in the Chamber have stories to tell. Some have shared their stories of abuse. Some, like me, have shared their stories of their siblings or their family members who have suffered with mental illness. And some are not yet ready to share their stories, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What is important, however, is recognizing our weaknesses, focusing on our behaviour, not only outside of this Chamber but inside of our Chamber—inside of the Chamber and seeking out the help necessary to help us cope with those sometimes very dark and devious demons.

To the mothers, daughters, sons, granddaughters, grandsons, grandparents, siblings, cousins: I want you to know that my heart aches for each and every one of you who have lost an individual, a family member, to violence.

The weight that each and every one of them bears is something that no family member should ever, ever have to experience. Their conviction for wanting to help others who are also suffering through such tremendous losses, I know, is sincere and guided by the loss that they felt through the loss of their family member.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank the Indigenous elders and leaders, the kokums, the front-line workers, the Indigenous organizations, the shelter workers, the Bear Clan, the Clan Mothers and all of those individuals and organizations who stand side by side with those families who are broken and grieving the loss of their loved ones.

Our government recognizes that there is much more work left to do to break circle of violence. And we understand that we cannot do this heartfelt work alone. We are committed to working together with the many, many grassroots Indigenous-led partners to address the Calls for Justice.

This is not work that we can do alone. We will continue to work together with those community

organizations, with those grassroots organizations, taking an all-of-government approach to ensure that survivors and victims have access to culturally based supports to help them and their families heal.

Gender-based violence is not a topic that many of us choose—is a topic that many of us choose to ignore, but unfortunately it affects many, many families across our province. It's not a subject that is widely discussed at the family dinner table, or with friends while out on the patio, but it is a chilling reality that many women, girls face each and every day.

It occurs in urban and rural communities, and is often hidden from families and friends. But I want to urge each and every one of you that if you suspect a family member or a friend is a victim of gender-based violence, don't ignore the situation. Talk to the victim, because help is available here in our province.

Gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking and multi-generational trauma has stolen the lives of far too many. I want to acknowledge Rebecca Contois, Morgan Beatrice Harris, Mercedes Myran and an unidentified woman who was given the name of Buffalo Woman, who lost their lives recently to violence. To those families: know that you are loved and that we stand together with you in your grief.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge and share some of the initiatives, the actions and approaches that our government has undertaken that directly supports the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls to action and justice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government developed, first of all, the gender-based violence framework in December 2020, a document that we worked together with all of government to develop, to ensure that gender-based violence, intimate partner violence was addressed here in Manitoba.

And while the members opposite say that we did nothing or we did little to respond to those calls to action and justice, that's not true. As a matter of fact, it was the government of British Columbia, an NDP government, that has actually followed that same framework that was developed here in Manitoba.

So, to say that, you know, we have done nothing; that's just another untruth. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Cox: And I know I hear the member from St. Johns—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Cox: —you know, speaking and interrupting me—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I'm calling the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) to order. The member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Cox) has the floor and will continue to have the floor until their time is up, at which point we'll continue in the rotation for those who wish to speak.

* (11:50)

Mrs. Cox: You know, and that is a framework that all of government worked very hard on. You know we ensured that it was broad, a broad-based framework, to ensure that women from across the province received the help that they needed, you know, when they required it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was out in Thompson, I believe it was in 2021, and had the opportunity to meet with many individuals who provide many resources for women who are affected by violence.

And the work that they are doing out there is remarkable. And each and every one of them said how fortunate they felt to actually have the minister for the Status of Women actually meet with them, something that has never been done before.

And—it's a matter of fact, during my tenure as the minister of Status of Women, I also went out and met with nearly every, every women's shelter across the province. And, again, they expressed to me that never before has a minister been out in Selkirk, Manitoba or in Steinbach or in Portage la Prairie or in Brandon to meet with all of them. And they felt that that was a real display of our good intentions to want to do more.

And when we talk about women's shelters, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for years and years and years, the former government didn't care about funding women's shelters.

And I'm very proud that it was our government who made significant contributions to women's shelters here in Manitoba to ensure that they have the staffing necessary, to ensure that the capital improvements were made, to ensure that they have all of the utilities and all of the different products that they needed.

Because quite often many shelters were forced to fundraise during the years of the NDP to actually be able to continue and to be sustainable. But we've solved that problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I can

tell you that that is immense, the contribution that we made to make the changes for women's shelters and to help them.

During my time as Status of Women minister, my focus was always on those women. And especially during COVID, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we made sure that any of the resources that were required were there for those women first.

And I also want to mention the fact Ka Ni Kanichihk has received significant contributions from our government because we recognize that they are Indigenous-led.

They are there to ensure that the women here in Manitoba and the city of Winnipeg receive the resources that they need, receive the help that they need when it comes to family violence, when it comes to gender-based violence, when it comes to intimate partner violence. And I know that they are an important, important part of our solution to addressing gender-based violence.

You know, we can't do these things by ourselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we have worked together with the federal government, as well, to fund second-stage housing projects; second-stage housing projects such as the one at West Central Women's Resource Centre.

That was a project that was taken on by our government. We met with Lorie English. She told us about her desire to ensure—or her need to ensure that they had a second-stage housing program for women after they left their shelter. And so what did we do? We ensured that that project happened.

Same with the North End women's shelter. We met with those individuals many, many times and again, we provided the funding for that second-stage housing. So, you know, I am very proud of what we've done.

And I know there is more to do, however, it is our government that will get it done—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, this is an important resolution. I want to start by thanking the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) for bringing this forward.

I also want to thank the member for Point Douglas and the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) for the work that they've done over the years in looking at and

helping individuals who have been the subject of intimate partner violence, particularly women.

And clearly—the Inquiry headlined right on Calls for Justice 1.1: We call on federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments—all governments—to act; I think it's very important that that be made very clear. And the next sentence is: In partnership with Indigenous peoples to develop and implement a plan to address violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA—Q—one—A people.

This clearly called for a plan, and it called for: make publicly available on an annual basis reports of ongoing actions and developments in measurable goals related to the plan. These were two calls for action right at the very beginning of all the calls for actions and recommendations.

And it is completely unacceptable that this government, in four years since the report and the calls for action were delivered, has not produced a plan and has not produced a single annual report.

This is a disgrace. We in Manitoba, who stand up and want to speak strongly for what Manitoba is doing, are ashamed that we have a government which has not produced a plan or a single annual report on such an important and a critical issue for our province.

When the NDP were in government, Manitoba Liberals called for a provincial public inquiry into MMIWG situation, and yet the NDP did not bring forward such a provincial inquiry. There was, of course, a national inquiry which was an excellent one and produced many recommendations.

But I think the failure to have a provincial inquiry resulted in not as much attention as we should have had to those issues which are specific to Manitoba.

We have an ongoing question: Why does Manitoba have a much higher rate of violent crime than other provinces? It remains unanswered, and we need a clear answer.

What are the most effective measures for Manitoba as opposed to Canada? We need those answers as well. We can't assume that what is recommended for all of Canada will apply specifically to Manitoba. We need those additional answers.

We have had an important report of the impact of intimate-partner violence on children from the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, and that has been a positive step.

I think, in all this, one of the things that we have to recognize is that 20 per cent of intimate-partner violence is actually committed against men, and there needs to be a level of fairness in terms of how this is approached.

There is a high rate, as I've said, of violent crime. We need to address the risk factors. Not the causes, but those factors which are associated with crime and are risk factors: poverty; what's happening in Child and Family Services; what's happening in terms of discrimination against people and marginalization; the lack of education, including adults; those with learning disabilities; exposure to lead.

All risk factors which need to be looked at and addressed. And we're not doing nearly as good a job as we should.

I'm going to step down now so there can be a vote, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I believe, let the historical record show that the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) is heckling my opportunity to be part of the democratic process, to put on the record my support for the member when it comes to MMIWG—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order please.

The hour being 12 noon, when this member—when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for McPhillips will have 10 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 25, 2023

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