



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

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CORBETT, Shannon	Transcona	NDP
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike, Hon.	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Spruce Woods	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 13, 2025

The House met at 10 a.m.

The Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and 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, Anishininewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated.

Routine proceedings—orders of the day, private members' business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MLA David Pankratz (Deputy Government House Leader): Would you please call for second reading and debate Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—
PUBLIC BILLS**Bill 208—The Manitoba Small Business
Month Act (Commemoration of Days,
Weeks and Months Act Amended)**

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will now resume debate on second reading of Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), standing in the name of the honourable member for Swan River, who has nine minutes remaining.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): It gives me great pleasure to put a few words on the record in regards to small business and recognition of these small businesses, because small towns—that's kind of the heartbeat, when we have small businesses that take on a name within the community, and they're the backbone of Manitoba's economy, playing a vital role in driving growth, innovation and community development.

These enterprises with fewer than 500 employees account for 98 per cent of the businesses in the province; 30 per cent of Manitoba's GDP, which is very significant. The significance of small business in Manitoba can't be overstated, and I think when we look at a lot of the small businesses—and I always like to mention, because we know what they—even those little bakery stores on the corner, you know, people drive a long ways to go ahead and to be able to go and get a fresh loaf of bread or their cinnamon buns at these small businesses.

I know, even in The Pas, you know, Berscheid Meats, every time, can't drive through The Pas without stopping there and picking up some of their delicious pepperonis or honey garlic sticks and various other things like that. So small businesses are important.

You know, I always bring mention to Benito meats, Benito Premium Meats in just a little community 23 miles outside of Swan River in my constituency. And you just can't drive through—and now Benito foods has taken on, you know, a name within that community.

Then when we get through Russell, another small business, Connie's. There's just a little restaurant, there—great burgers, and I know my fellow colleague here for—the MLA from Riding Mountain knows that he cannot drive through Russell without stopping at Connie's and having one of their delicious burgers.

So we all have an appreciation for, you know, for small business within our communities and we can all look at one that really stands out and draws the attention. And you stop there once and you'll stop in there a hundred times. They're essential to Manitoba's economic growth, creating jobs, stimulating innovation and increasing productivity.

According to a report by the Canadian federation independent bureau, small businesses in Manitoba created 3,700 jobs between 2013 and 2018. So, you know what, we do criticize the Selinger government, but near the tail end of the Selinger government, there was support for small business, unlike today's present Kinew government. You know, they've done more damage in probably 17 months to small business than the Selinger government did in 17 years.

So I'm going to just look at some ways the NDP is costing small business money: eliminating the school tax rebate for commercial business and raising property taxes \$150 million; eliminating 'basic' personal amounts and raising income taxes on doctors, engineers and other professionals—and these all have an impact on small businesses within a community.

Defunding Green Team programs by \$4 million last year; and, you know, ramming through legislation in BITSA that will ban business from using replacement workers during a strike. These have a great impact on small business. And it's very significant.

They—also is looking at some of the other things: cancelling contracts for nine new schools and thousands of new classroom seats and daycare spaces: five in Winnipeg, two in Brandon, Ste. Anne, Neepawa, West St. Paul. These have an impact on small business because when you don't have those facilities, you don't have those daycares, you don't have those schools, people don't want to move to these communities and there isn't the things that are going to propel those small communities to grow.

Ripping up job offers to 300 internationally trained workers and ending the Philippine recruitment mission. One of the biggest things, what attracts people to a small town, what grows small business within that town is of course going to be, is there good medical facilities? Is there good daycare facilities? These all are important of bringing people.

Firing Manitoba's leading doctors working to reduce back-logs and wait times, causing more than 1,300 surgeries to be immediately cancelled—and again, these are important. It's an attraction to small business within a community.

When people make a small business their home—or, I mean, a small community their home, a lot of them want adventure, they want to become 'entremeneurs' they want to give something a little extra to that community. And that's important. Cancelling two new shovel-ready homes in Oakbank

and Stonewall, that would deter somebody from moving to these small communities and opening up a small business.

Defunding the justice system by over \$9 million, which is hugely substantial—and I know our Justice Minister is nodding, yes, we're—you know, that was something we shouldn't have done. Quietly cancelled payroll tax rate reductions where small business—that could have benefited twenty—or 2,750 businesses with an annual tax saving of \$35 million beginning in 2024.

Filling the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) office fridge with \$16 salads, as reported by the Free Press, while small-business owners and their families continue to struggle with rising food prices.

*(10:10)

So those are important things. And that's just—I just wanted to point out a few things, how the NDP does not support small business.

Province small businesses are at a forefront of emerging industries like clean tech, advanced manufacturing and e-commerce, positioning Manitoba for future economic success. And we all know today with, you know, the tariffs and things like that, that has an impact on small businesses being able to operate, being able to bring product in.

The small businesses are deeply rooted in their communities. You know, they're the ones, when we're having that fundraiser, when the schools are out canvassing to go on that field trip, when you want a dance club that maybe—gymnastics, all those things, they need a raffle, they need that financial support. Where do they go and who are the first people to answer? The small businesses within the community. They're the ones that stand by, you know, for those local opportunities for the children.

Additionally, small businesses are often involved in charitable activities, as I had also said.

And small businesses in Manitoba are owned and operated by people from diverse backgrounds, including Indigenous peoples, women and new Canadians. And I know several new businesses have opened in our community in Swan River, and a lot of the East Indians that have come into the community have become entrepreneurs and they've added to the community. They take part in a lot of the events, they display some of their culture and people get the opportunity to be able to go and to go to some of these

culture events and share with them. And they are very much part of the community.

Small businesses are crucial for rural development in Manitoba.

I think time is running low here, with my last couple minutes, so I just maybe want to mention, in conclusion, small businesses are the lifeblood of Manitoba's economy, ensuring growth, innovation and community development. They create jobs, they stimulate innovation and contribute to local economic growth, making them essential for a province's prosperity.

The government of Manitoba recognize the importance of small business and is committed to supporting their growth and success. As the province looks to the future, it is clear that small businesses will continue to play a role in shaping Manitoba's economy and in shaping their—our communities.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Good morning. I'd like to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act.

It's a pleasure today to put some words on the record about making the month of May Manitoba small business month. As someone who's witnessed communities grow as a result of small businesses and the impact that one individual or one company can have on a community, I am quite pleased to put these words on the record.

I am thinking about the community of Ste. Anne when I talk about that, and T&T Properties and the investment that one individual decided to make in one community, which resulted in that community becoming one of the fastest growing in the southeast.

I know Ste. Anne has multiple businesses, but there's always been one man behind getting all these businesses started. I know Ken Tallaire has invested in that community, and whether it was just building Phoenix Cheer a spot for them to start their—or to have a bigger space for their cheer, he's definitely a community-minded person. He has built multiple housing, he's built the very mall that I'm in, actually, and, as a result of his small business, you can see that growth continue. I know he's also moved into other communities such as Lorette and Landmark and started to do developments there as well, which has resulted in more growth in the communities around me.

When I think about small businesses, I also think about the Chicken Chef in Lorette, and I think you'd

be hard-pressed to find in any community outside of the Perimeter that there isn't a Chicken Chef or there was a Chicken Chef at one time. They're great gathering places; I know the one in Lorette has been great for me to go and talk with business owners and other people in the community, with my Coffee with Bobs and so on.

So it's really a testament when you have these places that you can go meet and gather and talk and learn about each other and each others' needs and so on and so forth. It also helps give better accessibility when you're in rural Manitoba, when you're able to go to these little local, small businesses and grab a coffee and talk with constituents.

And in Lorette I also know, like, this is another staple of rural Manitoba—are the Home Hardwares. And Lorette also has a Home Hardware, and when I think about that Home Hardware, I think about the man who started it and how he turned it over to community members who now run it and they are running a very successful small business there in town. I can think about community businesses such as C&S gardens in Lorette as well—I know Chris Maxemuck have had the opportunity to talk about him and his small business and what he does in the community.

And I know, thinking back to the Lorette arena community complex, he was key in that 36-hour fundraiser. And touching on what the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) had said, it's these small business community-minded people that really are responsible for getting a lot of these initiatives off the ground, and I know Chris and his crew raised a lot of money for that complex, and waited a lot of years for that complex.

I'm going to move over to the community of—speaking of small businesses here, I'm going to move over to the community of Landmark and some of the small and large businesses that we have over here. I can think of the local co-op and how it's a centre hub for everything in this community.

We have in there a bistro, we have the post office, we have a liquor store, we have, you know, the gas station as well. And really, I can think about the times where I've walked in there and you just see the community spirit and the community buzz that that small business brings. It's a great gathering place—I know a lot of the farmers will go for coffee when they're not seeding or harvesting and it's a great opportunity to connect with them as well.

I also think of some of the largest—larger businesses here in Landmark and how, actually, it's unfortunate that the Ag minister doesn't take some of the tariffs and those things a little more serious, but when we think about companies like Maple Leaf, that have their headquarters here in Landmark and how it's also a community-driven business because it employs a lot of people in the community.

I know at some point they would have had to have started as a small business as well. I also think of Richardson Pioneer that has their—they've got a facility here in town as well, and how it also employs and contributes to this community.

When we talk about small businesses, we can move over to Ste. Anne, and you look there and how the growth is just booming there. You've got now, from a cannabis store to a local coffee shop to, there was a lawyer's office, there was a tattoo place. You think about the small hair salons, you think about the small insurance companies. The—these are really rural staples and, you know, you think about how each small business contributes to these rural communities. I also am reminded of, you know, there's always these local taverns and bars and so on, and they're great community gathering places, and they're normally owned by local individuals as well.

I'm also thinking of the Old No. 12 and how long it's been in Ste. Anne. It's a great small business that has, like, survived and it's a great gathering place as well. And I think about, the, you know, the new co-op that they just built as a result of the growth and it's a great little grocery store and it's super handy, especially if you need milk or whatever. And you can get your whole groceries there as well.

I'd be remiss not to think about the pharmacy here in town, too, another small business. The same pharmacy who provides all the medication to the seniors in the villa as well as the community members. It's really a great little pharmacy and it's very convenient to have a pharmacist that knows you by name and knows your health concerns and, you know, can help you out in those ways.

So small businesses really drive our economy. They also help ensure that we have vibrant communities and they like to, as my member—as the member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) said, they, you know, they help out when—by supporting the charities and supporting the kids' sports and all the recreational activities.

* (10:20)

And some of the ways they help in this is, you know, you think of the community festivals and how the small businesses will go behind these community festivals. And I know this might be a bit of a foreign concept to some of our more urban MLAs, but outside of the Perimeter, every little community tends to have the summer festivals and it's generally the small businesses that are contributing and driving volunteers and helping out and making sure that everything's getting done at these festivals.

So I'm just thinking back to what our PC done—team has done to help make a more competitive tax environment for small businesses while we were in government. We have maintained a zero per cent small-business tax rate to help keep our businesses competitive in a global marketplace. And when you talk about these small communities, and that's an important thing, like, each small business—sorry, I'm going to veer a little bit away from that but—each small business actually contributes to another business. I can think of where they get their supplies, where they get their goods, and it's always local, and it's normally driven from local Manitoba businesses because they like to support one another.

I'm thinking a little bit about, you know, how things that would harm it is not holding the line on municipal and school division property taxes. That puts an unnecessary burden on a lot of these businesses, and their taxes have to go to pay something that we were in the process of reducing. You know, you can—there are ways that we could—that we had helped was we removed the PST from personal services and helped many small barbershops and salons become a little more profitable.

And back to what I was saying earlier, when you invest and you take these burdens off of these small businesses, it allows them to invest in other community activities and growth. And this is great for the Manitoba economy. We had kept our corporate tax rate competitive with other provinces and started to make our tax rates more competitive by indexing the basic personal amount and tax brackets to end back creep.

We had to give an MPI rebate that had helped businesses with fleet vehicles and we worked with—to give Workers' Compensation Board rebates to employees while we were in government—employers, sorry, not employees. We helped beer vendors and liquor 'realtailers', and I touched on that a little bit in my first part of this speech, that these are the places where people in really small communities go to get all

their services when it comes to alcohol and beer and so on and so forth. And it actually can be argued that a small business like that contributes a bit to the safety of a small community—

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

House Business

MLA David Pankratz (Deputy Government House Leader): On House business.

The Speaker: On House business.

MLA Pankratz: Honourable Speaker, pursuant to rule 34(7), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham). The title of the resolution is Public Safety Strategy Progress.

The Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 34(7), that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Kirkfield Park. The title of the resolution is Public Safety Strategy Progress.

* * *

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): It gives me great pleasure any time I get to stand up in the House and talk about small businesses. It's something that's near and dear to my heart, and I know near and dear to the hearts of many of us in this Chamber who are small-business owners or who are married to small-business owners or who come from families and were raised in small businesses, because, as we know, 98 per cent of businesses in Manitoba can be considered small businesses.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Small businesses are Manitoba's largest employer. They are the biggest driver of economic growth and prosperity in our province, and their welfare matters to every Manitoban.

But I think it's important to recognize that a lot of small businesses are struggling right now. There's a lot of issues that they're dealing with that this bill isn't going to do anything to address, and I want to talk about some of those issues because I think it's important to give them voice here on the floor of the Legislature.

A long-standing issue for many small businesses in Manitoba is labour shortages. Without workers, small businesses can't do what they do best. And part of solving labour shortages in Manitoba is making Manitoba a competitive environment to attract skilled labour and talent to our province and keep them here, but, unfortunately, what we're seeing from the NDP is the exact opposite. They're taking steps to make Manitoba less competitive from a taxation standpoint and less competitive when it comes to neighbouring provinces when people are choosing a place to live.

One of the things we're seeing the current NDP government doing right now, for example, is ending the indexation of tax brackets, resulting in bracket creep, which is going to decrease the purchasing power of everybody's paycheck.

And why that matters to small businesses is because it puts pressure on small-business owners to raise wages beyond what they can afford to make up for that. They care about their employees and they want their employees to be able to pay for all of their own basic needs, to raise their families and to stay here and to not leave Manitoba for some greener pasture, but if they—the purchasing power of their paycheck is being taken away by this NDP government, small-business owners will be left with no choice but to raise wages to make up for it.

So that's one of the things the government is doing to make Manitoba less competitive for the talent pool that we have here in Manitoba.

There's other things that Manitoba employees will take into consideration when deciding where to live. For example—and I know this well as a parent—the availability of daycare, but, unfortunately, we've seen no plan from the current government to increase the availability of daycare in communities across the province, and, in fact, they cancelled thousands of planned daycare spaces. It was one of the first things they did after coming into government.

One of the main competitive draws for Manitoba is the cottage life. A lot of people will choose to live here because they can find a reasonably affordable cottage within a decent driving distance of many communities in the south of the province.

And, unfortunately, now the NDP government has made that more expensive, too, by eliminating the property tax rebate that cottage owners would receive. If it's not your primary residence, you don't get any credit at all; they don't qualify for the \$1,500 rebate that the Province instituted and their property taxes

are skyrocketing, making cottage life—putting it out of reach for a lot of Manitoba families who might choose to make Manitoba home, to come here to work.

Small businesses across the board are dealing with rising costs. Supply chain disruptions that began during COVID and have persisted through this era of great uncertainty around tariffs have resulted in a lot of small-business owners' costs going through the roof. In that environment of uncertainty, it's very difficult for small-business owners to operate.

What they don't need is a provincial government that piles on; for example, by eliminating any property tax rebate commercial property owners would have received. So small businesses that own their property and pay property taxes now in Manitoba are going to be paying more across the board; 100 per cent of commercial property tax owners will be paying more property tax under this NDP government.

The NDP also did away with the PST remittance commissions that were paid to small businesses. Small businesses, under the previous PC government, got a small fee for collecting PST on behalf of the Province. The NDP said, no, we'll take that, further driving up costs for small businesses. And it may seem like a small thing to members of the NDP, but to small-business owners right now and particularly in this environment, every dollar counts.

And then the NDP went along and absolutely gutted Manitoba's award-winning red tape legislation—absolutely abandoned any pretense of caring about red tape, completely ignoring the fact that red tape comes with tangible costs for small-business owners; there's all kinds of studies, there's all kinds of facts that prove it. The NDP said, eh, no big deal, and gutted it. So now small-business owners are going to be dealing with increased regulations and all of the costs that go along with that.

And why that has a cost to small-business owners is because most small-business owners don't have, for example, a compliance department, an HR department; in many cases, it's the small-business owner doing that work to ensure they're in compliance with all of the regulations that the NDP like to put on them. So when regulations increase, there's a cost in time, and you can assign a dollar value to that for small businesses.

* (10:30)

Let's not forget that they rammed through an array of anti-business legislation through BITSA last year, all in all making it very difficult for small businesses

in Manitoba to operate and making it entirely feasible that small businesses will shut down or move to other provinces who have governments that are much more business-friendly.

I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity in the House to highlight some of the many small businesses in the Roblin constituency. We're very fortunate in Charleswood and Headingley to have a great number of small businesses, many that are new, many that have been in the constituency for decades, in some cases more than a century.

In Headingley, and I know my colleague to the left of me is a big fan of Konez. It's a brand-new ice cream restaurant that's opened up on Portage Avenue, so if you're heading out west out of the city, you can stop at Konez. It's owned by a group of younger adults in the community of Headingley. I was in there on the weekend with my family. My kids decided they wanted to take me out for ice cream for Mother's Day, so we went to Konez and the place was hopping. Business is booming at Konez, and the ice cream's delicious. Can't recommend it highly enough.

Also in Headingley we've got Bell's Trailer Hitches. I was fortunate recently to highlight that business in a private members' statement. Bell's has been in Headingley for over a century—five generations of the Bell family have operated this very successful business. That's also on Portage Avenue.

And most members will know that Headingley is home to some of the best greenhouses in the province. We've got Shelmerdine, T&T Seeds, Paterson, Leclerc, Bosch.

If you need bedding plants this spring to plant in your garden, make the trip out to Headingley; it's well worth it. It's a great afternoon.

Headingley is home to some great restaurants. Nick's Inn is another favourite. I like to stop there on my way into the city for a milkshake. Headingley Grill, great place for breakfast. We recently recognized their 25th anniversary as well.

And Charleswood has its share of great small businesses, as well. Charleswood Paint; I love going to Charleswood Paint for all of my family's painting needs. With four kids, there's a lot of dings on the walls; we repaint often. And I always appreciate going in there and the level of expertise that they provide when it—you know, because I'm a DIYer, I am no expert when it comes to painting.

Charleswood Florist recently helped me out when I wanted to send flowers to somebody who was sick. They put together beautiful arrangements.

And all of these businesses, honourable Deputy Speaker, don't just employ Manitobans in our communities, but they support our communities. These are the businesses that sponsor local sports teams, that show up at local events. They play a critical role in keeping our constituency vibrant and a great place to live. So it's about so much more than just employment. It's about their presence in the community and the value that they provide.

We're—we certainly have no shortage of delis. If you are planning a barbecue, you can go to Headingley—or to Charleswood, sorry, for your steaks or burgers. Roblin meats, Mighty Meats—you've got a couple different options there.

And we're home to countless accountants, law firms, dentists, chiropractors, physiotherapists, optometrists. Those are all small businesses, too. Small businesses are critical to the future of this province.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I rise today to put a few words on the record with Bill 208, The Manitoba Small Business Month Act, which will—seeks to proclaim the month of May each year as Manitoba small business month.

On the surface, this bill may seem like a positive and celebratory gesture, one that acknowledges the incredible contributions of small businesses to our communities and, of course, our economy. And I want to begin by affirming that we, the PC Party, support small businesses. In fact, we champion them.

We know that small businesses are more than economic engines; they are the cornerstones of community life. From the family-run hardware store in St. Laurent to the multicultural restaurants that are now dotting Winnipeg's neighbourhoods, these enterprises are the heart and soul of Manitoba.

But what we can't forget is all of our producers out there; they're small businesses. Our farmers, whether it's raising pork, beef, chickens, eggs: all the stuff that we learn to appreciate when we go to the grocery store—each and every single one of our producers across this province is a small business.

They employ people as well. We can't forget about our Hutterite colonies. They're not only producers, farmers, but a lot of them have other branches of business. I have one in my constituency

that builds pre-made concrete buildings. They employ 43 locals in rural Manitoba. They are months and months and months on the waiting list if you want to order a building from them. They are so busy and they do amazing quality work.

Another colony, they actually build grain elevators. And so, if you have a farm, you want to load and distribute to a certain bin—I'm not sure about some of the people in the Chamber here, if they've been on a farm, but they actually lift up, and our leader has been and toured this facility here, actually. It was an amazing manufacturing plant right on the colony. And their sales are all across Canada; it's amazing. And I believe they're around 26 different employees.

They employ our neighbours; they sponsor our kids, our team sports. They innovate, take risks and persevere. This is describing the small business in rural Manitoba—well, actually, across all Manitoba and Canada, but I'm specifically talking about some in my community. And obviously, they have times where economic uncertainty looms over their head as well, as we are looking at right now with tariffs and all those other things that threaten small businesses on a perpetual basis.

I do want to just—another shout-out to Mike Futros, the owner of MTT, which is our local Petro-Canada station. It's had the same name, although it has stood for different things over the years, but MTT stands for meals taste terrific, because they're a restaurant; they are a vendor; they are a lounge. They are pretty much in rural Manitoba, everything that you would see in a common area, because we don't have tons of businesses dotting the landscape.

But, in particular, Mike Futros and his wife Barb, who have just sold this business now, they have historically sponsored—and nobody knows, it's all quiet—but they have historically sponsored the local arena in the form of not putting their name on anything. But they sponsor all the propane that the Zamboni needs to run—propane and fuel that the Zamboni needs to run to keep the local arena clear and have a nice skating surface for all of our kids to enjoy.

So that is something that we need to shout out to, not just that small business, but all small businesses that support our local communities and sports teams. I think if you look at any baseball team in rural Manitoba, you'll see whether it's our local Kubota dealership or John Deere dealership—you'll see the sponsors on the uniforms where they're allowed to wear them.

In Lundar, the next arena to the north that is heavily helped out by Sigfusson Northern—between the Zamboni and renting sign spaces—all those things add up from these businesses to support local communities.

So honourable Speaker, we must ask ourselves what—sorry, honourable Deputy Speaker, my apologies—we must ask ourselves, what does this bill actually do to support small businesses? Because while the NDP government is proposing to dedicate a month in name to small businesses, their actions of their government have done anything but make life easier for those small businesses.

* (10:40)

Declaring a small business month without backing it up with real, measurable support is not leadership; it's symbolism without substance. So I want to take a closer look, not just at this bill, but at the broader picture of how this government is treating small businesses in our province.

Let's start with the obvious question: What are the actual benefits of small business month? Will there be programs? Will there be grants? Will there be supports? Will the government be providing additional funding? So far, no details; no answers, similar to question period; no metrics to track the impact of this proclamation; no funding announcements; no support strategy; no plans to address real challenges like rising costs, staffing, crime or red tape—all of these on the rise under this NDP government, except for staffing.

Mr.—oh, sorry, honourable Deputy Speaker—it feels less like a strategy to support small business and more like a photo op, similar to the nurses here the other day. They want action, not photo ops. They want real words that matter, that make change.

The NDP are asking small-business owners to applaud a proclamation while they quietly dismantle the supports for those businesses that they really, really need.

Let's look at the facts. In less than a year, this government has taken 21 actions that are actively costing Manitoba's small businesses money, confidence and opportunity. First, the NDP eliminated the school tax rebate for commercial businesses and raised property taxes a staggering \$150 million. That is a direct hit on the bottom line of small-business owners in every single corner of Manitoba.

Second, they have raised income taxes by eliminating the basic personal amounts exemptions, punishing the very professionals—doctors, engineers, tradespeople—who keep our economy moving and some—support small enterprise.

In rural Manitoba, they say a dollar that is spent in the community—and Winnipeg, it might circulate a couple, three times—in rural Manitoba, it's different; that dollar goes from business to business to business. When farmers have a good year in Manitoba, Manitoba has a good year. They're finally catching up on the repairs—much-needed repairs, they're purchasing new equipment, and that is how rural Manitoba depends on small businesses.

On this side of the House, honourable Deputy Speaker, we had reduced red tape when we were in government. Every regulation that was brought in—new regulation that was brought in by government, that department had to remove two regulations, resulting in much, much less red tape and regulations.

Some of the regulations that the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler) had removed still insisted that frost shields, for example, were required on windows. The regulations that we have are ludicrous. The NDP got rid of that policy as soon as they took office, so I guess maybe they'll bring back in frost shields. Who knows?

They are a tying government that is going to be a one-hit wonder. They are soon going to realize that their time is expiring, just like mine.

So thank you for the time, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, fellow PC colleagues, and thank you, Deputy Speaker. It's nice to get a rounding applause from the PC caucus and the PC team, who actually support small businesses—not just symbolism, like my colleague from Interlake-Gimli says. *[interjection]*

You know, you've got members of the NDP already heckling me in the first 20 seconds of me standing up to put some words on the record about making May Manitoba small business month.

You know, it shows you the class of the NDP, honourable Deputy Speaker, that when I'm standing to talk about how great small businesses are, they want to make it personal. They want to attack. Shows you their true colours. But we on this side of the House will rise above the pettiness of the NDP and we will

talk about how great small businesses are and how much they're doing for our economy.

Honourable Speaker, I can tell you myself, and as I look around, probably the majority of the colleagues on this side of the House if not everyone on this side of the House has started a small business and has had to work for their paycheque and has had to make sacrifices to make payroll.

I know myself have had to put payroll on my credit card numerous times. As I look back, I can see, you know, various MLAs who've had small businesses who have had to make those sacrifices; who have had to dig into their personal savings, their line of credits, remortgaging their house to provide for their employees and for this province of Manitoba, to make life better here.

As I look across the Chamber here, I see maybe one small-business owner on that side of the House. And that's the interesting thing, and again, as they heckle because we're talking about how great small businesses are and how much they matter to this province and how important they are, then you've got the member from Point Douglas. I don't know if the member of Point Douglas has—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —ever had a job outside of this place. The member from St. Boniface wants to heckle. I can't even hear what he's saying, it's so loud in here, honourable Deputy Speaker. It's unfortunate that the NDP want to go low. We will go high. *[interjection]*

We will talk about how great this province is and how it's made stronger by small businesses, not how it's made by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) who's heckling me across the way, who wants to grandstand about a \$300 camera program, which in reality—*[interjection]*—yes, and they clap.

Here's the thing, and they'll clap for a \$300 camera, it shows you the disconnect, Deputy Speaker, that they have no idea that a commercial camera costs about a thousand dollars for one camera—a thousand dollars for one camera, and not on top of that, this system, the infrastructure, the monthly payments. The Minister of Justice has no clue. He has no clue. He's not—his reality is not based in reality, it's based in this fake, unicorn-filled world that he can just announce things and everything's going to go away, exactly like this bill is trying to do, here.

They're going to announce that this is a Manitoba Small Business Month Act and it's going to make

Manitoba businesses that much better. In reality, like my colleague from Interlake-Gimli says, it actually does nothing. It doesn't address anything; doesn't talk about grants; doesn't talk about funding; doesn't talk about supports for small businesses. All it talks about is small businesses—which is great.

But what are they actually doing for small businesses? We've asked them in question period, we've asked them here today—nothing. Nothing. They don't want to talk about anything because this bill to the NDP, like most of their legislation, if not all of it, is just surrounded, just encompassed in smoke and mirrors and symbolism.

Now, you know, the Minister of Justice has some strong words that he wants to say. Well, I welcome them. I asked him to stand up and let's debate it here, what it's supposed to be. Instead, they want to heckle, they want to you know, yell absurdities across the way when the—we on this side of the House, the entire PC caucus supports small businesses. We have ran small businesses. We know what it takes to run a small business.

Last night, I was honoured to attend the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce LG Champion Awards last night, and the minister from Brandon or the MLA from Brandon East was there. And it's funny to show the disconnect in that room from what the NDP are trying to paint and what Manitobans actually see. So normally, you go to an event and the minister's there, it's the minister's portfolio. There should be a rounding applause for him. You could literally hear crickets in that audience when they announced him.

And yet, when they announced—and you know, like the NDP do, they go low—introduced his colleagues—

An Honourable Member: Relevance.

Mr. Khan: —no applause. The relevance for them across the way is that this was the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce Champion Award for small businesses. It doesn't get any more relevant than that. It goes to show you they have no idea.

* (10:50)

I've got—you got more applause in here with our 20 colleagues than it did in an auditorium full of members because no one knew who the minister was. And the comments were, what have they actually done for us, honourable Deputy Speaker? People in the crowd said, who is this guy, what has he done? Nothing.

Then what happened was, they introduced the PC colleagues, honourable Deputy Speaker, and the room erupted in joy. People were ecstatic: rounding applause, on their feet, supporting small businesses—so much so that I think the minister actually tucked tail and ran out the back door, he was so embarrassed.

An Honourable Member: Relevance.

Mr. Khan: Again, the relevance is that this is a Manitoba chambers celebration of businesses and the NDP have no idea what they are actually talking about—[interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: So when it comes, honourable Deputy Speaker—[interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: You might not think it's loud, honourable Deputy Speaker—you might not think it's loud, but I can't even hear the words that are coming out of my own mouth, let alone I don't know how you're hearing what I'm saying up here.

The behaviour by the opposition when we're talking about how great small businesses are is concerning. And I would say, on this side of the House, we respect the authority of the Chair and we respect this building and everything we do in here. And again, the member from River East Kildonan wants to heckle me, as all the members do. That's okay.

So let's get back to why small businesses are amazing at what they do for this province, not only the sacrifices they make—I want to take a second and acknowledge some of the businesses yesterday that were at the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, businesses like Q Inc. in Winnipeg; Lynn & Liana Designs in Steinbach—a great company, great local Manitoba company, if you want something for a great gift, you've got to go to Steinbach, the MLA there not only is one of the best MLAs this province has ever seen, but also this company here, Lynn & Liana Designs; Friesens Corporation in Altona, another great business.

This one's a massive upcomer here in the province—Southport Aerospace centre, with the great MLA from Portage la Prairie was there, full force, in support. I believe they're so honoured to have that MLA, honourable Deputy Speaker, and they see the work that he does—they actually brought him up for a picture up on stage and they asked the minister from that side of the House to actually get off the stage while he took a picture there.

You look at Nonsuch Brewing in Winnipeg; Valley Fiber, Winkler, amazing work they do. And the MLA from Winkler-Morden, I want to give her, you know, a massive round of applause for that MLA and the work she's doing in support of small businesses.

Not one round of applause from the members opposite, honourable Deputy Speaker. [interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: I know my light's on. I'm just waiting for some order to come to the House here so I can proceed. If we're going to keep having this rousingness from the other side—I can understand that members opposite don't like it when we talk about support for small businesses and all the support on this side of the House, when, in reality, all they have is daggers and hate on that side of the House, honourable Deputy Speaker.

You look at individuals like Derek Earl, the chair for BizforClimate in Winnipeg, here; Marcel Kringe, founder and CEO, Bushel Plus in Brandon—another great company in Brandon.

You know, honourable Deputy Speaker, the list goes on and on of all the great businesses here in the province of Manitoba and all the great work they're doing.

I only have a minute left. I'm going to ask for leave so I can continue on, I'm only on page two.

You know, you look at the past record of the NDP here, they're the ones that raised the PST on Manitobans and small businesses, we're the ones that brought it down. We're the ones that removed PST from personal services to help small businesses like barbershops and salons. We're the ones that helped beer vendors and liquor retailers and wine stores and restaurants by allowing them to sell more diverse products. We're the ones that make it easier for businesses by removing red tape and artificial barriers. They're the ones that increase it, honourable Deputy Speaker.

When you look at the list of stuff that goes on and on and on, NDP are not business-friendly. The NDP have clearly killed this economic horse in this province. Under their government, this GDP in this province, is the lowest it's been in decades, unemployment is the highest it's been under this NDP, honourable Deputy Speaker.

The NDP are a complete failure when it comes to supporting small businesses.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): You know, I think it's very telling that this NDP government has put forward so few speakers to speak to what should be a very important bill.

And as my colleagues have stated this morning, our PC team supports small business, as many of the members from our side of the Chamber have either owned a small business or worked in small business. We are also all from small communities that are built on homegrown entrepreneurialism.

Our small communities are amazing, thanks to those family businesses and the people that donate not only their time, but also significant dollars to make our communities incredible: everything from rinks to playgrounds to school projects, those are all coming from the individuals that live and work in our communities.

And those of us on our side of the bench know first-hand what it takes to actually do a payroll. As the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, there are very few individuals from the other side of the beds that have ever had to do a payroll or have even owned a small business.

Our side of the bench knows and has faced the cost implications of red tape, something the NDP clearly does not have an understanding of, as they brought in bill 16, removing the one-to-one ratio of—or, two-to-one ratio of removing red tape reduction, something that the CFIB has previously said has been a huge benefit to small businesses in Manitoba. By eliminating that red tape, the NDP has put us backwards on that process.

The NDP has clearly positioned itself with an anti-business rhetoric over just the short almost-two years that they have been in power. As we've seen over the past number of years with the Trudeau Liberals, as well as the Kinew government, our reliance on foreign markets has grown significantly, where it's often cheaper to import goods from half a world—transported by sea, rail and truck than it is to domestically produce.

We know that there are more restrictions on interprovincial trade than intercontinental—differing environmental regulations, licensing requirements, labouring requirements, health and safety legislation, tax policies, alcohol taxes, trucking restrictions, among a host of others, and these barriers are costing small businesses and the trickle-down effect costs consumers. This is a problem. This is exactly why Canada is in the predicament it's in.

And right now, the NDP are halting legislation to remove those interprovincial barriers that would in essence support small businesses and improve our ability to do business, not just within Manitoba, but across the country. So it's disappointing that the NDP refuses to support Bill 227 to remove interprovincial trade barriers and enhance labour mobility, despite the fact that Montreal institute and CFIB have both indicated that Manitoba could be among the greatest benefactors across the country.

So here we have a bill before us today that is supposed to support small business, but the NDP's actions speak louder than words and their actions are showing that they don't support small business in Manitoba, because the bills that are before the House today, such as Bill 227, the NDP are halting, which actually would have tangible and meaningful, positive impacts to small businesses in Manitoba.

We have a skilled worker shortage here in Manitoba. We know that we need doctors, nurses, veterinarians, skilled workers, skilled tradespeople, welders, yet this NDP is halting the progress to bring those workers that Manitoba need the most.

We need to foster a better business environment here in Manitoba. Tax competitiveness has been significantly weakened by the Kinew NDP over the past almost two years. Ideological decisions like carbon taxation, land-use limitations, regulatory red tape, all have made it increasingly difficult to start or expand a business here in the province. The job-killing payroll tax is one example that penalizes companies that actually want to hire more Manitobans that needs to be eliminated. When the NDP had the opportunity a year ago to increase the thresholds, they chose not to, and instead have delayed increasing those—

* (11:00)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have five minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 14—Protecting Women's Health in Manitoba

The Deputy Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and the time for private members' resolutions has begun. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Protecting Women's Health in Manitoba, brought forward by the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen).

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton),

WHEREAS women have historically faced barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare, leading to significant harm to their health and well-being; and

WHEREAS long-standing threats to reproductive rights created the need for the implementation of The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, which ensures access to and delivery of abortion services without harassment or intimidation in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act protects access to healthcare with dignity, privacy, and safety of both patients and health-care providers by establishing buffer zones around clinics; and

WHEREAS the previous Provincial Government's decisions put women's health at risk, including the closure of the Mature Women's Centre at Victoria Hospital, which reduced tailored access to menopause and osteoporosis care; and

WHEREAS cuts to lactation consultants under the previous Provincial Government impacted access to supports, disproportionately affecting women's and babies' health outcomes; and

WHEREAS the current Provincial Government is lowering the breast cancer screening age to 40 and expanding screening infrastructure, staffing, training and services so more women can access this vital healthcare in the province; and

WHEREAS this Provincial Government continues to protect reproductive rights with ongoing funding of safe abortion services and the expansion of free birth control programs to include Plan B; and

WHEREAS buffer zones serve as a necessary measure to uphold the right to access healthcare free from coercion, fear, and interference.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to recognize the importance of women's health care and the right of all Manitobans to access abortion and other critical reproductive health care, pre- and postnatal care and menopause treatment, and to affirm the provincial government's ongoing support for buffer zones for reproductive health care that protect the patients and health-care workers who provide these important services.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen),

seconded by the member—the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton),

WHEREAS women have historically faced barriers to accessing reproductive—[interjection]

Therefore.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to recognize the importance of women's health care and the right of all Manitobans to access abortion and other critical reproductive health care, pre- and postnatal care and menopause treatment, and to affirm the provincial government's ongoing support for buffer zones for reproductive health care that protect patients and health-care workers who provide these important services.

MLA Chen: Honourable Speaker, I rise today to speak about an issue that is deeply personal, not just to me as a mother and a woman, but to so many across our province: protecting and strengthening women's health care in Manitoba.

Health care is not just about hospitals, clinics or policies. It's about people. It's about families. It's about ensuring that every Manitoban, regardless of their age, background or identity, can access care that is safe, respectful and culturally appropriate. And for far too long, women's health care has been overlooked, underfunded and deprioritized in this province.

We know what happens when governments don't prioritize women's health, it's the woman who pays the price. And too often, those most affected are women already facing additional barriers: low-income families, Indigenous women, newcomers, racialized communities and the rural Manitobans.

Honourable Speaker, I speak not only as the first Chinese Canadian MLA in Manitoba's Legislature, but as a mother of two young children. I remember what it was like to become a new mom in the new country, it was overwhelming. While navigating the new country's health-care system, including prenatal care, childbirth options and postpartum support, building a support network and embracing the cultural differences, I didn't know where to turn, I didn't always know the questions to ask and I certainly didn't always feel like there were enough services available to support me.

And I know I'm not alone. In my role as MLA for Fort Richmond, I've spoken with so many women—mothers, daughters, grandmothers—who've shared

their stories with me. They've told me about the long waits to see a specialist, the lack of services for menopause, the struggles with breastfeeding without access to lactation consultants and the frustration of being told their concerns aren't serious or urgent.

Honourable Speaker, these aren't just health-care issues. These are quality of life issues. These are about dignity. These are about people.

When I served on the Newcomer Advisory Committee at CancerCare Manitoba, I learned something fundamental: health care isn't just about treating disease, it's about treating people—people from different backgrounds, with different cultural values and lived experiences. And if we truly want an inclusive and effective health-care system, we need to ensure it reflects those differences because what's respectful, helpful and effective for one person may not be for another.

For example, when it comes to reproductive health, menopause or postpartum care, there are often cultural norms that shape how people talk about and access these services. We must listen, we must make space and we must build a system that recognizes the full humanity and complexity of every Manitoban. That's why I'm so proud of the steps our government is taking.

In Fort Richmond, I've heard loud and clear from women in my constituency that they want the Mature Women's Centre brought back. And today I'm proud to say that we are doing just that. The centre at Victoria Hospital was a lifeline for many women, offering care in areas like menopause, osteoporosis and heart health. Its closure in 2017 left a deep void. But our government is restoring and expanding that care with a \$10-million investment in services that address the real and urgent needs of women in our community.

This isn't just about reopening a clinic, it's about restoring trust. It's about recognizing that women in their 50s and beyond deserve thoughtful, science-based and compassionate care.

We're also investing in hormone replacement therapy, another issue I've heard about from so many women. Menopause and perimenopause are not just phases to get through. They can deeply impact mental health, quality of life and relationships. This care must be accessible, affordable and rooted in up-to-date research.

Honourable Speaker, as a mother, I also want to speak about the critical importance of postnatal care.

When I had my first child, I struggled. Breastfeeding didn't come easily and finding the right supporting was difficult.

When lactation consultation services were cut by the previous government, many mothers felt abandoned. Those services aren't a luxury, they are essential. They help new families find stability, confidence and a connection in a vulnerable time. So when our government restores these services, we're not just investing in health, we are investing in families, in communities and in the well-being of the next generation.

Another area where we are taking action is in breast cancer screening. We lowered the screening age to 40 and backed up with real investments—\$4.6 million for staffing, infrastructure and mobile mammography units, because early detection saves lives and no woman should miss out on care because of where she lives or how much she earns.

And we are making sure that maternity care is accessible and culturally appropriate. We are investing in midwifery, recruiting more midwives across the province with \$1.1 million in funding. In many communities, especially Indigenous, newcomer and rural communities, midwives aren't just health professionals, they are trusted companions through one of life's most profound journeys.

Honourable Speaker, our government is building a new path forward, one that listens, one that understands and one that acts. We are doing this because we believe every person has the right to make informed choices about their health. We believe in investing in care that meets people where they are, in the language they speak and in the context of their lived experience.

Honourable Speaker, as a mother, as an immigrant, as an MLA and as a woman who has spent years listening to the community, I know how personal this work is. This isn't just about reversing the damage of the past. Protecting women's health is about creating a future where every Manitoban can access health care that is compassionate, equitable and effective.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Questions

The Deputy Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. And questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first sequence—the first question may be asked by a member from another party; and 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.

Floor is open for questions.

* (11:10)

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I'd like to ask the member opposite who she or her colleagues have consulted on this resolution.

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the Minister of Health and the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) for—they have done the tremendous job of consulting with many groups and many individuals and many front-line workers that represent the voices of women and families in our communities.

And also, as a mother of two young children, I've personally connected with many women who have shared their struggles navigating women's health care, and the Minister of Health and the Minister of Families have done a lot of work in the community to ensure that health services are accessible and are culturally respectful. Listening to the stories and concerns is at the heart of the work we are doing and it is helping shape the support we offer.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I congratulate my colleague from Fort Richmond for bringing this very important resolution forward.

My question and my comments are: the previous failed PC government put women's health care in our province at risk when they shuttered the mature women's health centre, leaving women without access to these essential services. Our government is delivering on our province—to reopen this vital centre with Budget 2025 putting shovels in the ground.

My question for my colleague is, how did the closure of the mature women's health centre affect her constituents?

MLA Chen: I want to thank my colleague for the important question.

The closure of the Mature Women's Centre in 2017 was devastating to many women in my constituency, particularly those navigating menopause or osteoporosis. This centre offered more than just health services; it provided comfort, understanding and specialized the care during a stage of life that is often overlooked.

I heard from women who felt as though their concerns were no longer valid and that their needs didn't matter. It was a painful reminder of how easily a woman's health can be sidelined.

So reopening this centre isn't just about restoring services; it's about restoring dignity and showing women that their health matters at every stage—

The Deputy Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Doctors Manitoba, Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals and the Manitoba Nurses Union have noted that this government has failed to provide a comprehensive health-care workforce recruitment strategy.

Can the NDP share today what their strategy is to recruit health-care workers to improve services for women and girls?

MLA Chen: I want to thank the member opposite for the important question, and, first of all, I want to thank the Minister of Health for their work that—has done a tremendous job for adding over 1,600 net-new health-care workers into our health-care system in Manitoba.

I understand our staffing is a significant challenge and it's something we are actively addressing as a government since we took the office in October 2023, and we are working on improving recruitment efforts through targeted programs, offering incentives to health-care professionals and expanding training opportunities for new workers in specialized fields.

Our goal isn't just to add more services, it's to—

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

MLA Kennedy: Everyone deserves equal access to health care, which includes abortion services. Under the previous failed PC government, the Women's Health Clinic had to turn away over four—or 500 women seeking access to abortion services because of their malicious budget cuts to our health-care system.

Can my colleague share with the House what our government is doing to support the women's health centre?

MLA Chen: Honourable Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for this important question.

Reproductive health is fundamental to well-being and personal autonomy. The previous government's failure to adequately support these services left a lot of Manitobans in very vulnerable positions, and

I remember speaking with people who had to travel long distances or wait for far too long to receive care.

So our government is turning the page by investing in clinics that provide these essential services and by upgrading the infrastructure needed to deliver that care.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): One of the organizations or some of the organizations are pregnancy-care centres across Manitoba. They do so much to help support women and in their health-care journey when pregnant and having babies.

Which pregnancy-care centres were consulted through this bill?

Thank you.

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

And again, I want to give this credit to our Minister of Health for their tremendous, amazing job that has been done in terms of talking—listening tour, talking to front-line workers and adding over 1,600 net-new health-care workers.

And also, I understand the concern about accessibility and it's something we are actively addressing. And our goal is to ensure that all Manitobans, no matter whether they live, have timely access to the care they need.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

MLA Kennedy: The previous failed PC government put women's health in our province at risk when they cut lactation consultation services at the Women's Hospital.

My question for my colleague is, how did the PC government's termination of the lactation consultation service affect new parents in her constituency?

MLA Chen: I want to thank my colleague for this question and as a parent myself, I know just how overwhelming those first few days after childbirth can be.

In my constituency, many families told me how critical lactation consultation was to their early parenting journey. These services helped them feel supported, 'equipped' and reassured. Cutting those consultations left many new parents to navigate those challenges alone, which increased stress and anxiety, especially for mothers struggling with feeding.

And our government recognized that and we are actively working towards that which can make a lifelong difference.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Cook: The MAHCP has recently stated that, quote, Manitoba is struggling to retain specialized health-care professionals on the frontlines and with every government announcement, allied health is asked to do more. We are told more help is on the way, but it's not happening.

Do the NDP believe that this resolution will speed up the recruitment of allied health workers like mammographers and sonographers that are so important to women's health care?

MLA Chen: Since our government took office in October 2023, we are focusing on prioritizing investments that directly benefit Manitobans and address critical needs.

When we invest in health care, especially in services that are currently underfunded such as gender-specific care, we're not only improving the quality of life for individuals, but also reducing long-term costs associated with untreated conditions. And we are committed to ensuring that these essential services are funded and staffed responsibly through strategic investments, targeted funding and targeted recruitment and by working with the federal government for additional support.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

MLA Kennedy: Last year, our government launched a universal birth control program for Manitobans to access free prescription birth control, giving them greater reproductive freedom. Since its start in October of 2023, over 32,000 Manitobans have accessed free birth control through the program.

Can my colleague share with the House how we are continuing to support Manitobans' reproductive freedoms?

MLA Chen: I want to thank my colleague for this important question.

Reproductive health is health care and must be protected. Promoting reproductive health care means ensuring people have the ability to make informed, responsible decisions about their health and futures.

* (11:20)

When people can access reproductive health services without worrying about the cost, they're

better able to plan their futures, care for their health and make informed decisions.

With Budget 2025, we are expanding this program to cover more options, because protective health is more than a prescription. It's about having real, applicable choices.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: And with that, time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Deputy Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Another day, another partisan NDP resolution patting themselves on the back. This seems to be how we spend private members' hour when it's the NDP's turn. Rather than doing work that will benefit Manitobans, the NDP, as usual, want their gold stars, want their pats on the back.

And so that's what we're going to entertain today, honourable Deputy Speaker. I do find it rich that the NDP put forward a resolution on women's health care when their record thus far, after 18 months in government, has been, frankly, dismal for women.

I'm going to start—and perhaps this will not be a surprise, given my advocacy on the issue so far—with breast cancer. I think it's important to put on the record that the only reason the NDP have made promises to reduce the breast cancer screening age in Manitoba is thanks to the effort of hundreds of advocates, survivors and their supporters across Manitoba, who have been applying persistent and relentless pressure on this NDP government to do the right thing, to take their lead from other provinces, who have already moved in this direction following new research that's become available, and to lower the breast cancer screening age for women.

So they've made this promise and, unfortunately, their latest budget made no mention of lowering the breast cancer screening age for everybody until the end of next year, which was unfortunate because they actually had committed to lowering the breast cancer screening age to 45 by the end of this year. And I asked a number of detailed questions about this during the Estimates process, and it took several questions for me to extract a commitment from the Minister of Health that they do, in fact, still intend to lower the breast cancer screening age.

I've also asked a number of detailed questions about the number of mammographers that need to be hired. Where do they need to be? In essence, does this NDP government have any plan that includes some details? How much extra screening capacity do we need? Where is it needed? How many more people do we have to hire to get that work done?

And I got, unsurprisingly, no answers. No answers from the NDP on the details. And that is what this NDP government does best, honourable Deputy Speaker. There is nobody better at staging press conferences and photo ops and overpromising and underdelivering than this NDP government. And it's a pattern. It's only been 18 months, but we've seen it with breast cancer; we've seen it with their homelessness strategy; we saw it when they promised to hire 90 paramedics in 2024 and fell dismally short of that.

We—just this morning, we saw that their commitment to do additional orthopedic surgeries is going to fall well short of their goal. So the NDP's track record on making promises and delivering on them is dismal, and I think that Manitobans reading this resolution today should bear that in mind, because the NDP are very good at promising things, very good at holding press conferences, not so good at following through and delivering.

I want to put a couple of comments on the record about the NDP's record when it comes to women's health thus far. We've talked about breast cancer. I'm still somewhat optimistic; I am hopeful, on behalf of Manitoba women that they will eventually get the work done on that. But I think it's going to require continued pressure from advocates, continued pressure from us on this side of the House, in order to get that done, because all the NDP respond to is negative media attention.

And we saw that in Brandon, just earlier this year. At the beginning of the year, Brandon Regional Health Centre, Prairie Mountain Health, actually advised expectant mothers and anyone seeking maternity services that they were going to have to go elsewhere because the NDP couldn't staff obstetrical services at Brandon hospital.

And we saw health-care workers speaking out about the unprecedented nature of this. Doctor Nichelle Desilets, who is now the incoming president of Doctors Manitoba, said, quote—in the Brandon Sun on Friday, January 3, quote: Some of the maternity nurses have told me they have never seen a closure of maternity services for that reason in their careers.

It could happen again. That's happening under this NDP government.

A doctor—a Brandon family physician, Dr. Elise Gaiser-Edwards, also spoke out about why the NDP's failure to properly staff obstetrical and maternity services at Brandon is so dangerous for the community. She said, in the same Brandon Sun article, quote: It looks like it's just a problem for expectant mothers, but it's a complete community-wide crisis. The obstetrical care collapse doesn't just affect pregnant women. Which is, by the way, a life or death situation. We know that in obstetrical emergencies, we have anywhere from five to 60 minutes to get that baby out, whether it's surgical or a vaginal delivery, and so redirecting to Winnipeg with two ambulances in our entire region is condemning women. Unquote.

That's the NDP's record, and it just goes to show their attitude to rural Manitoba and to women who are, you know—anyone here who's had a baby knows that that's one of the most vulnerable times in your life. And to think that women who were facing an impending delivery during that time frame were contemplating having to get in their cars or, worse, an ambulance, and go to a far away community to deliver when they had full expectation of being able to deliver in Brandon is appalling, honourable Deputy Speaker.

And the only reason that issue resolved itself is because doctors from other facilities stepped in. They took time from their families and from their time off and got in their cars and drove to Brandon in the middle of winter to cover those shifts off, because they care about their patients and they care about Manitoba women. And it didn't get the attention it needed until it got negative media coverage because that's the only thing that gets the NDP to respond to an issue.

A little bit more recently, we saw a nurse just here in Winnipeg, who, I should note, didn't want her name used because she feared reprisal, because that's the kind of culture the NDP are promoting in health care—that if you speak out, you should be afraid. Over the span of 72 hours, a nurse visited multiple health-care facilities looking for help.

And now I'm going to quote from the Winnipeg Free Press on Saturday, May 10: She first went to the eye centre at Misericordia Health Centre on Thursday night, but no doctor was on duty. Told to go to Victoria general hospital, she instead went home to rest. But when her symptoms worsened later that night, she went to Victoria, but was told the wait would be hours and there was, quote, no point in

staying, despite saying she'd been referred for a possible brain bleed. She says no one took her name or vitals. She left in tears, and she told the Winnipeg Free Press, quote, I shouldn't have had to beg for the care I ultimately needed.

The Speaker in the Chair

And that, I think, is an experience reflected in a lot of Manitoba women. Unfortunately, not everybody is able to advocate for themselves the way that this woman was. Not everybody has a family member or a friend to advocate for them.

Another women's health issue that's completely absent from this resolution is women's heart health, and that is a women's health issue. We know that heart disease and heart failure affect women differently than men, and there's a growing proportion of women—we're just—we're learning now that their symptoms are different, they present differently and, often, their symptoms go undiagnosed because they mimic other conditions and because a lot of our medical establishment has been taught how men present when it comes to heart health.

But there's some really great research going on here in Manitoba. I had the privilege of visiting the Albrechtsen Research Centre at St. Boniface Hospital just recently to learn about the great work that they're doing, cutting-edge research that's going to save lives—[interjection] I hear the Minister of Health laughing about that; I don't know, maybe they think it's funny, but I think it's actually really important work that's going on here in Manitoba. And it's actually being led by a young female doctor, Dr. Inna Rabinovich-Nikitin—I will get that spelling for Hansard. And she's doing incredible work. I was privileged to tour her lab and learn about the great work that she's doing to improve women's heart health.

* (11:30)

And let's not forget, when we're talking about NDP empty promises, they promised an extra \$5 million a year for the cardiac centre at St. Boniface Hospital. Wasn't in the 2024 budget, wasn't in the 2025 budget; maybe it'll be in the 2026 budget.

I guess we're going to have to get some media attention on that one to get them to move on that too because, as we know, the NDP overpromise, underdeliver and only respond when they get negative media attention, Honourable deputy Speaker.

So I think, you know, their record thus far has been one of failure, when it comes to women's health. I don't think this resolution is going to do anything to change that.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): I remember sitting in this Chamber when I was just newly elected in 2016 and, at that time, Canada—I think I'd been elected for a couple of months and Canada had announced that Mifegymiso or the abortion pill, as it's also known, would be coming to Canada. They were going to do tests and then it would come to market or to health care for women and gender-diverse folks to be able to access.

And again, I think it's important to note that, actually, Mifegymiso came to Canada 30 years after it had been in use in China and even in the US, which is quite ironic, if you think about it. And so Canada was late to the game. And I remember starting to ask questions in the House of the then-Brian Pallister government and about Mifegymiso. Were they going to be allowing it to be free for access for women and gender-diverse folks? Because Mifegymiso can be quite expensive, around \$300 to \$400.

And it was interesting because those lines of questioning, I posed for many years, and in this Chamber, though we're elected to represent all Manitobans, including those Manitobans that want to access abortion or need to access abortion for a variety of reasons, which is nobody's business but their own and certainly nobody's business in this Chamber, and year after year, the PC caucus, under the leadership of, well, leadership of Brian Pallister and then Heather Stefanson, they couldn't even say the word abortion.

They literally could not say the word abortion. Not only could they not say the word abortion, but they actually took the administration of abortion in its totality from the Department of Health, where it should rest, to, at the time, Status of Women, which just really showed you how utterly clueless the Pallister and Stefanson government were in respect of reproductive health, including abortion.

And, you know, we've got a PC caucus here, including the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook) who claims to get up and that she stands for all these rights including—although I haven't really heard her say if she supports the right to access abortion—but she gets up routinely in this Chamber and says that she stands for this right or this right. And yet, she sits in a caucus with members, including the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) and all of these other folks that nobody

in Manitoba knows who they are or really cares about them, but she sits in a caucus of a bunch of men who would, if they were given the opportunity, would introduce legislation to ban or restrict abortion so fast in this province.

And also, the same caucus members who support Pierre Poilievre who, again, I want folks to remember, that the federal Progressive Conservatives have, to this moment, introduced 41 pieces of legislation federally, including petitions, to ban or restrict abortion. That's who those folks are in this Chamber, including the member for Roblin because I can tell you that every single one of our members on this side of the House, including the men and gender-diverse folks, stand with Manitobans' rights to access abortion and protect that right.

It's important to put on the record and remind Manitobans that it took six years for us in this Manitoba Legislative Assembly to pass a safe access to abortion buffer zone act. I think I introduced that legislation six times before it finally received royal assent, and it finally received royal assent under our NDP administration because, again, the NDP—our government—understands that abortion is health care. It's as simple as that.

And so if folks disagree with abortion or they think—whatever it is that they don't agree with, that's fine. As I have said for the last, well, nine years in this Chamber, but certainly for the last 20 years, if you don't like abortion or don't agree with abortion, simply don't have one. It's literally as simple as that.

Nobody has the right to infringe on Manitobans' or any Canadian's right to be able to access abortion or any reproductive health care. And it's important to note that, again, if any—the PCs or the federal Progressive Conservatives had the opportunity, as fast as they could, they would open up legislation to restrict or ban abortion. They've already tried to do it, as I said earlier, 41 times.

And so, you know, we just had a federal election and it's really important that folks remember, either it be in Manitoba or across the country, that who you vote for matters. Who you vote for to sit in this Chamber, in this sacred Chamber, to represent your interests and to do what's in the best interests of all Manitobans. It matters who you elect. And I want to be very clear that there are members in this Chamber that are against abortion, against the right of Manitobans to be able to access abortion.

And what we saw in the last failed administration of the PCs under Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson was a decimation of women and gender-diverse folks' health care here in Manitoba.

Again, the MLA for Fort Richmond mentioned about lactation consultants. I, myself, when I had young children also needed the help and the expertise and the care and the compassion to be able to learn how to do that properly.

The PCs didn't care. They didn't care that women and gender-diverse folks wouldn't be able to access that very much-needed support, which, when you're going through that, when you're struggling to feed your baby, it is the worst feeling. You feel like you're alone, you feel like you're a failure, and then you have this, like, godsend that comes to your house and teaches you how to do it and literally changes the trajectory of your mothering and your mothering experience. And members opposite didn't care. They didn't care that Manitobans didn't get that support that they needed.

I remember going to the Mature Women's Centre at Victoria Hospital and sitting and talking with some of the nurses there. That they closed down that excellent, excellent and much-needed centre—and again, they had nurses—they had one nurse that worked there, and for the life of me I can't remember her name. She was the only one that was trained in that health-care expertise in Manitoba and, actually, one of the very few across Canada, and we lost her.

And I'll always, always remember, as I was leaving and talking with her, her starting to cry, and there was nothing that I could do. And all I could say to her was with—thank you. Thank you for taking that extra training. Thank you for dedicating your life to mature women's health, to reproductive health for Manitobans. Thank you, and I'm so sorry that—at the time it was under Brian Pallister—that he didn't care about mature women's health. He didn't care about reproductive health at all. He could not care less. And he proved that day in and day out in this Chamber with the cuts and the directions that he gave.

Again, I'll remind members, you know, the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook) routinely gets up here and acts as if she's, like, the champion of women's right for breast screening. Her party—her failed cold, callous, clueless government—cut money to the mobile breast screening unit. That's who she belongs to. She belongs to a party in a failed cold, callous, uncaring, incapable government that stood against health-care providers that do abortion services. She stood against

them and she said, you know what, you folks don't deserve that added protection.

* (11:40)

Luckily—luckily—Manitobans had the good sense to elect our government and have a Health Minister that every single day stands up for Manitobans' reproductive health. And under the Health Minister's excellent, competent leadership, we are now one of the few provinces that actually have universal free birth control. That is a game changer in the lives of Manitobans: literally transformative policies that we're doing.

You know who voted against that? Members opposite. They didn't want Manitobans to have free access to birth control. And if it were up to them, I'm sure they wouldn't even want Manitobans to have access to any contraceptives, similar to their buddies in the US and all the nonsense that we see going on in the US.

So I am so proud to belong to this government and to this caucus and we will always stand for reproductive health rights.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): It's an—a privilege for me to stand beside the member from Roblin who has done so much and has brought up so many good things here today.

But I also want to stand up for my mom and my sister, my daughters, my friends and my constituents, because I have been elected to represent all of my constituents. I want to talk about a number of things today, and some of those things that I am hearing in my constituency office and here today is the promises that have been made by the government across and just not fulfilled. And it's very unfortunate that this is happening, because it's putting women's lives in danger as well, too.

You know, I think about years ago, when my mother was in the hospital and she had, I believe it was called rheumatic fever, and I can remember the doctors accusing her of having mental health issues, because they didn't know. And we need to stand up more, to make sure things aren't happening like that again.

I was so proud to be here one day to see us honour Jenny Borgford who has done so much in Manitoba and so much for Canadian women when it comes to breast screening. I've had the opportunity to learn from what I've been told is one of the best breast doctors in Manitoba, Dr. Nostedt who's at the Portage

hospital here, who advocated for a mammogram machine, a 'mammogry'—mammography machine, and I know that the Portage hospital foundation is working on that.

And I know members across would consider that private health care, because that's private money that's going in to purchase a mammography machine. But again, the overpromising and underdelivering is what I hear from my constituents day after day. And when we look at that, you know, I can't help but think of the amount of people that have come into my office. And we know that there's a MRI machine going up in northern Manitoba and I'm glad to hear that—waiting to see it—but glad to hear that, because again, hopefully it will bring down those wait times.

We did a petition a number of months ago, and at that time there was 24,000 people, both men and women, waiting for an MRI across Manitoba. I'm here today to say that that has now gone up to—and again, at the 24,000, we were looking at six to eight months as a waiting time—we are now at 28,000, and it is now 10 months that we're waiting for.

Judy Jefferies had to wait too long. Her results come back because she had to wait and she is now suffering from cancer. We're not sure of what the outcome is, but we have to do better.

If I can stand here to support the women in my community, the women in my constituency, for better health care, but not overpromising. Nobody wants that when it comes to life and death situations.

I look at Regency House, again, a seniors centre in Portage la Prairie. They had me in there, and again, most of the ladies in that building have issues with mobility and that, and they're advocating for a new tub. That's it—just a new bathtub. Something to make these ladies comfortable. I talked to Shared Health, and what was their answer to me? Their answer to me was it wasn't a priority. It wasn't a priority of Shared Health? Or it wasn't a priority of those ladies that want to use that tub? So again, we need to start thinking more that way.

I want to talk about a few key messages from this Progressive Conservative team over here. Progressive Conservatives will always recognize the importance of women's health care. The NDP continue to put 'partisanmaship' over patients and wedge politics over women, and we're seeing that again in machines like mammography machines, machines like MRIs, that are increasing the wait times in a tremendous way.

PCs have been strong advocates for expanding breast cancer screening services and improving health-care access for Manitoban women and girls. In October, MLA Kathleen Cook introduced bill 221—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Once again, I must caution members that we cannot use members' names; we have to use their constituency name or their ministerial title.

MLA Bereza: Thank you for that reminder, Honourable Speaker.

The early screening for breast cancer act, which sets a firm deadline to lower the eligibility for routine breast cancer screening services from 50 to 40 years no later than December 2026.

PCs built and expanded several health-care facilities across the province to increase access to health care for women, such as gynecology services, breast and ovarian cancer and more.

I'd like to just name a couple of those facilities. The half-a-billion-dollar project in Portage la Prairie that, unfortunately, I'm not able to visit. The Neepawa Hospital; again, the PC government, when they were in power, put that out there, again, will give us better service for women out there. The addition to Boundary Trails in Morden-Winkler, Manitoba—again, to provide more beds.

This side of the government, we have been hammered on sending people out of province and out of country for life-saving.

I want to talk about a close friend of mine. Her first name is Shirley, she asked me not to use her last name. She was suffering of a heart condition that her doctor told her that she was not going to be able to live. Thank goodness for the PC government at that time, so that she could go down to the Mayo Clinic and be operated on and live a healthy, happy, wonderful life today.

So again, we have and we will continue to advocate.

The NDP government killed PCs' bill to lower the breast screening age and report on its progress. As of March 2025, Prairie Mountain Health suspended at-home birthing services for six months due to shortage of midwives. Three months earlier, Brandon hospital also nearly closed a maternity ward.

* (11:50)

I want to talk about some individuals as well too. A 69-year-old woman named Debbie Fewster died in

October 2024, after waiting almost two months for a triple-bypass surgery that she was told she needed urgently.

We cannot let that happen. And we shall not let that happen on this side of the table. We must do better when it comes to that.

In late 2024, a woman named Geraldine Mason was thrown in jail for a whole month because she had tuberculosis. When I read this, I thought about my mom and my mom being told that she had issues and that was her fault, a fault of what she did. So again, it might seem odd that a male is up here talking about women's health, but I am proud to stand and work every day for not only—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I have to say, it is something else. It is truly a rich experience to stand in this Chamber and listen to the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook) and the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza) and members on that side of the House try to do anything other than be accountable for the fact that they spent seven and a half years trying—like intently—intensely trying to destroy women's health care in Manitoba.

It is truly a mark of a—the highest level of unseriousness for the member for Roblin to stand in her place and claim to be the champion for women's health care when she was advising the previous government on how to dismantle women's health care. And the member acts like we don't know that. Well, we do know that. Honourable Speaker, they fired lactation consultants, they fired hundreds of women working in health care, they cut mobile breast cancer screening services, one of the most accessible ways that women and those who need it get screening for breast cancer.

Honourable Speaker, they dismantled the Cardiac Centre of Excellence here in Manitoba. And then they reference devastating cases, outcomes for Manitobans that are a direct result of the cuts they made to the health care that women in this province depend on. It is absolutely deplorable. It is shameful that instead of standing up and saying we're so sorry, we're so sorry for seven and a half years of damage to women's health care and we're going to do everything we can to atone for that, they stand up and they try to call the work—the very real work our government is doing in partnership with Manitobans who care about women, to fix the damage and make it better.

They call it a failure. We are doing that work in partnership with women. I sit down with women across this province all the time. I did so yesterday to talk about ways that we can invest and work together to making women's health care stronger, recognizing we have a ways to go, not only because we have to clean up the mess that they made; we have to fix the harm they did to women in health care, but because, disproportionately we don't see historically the investments in women's health care that we should.

And our government is doing it differently because we respect women. That's not a hard thing to say, Honourable Speaker. We respect women. We listen to women. We believe women. We understand the importance and the value in investing in their health care. But on that side of the House, for years, and even to this day, because it's not actually historical—to this day they have members on that side of the House who cannot stand up and say unapologetically: We wholeheartedly respect women and their full bodily autonomy, reproductive and health-care rights.

I challenge them to get every member on that side of the House to stand up and say it. They can't. I know they can't. And the member for Roblin definitely knows they can't. The member for Roblin, like every member on that side of the House, did something really disgusting in the fall of 2023, that definitely affects the health care of women, because we know that studies—evidence shows that when you have billboards attacking women, attacking the women who were murdered by a serial killer and attacking their families, that is harmful. That sends a clear message to women, some of the most vulnerable women, that not only do you not care about them, but you're happy to make them a target. That is disgusting.

And the fact that the member for Roblin proudly sits beside a person who only, just a week ago, barely apologized—barely apologized—for his role in that, I think speaks volumes.

I can barely hear what that member says because I see exactly what she does, and Manitobans need to pay attention to that. Manitobans need to pay attention to the fact that members opposite continue to not apologize for targeting trans kids, trans women. They continue to not acknowledge the fact that the investments that we're making to not only fix the damage they've done, but to improve the overall care and trajectory for women in this province. These are all ideas, suggestions that were brought forward under their seven and a half years—they don't care about that.

And so, Honourable Speaker, no, I will not take not a single lesson from the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook) or any member on that side of the House, because it has never taken me losing an election to acknowledge that women's health care matters. That is a value that our side of the House has fundamentally believed in consistently. There is no political wind that could shift any which way that would change that.

On this side of the House, we go out and we talk with women. We meet with women who are experts. We sit down with the gender-diverse community, we listen to their needs and we make investments based on what their expertise tells us. We've invested in gender-affirming care. We've eliminated barriers so that gender-diverse Manitobans can get access to life-saving, critical, essential health care.

But before we did any of that, our government made very clear we stand unapologetically with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We will always stand with the community.

Our government hasn't had to stand up and not apologize—because they still haven't—for hateful banners targeting some of the most vulnerable girls and gender-diverse people in our province.

So, Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, yes, we're going to bring forward resolutions that say women's health care matters. And we're going to go further: we're going to keep investing in it to make it better; we're going to keep listening to those who bring their experiences forward, and do better; and we're going to keep apologizing on behalf of the failed former PC administration for the harm that they caused to Manitoban—Manitoba women across this province and continue to, because if you don't acknowledge the harm that you've caused, you cannot repair it or atone for it, and members opposite haven't even taken that basic—basic—step.

Honourable Speaker, we're investing not only in more care for women at the bedside, we're investing in research. We're investing in critical research areas

in—regarding women's heart health, ovarian cancer, breast cancer screening. We're investing in education and awareness in all of those areas and more to make sure that we're closing those health inequity gaps.

We're closing those equity gaps to make sure that more women, particularly in racialized and BIPOC communities, have access to the health care and the information and the tools they need to get their health-care needs met and addressed accordingly, properly, respectfully.

Honourable Speaker, I watched—I sat in that seat where the member for Roblin sits now as the critic. I watched while the former premier, Brian Pallister, former premier Heather Stefanson, attacked women's health care with an enthusiasm and zeal that was unmatched. We fought tirelessly against their cuts to women's health care. We encouraged them—we basically pleaded for them to treat women's health care and women with respect. They slammed the door on that.

And now members opposite want to pretend that they're opening it? Absolutely not—absolutely not.

Every single member on that side of the House continues to show Manitobans in their actions and their behaviour that they do not value women's health care.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Women's health care does matter, and I want to open my remarks, first, by saying: happy National Nurses Week. And I want to say a shout-out to all those nurses who are on the front lines and behind the scenes—

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is before the House again, the honourable member will have nine minutes remaining. The hour being 12—the honourable member will have 10 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 13, 2025

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