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

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| ALTomARE, Nello, Hon. | Transcona | NDP |
| ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon. | Union Station | NDP |
| BALCAEN, Wayne | Brandon West | PC |
| BEREZA, Jeff | Portage la Prairie | PC |
| BLASHKO, Tyler | Lagimodière | NDP |
| BRAR, Diljeet | Burrows | NDP |
| BUSHIE, Ian, Hon. | Keewatinook | NDP |
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| NESBITT, Greg | Riding Mountain | PC |
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| <i>Vacant</i> | Tuxedo | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 14, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, 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.

House business. The honourable—orders of the day. House business—private members' business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Good morning, Honourable Speaker. Can you please call second reading of Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act, commemoration of days, weeks and months act amendment.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 208—The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

The Speaker: We will now call for second reading of Bill 2—eight—208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): I move, seconded by the member from Lagimodière, that Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Oxenham: Honourable Speaker, I stand before you today with immense gratitude to speak to the critical importance of two-spirit and transgender visibility. In the ever-evolving landscape of our world, the struggles faced by those existing beyond the traditional gender spectrum are increasingly evident, brought to our attention by recent media stories and our own lived experiences.

For individuals like me, who have traversed life's journeys outside the confines of a binary gender identity, the recognition and validation of our diverse experiences resonate more profoundly than ever before. It is a privilege to speak on Bill 208, which will designate March 31 as the two-spirit and transgender day of visibility here in Manitoba.

I humbly ask for the opportunity to recount my personal narrative with you and all of those present as I reflect on my formative years.

It was in 1977 that I first entered this world as a bright-eyed kid full of energy and potential. Growing up, I would do all the things other boys in my neighbourhood would do. We'd kick up dust on our bikes and ride around with our shirts off and pretend we were the Dukes of Hazzard.

My parents told me you could be anything you wanted if you prayed. I used to pray I would turn into Superman. Every lunch hour at school, I'd run as fast as I could in the field and jump and pray to God I'd turn into Superman, but every time I'd land on my face. But I'd get back up and I'd keep trying.

Growing up, I believed I was a boy. The defining moment when the concept of gender abruptly confronted me remains vivid in my memory, a moment that changed my perceptions and reshaped my self-understanding entirely. It was a poignant conversation with my mother, who tenderly explained to me that my identity did not align with the male persona I perceived myself to be. She explained to me that

I wasn't a boy and that I would not grow up to be a man. It was the first time I'd ever encountered gender and gendered expectations.

But I hadn't just encountered gender; it had slapped me right in the face. She reassured me that I need not conform to societal expectations, such as wearing dresses to church, yet indicated that I must learn to embrace my female identity. It seemed to go against everything I'd been taught up until that moment. Up until then, my parents always told me you could be anything you wanted, so I would pray that I would be turned into a boy. I thought that if I couldn't be Superman, then I could at least be a man.

Despite my continued engagement in typical masculine activities, excelling in sports alongside my male classmates well into my high school year, a seismic shift occurred with the onset of puberty. The profound changes my body underwent left me grappling with a sense of devastation and alienation. I was facing bouts of anxiety and depression daily, but I stuffed my feelings down.

Every time I felt my body change or people made assumptions about who I was based on my female-presenting body, I felt I was moving further and further away from the person I knew I was. Simultaneously, I struggled to reconcile these transformations while navigating the complexities of my ever-evolving sexual orientation. The societal messaging incessantly reinforced the narrow narrative that girls are meant to be attracted to boys, inundating me with a relentless stream of expectations that diverged starkly from my lived reality.

Growing up, I wasn't in a safe space to be queer and trans. I remember watching Ellen DeGeneres in the late '90s. She had just come out on television when one of my family members rattled off some homophobic comments that pushed me deeper into the closet.

In the years to come, I finally embraced my sexuality, but embracing my gender took more time. For almost 40 years, I continued to stuff my feelings deep within me, until one day in 2014 when everything changed. I'm having coffee with my wife in the coffee shop in Kirkfield Park and I remember just sitting there across from her, and she knew something was up. And she asked me if I felt like a boy and I said yes. And it was the first time that I had ever affirmed my gender out loud.

Over the years that followed, I began my transition journey and became the man I always knew I was.

I journeyed to become the man you see today. With these changes came a renewed sense of confidence, joy and pride that I honestly never knew possible.

* (10:10)

Through this time, my wife and I, we've had a beautiful child who is confident and she's full of love, and she's the greatest gift that I've ever received. She gives me strength to be in this place and to fight for the rights of trans and two-spirit and gender-diverse folks.

Having come out almost 10 years ago, my eyes were opened to the kaleidoscope of genders that exist in our world. It's a really big, beautiful kaleidoscope. I've learned so much from my community, many of whom joined us in the gallery last month.

The biggest lessons I've taken to heart are that no two transition stories are the same and that each one is beautiful and sacred. We need to get back to a place before colonization, where we listened to people's diverse, lived experiences and celebrated and uplifted them instead of trying to snuff the light—life out of them and the light out of them.

Watching community come together to rally against hatred last summer was heartbreaking, and it was also beautiful. Heartbreaking, because we still need to protest, and beautiful, because the community came together and declared that trans rights are human rights and that we exist.

I've seen leaders from the business community, from labour, from the health-care sector, social workers, religious leaders and community activists all link arms with us in the front lines of this fight against bigotry, and celebrate queer and trans lives.

Kids in schools who are queer and trans are constantly looking for signals from others that show them they have a safe person to be with or safe space to be in. They're looking for a government that affirms their personhood and allows them to express it. Hopefully, today marks that step forward in our province.

Reflecting back, I know my parents are good parents. They instilled in me values like compassion, respect and love for one's neighbours. All they needed was an extra nudge and some time to understand who their child really was.

Parents love their kids, and they want what's best for them, but there are times when we all, as parents, project what we want for our kids so strongly onto them that we fail to listen to them. It doesn't make us bad parents; it just means we're learning to love.

Just as my parents came to understand and love my gender and my gender identity and family structure, so can we all come to respect and cherish different kinds of people, genders and ways of being in our world. The Trans Day of Visibility is such an important signal to everyone that your gender journey is something worth celebrating and cherishing, and that you're not alone.

It's become increasingly apparent that my identity and experiences transcend the confines of cisgender, heterosexual norms, standing in contrast to the prescribed colonial ideals of gender and societal roles. I really want to take time right now and thank the two-spirit, trans and gender-diverse community, as well as the larger queer family that surrounds us all. You folks give me the strength to carry on each and every day.

Although we are all disappointed that this bill was blocked the first time around, I was immensely honoured that so many folks took time to be here for this historic event. Thank you for continually showing up for each other and for Manitobans everywhere. It's time to live our full, authentic and visible lives.

In light of these reflections, I bring attention to the pivotal bill under consideration, Honourable Speaker. This legislation serves as a powerful testament affirming the inherent value and validity of the two-spirit and trans communities. It sounds a resounding message, echoing the sentiment that their lives are not only deserving of recognition, but are indeed indispensable to the fabric of our collective humanity.

Thank you so much for your time, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): My question to the member from Kirkfield Park is: Why was March 31 selected for the date of this remembrance?

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): I would like to thank the member opposite for the question, and Transgender Day of Visibility, two-spirit–two-

spirit has been added to this bill, but it—in–internationally, it's known as Transgender Day of Visibility. And it's always held on March 31, and so just keeping up with the tradition, that's why we selected the day.

Thank you.

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I just want to say thank you to the MLA for Kirkfield Park for sharing his very personal story. And I'm sorry that you had to wait 40 years to be your authentic self, but I am so happy to know you now.

What inspired you to propose this bill?

Mr. Oxenham: The youth. Trans youth really inspired me. Youth who contacted me throughout the election campaign—even before, Honourable Speaker. I've been doing this work for many, many years, advocating for trans folks and trans youth. And I had many youth and adults reaching out to me asking, you know, like, what is it that you can do to help the community? And I thought this was a really good first step to acknowledge the existence of two-spirit, trans individuals and youth.

Thank you.

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): Thank you to my colleague from Kirkfield Park for bringing forward this bill.

Just a question. I believe there's also a Trans Day of Remembrance, which is in the fall. And so wondering what made the member bring this day forward rather than that, or if the member had considered bringing them both forward, et cetera, if that's something that they're looking at.

Mr. Oxenham: I'd like to thank my colleague on the opposite side of the Chamber for that very important question.

It does distinguish the day, trans day—or two-spirit and trans day of visibility is really, you know, a day to celebrate folks and to lift folks up, whereas Trans Day of Remembrance is a day to really honour and remember trans and two-spirit folks who have been murdered, which are at alarming rates right around the world. And so we come together on that day. It's a solemn day, so I thought it would be great to have something that uplifts community, something that we can rally around and celebrate, as opposed to, you know, being sad.

Thank you.

MLA Cross: Can you explain to us who you consulted when drafting this bill?

Mr. Oxenham: I'd like to thank my colleague from Seine River for that great question.

I was privileged enough to meet with many members from the trans, two-spirit community and gender-diverse community. I met with folks from Klinik, Manitoba Moon Voices, folks from the Rainbow Resource Centre and also just folks who are community members. Had several opportunities to meet with them, and they were all very excited. They can't believe that there's an opportunity to be recognized, and it's something that's really special.

So thank you for that question.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): My question is for the member from Kirkfield Park.

Being somewhat naive, my question is around—there's recognition month of—Pride month, which takes place in June, and it doesn't fall under legislation.

So my question is: Why was this day chosen, specifically for transgender, which, to my understanding, Pride month encompasses transgender and far more?

Mr. Oxenham: Yes, that's—I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question.

And I—you know, Pride month is a really special month. It brings together folks from different sexual and gender identities.

And I think what two-spirit and trans day visibility does is really highlights and signals to a community, a very marginalized community, a community that's very under-represented in society, that their lives matter, that they're valid and that they exist.

And I think something for the trans community specifically like that means a whole lot to the community. So that's why I wanted to have a day for celebration and acknowledgement.

* (10:20)

MLA Cross: I wonder if the member from Kirkfield Park could share some of the feedback they received from community when you approached them with this idea.

Mr. Oxenham: Again, thank you to my colleague for that great question.

The feedback was incredible. With—you know, the world around us is really hard on trans folks. We have provinces that are up against Manitoba that are really not doing any justice to trans youth, and the

feedback that I got was, you know, just really positive. You know, a government that wants to recognize folks for existing is a big deal, and the community's really, really excited.

Thank you.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Thank you to the member from Kirkfield Park for your openness and honesty on this.

Question I have is, are there measures in place to address issues such as discrimination or marginalization faced by the two-spirit and transgender individuals within this resolution?

Mr. Oxenham: I think this bill really states very clearly that two-spirit and transgender people have always existed throughout human history and that two-spirit and trans people existences are valid.

And yes, that's my answer for you, Jeff.

Thank you.

MLA Cross: How do you envision future events celebrating two-spirit and transgender day of visibility?

Mr. Oxenham: Thank you again, to my colleague for that great question.

And I can see celebrations within the community. Again, you—it was mentioned Pride month. I can see us celebrating here at the Legislature, lifting folks up and acknowledging them and their humanity, and I don't know how you couldn't celebrate that. It's just—we—I'm part of a community that's so diverse and beautiful, and I think that any celebration that we had would be just that, would be beautiful, would be very special, and I really hope that we can see that here some day.

The Speaker: There are no further questions?

MLA Cross: What are some of the challenges facing the two-spirit and transgender community?

Mr. Oxenham: Thank you, again, for that great question, to my colleague.

I would say the No. 1 epidemic is the murder of trans folks. I've seen and I've heard folks calling for the elimination of trans people. I've heard people say that trans folks have an agenda. And that—we do have an agenda, actually, and that is to live. That is our agenda: to live into adulthood and to have meaningful lives.

So I'd like to thank my colleague for that question.

MLA Cross: How do you see Bill 2–eight–208 positively impacting all Manitobans?

Mr. Oxenham: I believe this bill provides an opportunity for education. It shows that trans and two-spirit folks have existed and always have existed. We're not a new thing in society. We've been around for many, many years.

I think that, you know, folks across the aisle are getting to know me slowly but surely. And I'd like to extend that invitation to get to know the community, as well, and to get to know us. We're a bright, beautiful, fun-loving community and I invite you to get to know us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): It gives me pleasure to rise in the House and speak to Bill 208. And this bill is a important one on many levels and I would like to thank the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham) for bringing this bill forward so that we can have further discussion in the House today.

So it may be comments that the member from Kirkfield Park just made about getting to know people and understanding people—a little bit of history is the member from Kirkfield Park actually spoke to me many years ago on this very topic and has been an advocate for the trans community for many years.

In a previous life, prior to us being in the Chamber, the member for Kirkfield Park was a correctional officer, and I was a police officer and, at that time, in our executive of the police service. And the member for Kirkfield Park had come on a tour of our facility, and we had a great meeting and talked about the issues surrounding transgendered individuals when they're brought into custody.

And it resonated with us at that time, and when I say us, I mean our executive because it's not an area that we had talked about very much at that time. And it was very important to the member from Kirkfield Park to bring forward information and feelings and issues that members in the transgender community have when they run afoul of the law and had to be brought into custody, and being subjected to hate within institutions.

And so with that discussion, we were able at my police service to educate our members based on the

information that was brought forward by the member from Kirkfield Park, at that time, a correctional officer. Not only were we able to educate our members, we were also able to change policy and processes because of that and I believe it was reviewed by the member from Kirkfield Park, if I recall correctly, some of our changes that we made.

It also extended outside of our custodial area to our front reception area where we made a change of the washrooms that were designated male and female and they went to universal washrooms so that anybody entering our facility at that time could feel welcome. It was a small change but had large impact. Within the community, people felt that they were welcomed within our establishment. And coming from a policing establishment, it's not always the most welcoming environment for individuals, so what we can do to try and help that along the way, I was happy to do.

So just a little bit about this bill, as it breaks down from paragraph to paragraph, that I would like to bring forward is that paragraph 1, it says that individuals are deserving of respect, dignity, freedom to live as their true selves.

Paragraph 2 states that there have always been people who have challenged the binary conception of gender.

Paragraph 3 cites census data that one in 300 Canadians aged 15 and above identify as two-spirit, transgender or non-binary.

Paragraph 4 states that the contributions of two-spirit, transgender, nine–non-binary individuals fronting the 2SLGBTQ+ liberation movement have been overlooked.

And paragraph 5 cites campaigns to have sought to hinder and erase their existence.

* (10:30)

Paragraph 6 cites disproportionate rates of mental health issues due to the stigma created by varying instances, including the denial of gender-affirming care.

Paragraph 7 states how transphobia and discrimination are felt more deeply by Indigenous peoples and people of colour.

Paragraph 8 states how youth have agency over their lives and understand the concepts of gender expression and gender identity.

Paragraph 9 cites the creation of the International Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31, 2009 by Rachel Crandall Crocker.

Paragraph 10 states that the legislation would provide Manitobans with the opportunity to celebrate and support two-spirit, transgender and non-binary people.

And paragraph 11 states that the day would demonstrate that two-spirit, transgender, non-binary youth are seen, heard and cherished and deserving of safe and inclusive spaces.

Honourable Speaker, that sounds like a lot of areas that fall under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, of which I have been fortunate enough, over my career, previous to my time in the Chamber, of making sure was enforced and looked after on a global prospect—or global stage: not just my city of Brandon, not just Manitoba, but all of Canada.

And, of course, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows for the freedom of conscience, the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, and that every individual in Canada has the right to those expressions. It also talks about the freedom of peaceful assembly, and this bill talks about having a day of celebration and the fact that many people will want a peaceful assembly when they gather to have the celebration.

And last, of course, is the freedom of association. Now, the Charter mentions many, many other freedoms, but these are the ones that I picked out when I read through the Charter last night and again today to say how this impacts this bill.

And, of course, the freedom of association, the freedom of any individual to associate with another individual within our country is paramount to make sure that we, as individuals, have those basic freedoms that are denied to many, many other people in many, many other countries.

And, Honourable Speaker, it's not new to this House, and I've seen since I have been here a number of times that The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act amended have been brought forward. Recently, we spoke about the firefighters day of remembrance and celebration that happens on May 4 now and was passed through this very House.

And, of course, we were happy to be there as this group to participate in that process, and we're happy to see that go through stages to committee and to final resolution in this House. So, Honourable Speaker, it's important that individuals have the right to bring

legislation forward as they feel fit and that is important to each individual, just as I may bring legislation forward that I find very impactful and very important for the communities that I serve.

It's important again that individuals have the right of freedom of conscience, freedom of belief, opinion and expression, which result in freedom of association. So, I would just like to put those words on the record and, again, thank the member from—Kirkfield Park for his story today and for the information brought forward for all of us to consider in the House today.

And yes, thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière): It gives me great pleasure for—to put some words on the record about this bill.

I want to start off by thanking my dear friend and colleague from Kirkfield Park. This Chamber is richer because his voice is here advocating for his community. And so I want to thank him for putting his name forward and being here and being part of our Legislative Assembly here.

I would also like to thank our Premier (Mr. Kinew), who has been really unflinching in his support of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Every opportunity he's had, he's stood shoulder to shoulder with our members in our caucus and with the community, so I want to thank him for his advocacy.

We're coming out of a campaign where the opposition chose division and dog whistles and hatred. But we have an opportunity here to be models and to role model how we can really address in a meaningful way marginalization and inclusion.

And I want to take a moment to actually talk about both those concepts, marginalization and inclusion, because I think people aren't born marginalized in their essence. It's the societies and structures that they're born in that causes them to be marginalized.

So, we, as this provincial Chamber, have a real opportunity to change those structures, to see people, to celebrate people. And also on the idea of inclusion, we don't want to be including people in our flawed systems and be content with these flawed structures. We want to expand what's possible, who's welcome, in a meaningful way.

So, when we talk about marginalization and inclusion, we have a real opportunity as leaders in this province to welcome folks in, but also change and

expand the ways in which people are welcome. And you see within our caucus the broad communities that are welcome in this space, and we're working day after day after day to ensure that communities feel seen in this space and also feel that one day, they could be here.

So this bill is a really important opportunity for education: education, like in the formal sense in schools, but also community education. I'll say as a member of the queer community, I have—my learning journey continues about the nuances of two-spirited folks, trans folks, intersex folks, and so I'm on a learning journey as a part of the community so I can understand how education is ongoing for everyone, and a moment, a day of recognition like the two-spirit and transgender day of visibility is that opportunity.

And I can—I'll speak for all the educators in the room. When there's a day that gives you a chance to bring something into the classroom, it gives you a chance to really have a meaningful day with your students and take that opportunity to really deepen your understanding but also their understanding of the community and the society in which they live.

I come from an education background. I worked with Wayfinders, which is a mentorship program with high school students. And it wasn't a program for queer students but—specifically—but we attracted them. Our program was full of queer students, and I'm so proud of that. And I think it's because our staff gave students space to be who they are.

And if students can feel a sense of belonging in their communities, whether it's school or cultural communities or even at home—if you feel a sense of belonging, that is a foundation for growth and for taking risks and for learning and exploring. And so, I'm super proud of my work and my team that I worked with at Wayfinders in Seven Oaks School Division.

I think a lot about my students when I'm thinking about this bill—the many trans and two-spirit students that I worked with and also the educators.

One student I used to—I try to get to know every student, and I remember this one conversation in particular, getting to know this grade 9 student, and they came into the program proud and trans, and I was like, lovely, awesome.

* (10:40)

And so we're talking and we're talking, and I'm trying to get a sense of what their goals are, what he wants from his experience with us, but also as he

grows older. And it suddenly occurred to me to ask him if he'd ever met a trans adult. And to this—and the answer was no. This 14-year-old had no real concept of what being a trans adult could look like. He had never had the opportunity, as far as he knew, to build a relationship with someone from his community and kind of see that pathway forward beyond his teenage years.

And so, when we're talking about visibility and representation and being seen, like, that's a fundamental experience, to see how you can proceed within your community as you grow older, as you gain experiences and as you find success in whatever it is you end up doing.

So that was a real moment for me, working with that student. And that sense of belonging is important, because students will—again, young people and even elders as they discover their gender identity, they will become empowered when they feel like—a sense of belonging and they grow in their skills; they'll really feel empowered and speak to what they need to be successful.

And we saw that in our program as students felt confident, felt like they belonged, felt like they had community. They felt capable of asking and saying, this is what I need to be successful, and we could work with them in that.

I want to talk a little bit about the two-spirit history of Manitoba. Two-spirit and transgender and gender-diverse folks have lived here in Manitoba, and before Manitoba was Manitoba, for millennia. And we owe so much to these generations of folks who thrived and continued those traditions.

I was wildly fortunate to take a course with Myra Laramee, Elder Myra Laramee, and she is one of the people that developed the term two-spirit back in 1990. And I want to say her name as many times as I can—Myra Laramee, Myra Laramee—because she's just absolutely wonderful and strong and funny and moves through this world with such conviction.

I was so lucky to have one course with her. That was over a decade ago. I went to my first sweat with her. And it was just—she's really informed a lot of how I look at the queer community and the Indigenous community and the overlap of how we live together, in such a good way.

We talked a little bit about Pride this morning, and Pride is wonderful. It's celebrated all over the world and also all over Manitoba. There's dozens of celebrations of sexual- and gender-diverse folks.

But, as I said, there's nuance to our community, and that nuance needs to be seen, acknowledged and celebrated. So I think it's really important that this bill comes forward, because within the broader queer community, we do need to recognize and celebrate the two-spirited and transgender folks within our community.

So I just want to end off by saying, again, thank you to the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham). I want to thank all the folks who I've talked to, whether it's trans folks, two-spirit folks, parents of trans folks, elders, grandparents who love their trans grandkids. You make this work worth doing, because you're working hard to make your community so much better. And we're here to walk alongside you, and I look forward, yes, to speaking more about the importance of two-spirit and trans day of visibility.

Thank you. Thank you.

The Speaker: No further speakers?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Speaker: Question before the House is second reading of bill number—one second—Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?
[Agreed]

I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Grant Jackson (Deputy Official Opposition House Leader): Is it the will of the House, see the clock as 11?

The Speaker: Is it the will of the House to see the clock as being 11?

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: No?

Leave has been denied.

MLA David Pankratz (Deputy Government House Leader): Is it the will of the House to agree that it's a unanimous decision to pass the bill?

The Speaker: Is it the will of the House to see the bill passed unanimously? [Agreed]

The honourable member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz), on House business?

MLA Pankratz: On House business. I'd like to call for second reading debate Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act—resume debate on Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 212—The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will resume debate on Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended). It is standing in the name of the honourable member for Agassiz, who has four minutes remaining.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Again, I'm pleased to stand in the House today and continue speaking on Bill 212, the Asian heritage month that was recently introduced.

We are so fortunate here in our province where we can celebrate the richness of a multicultural destination. Just a moment—can I get a drink of water? Thank you. Sorry.

So we're fortunate to have here in our province a richness of multiculturalism and we have many museums, art galleries and even cultural centres where we are able to provide a platform for artists, presenters, performers and storytellers to showcase their talents and share their cultural heritage to a much broader audience. Thank you.

Many of these spaces have had funding come from the previous government's Building Sustainable Communities fund and also the sport, cultural, heritage department. But unfortunately, with cuts to the B-C-S programs these facilities and organizations may not get the same support for these programs and upgrades for their facilities and provide these venues for these special events like they've had in the past.

These spaces have served as a catalyst for many cross-cultural—or provided that space for 'crosle'—cross-cultural understanding, fostering dialogue, appreciation and respect for the multitude of cultures that coexist here in Manitoba.

Like many issues in today's society, there are challenges that can manifest among individuals or groups from diverse cultural backgrounds, things like communication barriers, prejudices, conflict and tension that may occur with issues like religion, gender roles and social norms and lack of understanding and

empathy, integration, social cohesion and perhaps a loss of cultural heritage.

By recognizing and actively addressing some of these challenges, societies can harness the immense benefits that diversity offers, all while promoting social cohesion, equality and celebration of our shared humanity.

With summer months approaching, there'll be many festivals and cultural celebrations to take part in. These are a showcase of fantastic authentic food, talent and dance—great entertainment for families to be a part of and for people of all ages.

* (10:50)

Again, we are so fortunate to live in a province where we see diversity expand into our communities and see people embrace the opportunity to learn and experience the many different cultures of our world.

And may we continue to appreciate and respect the rich diversity of our great province of Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I'm very proud to rise and support—[interjection] Thank you. I'm proud to rise and support Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act. I guess I'd like to begin by talking about representation because representation matters most of all.

Our government on this side of the House, the members of our caucus, we represent a strong number of Manitobans. I think we reflect the diversity of Manitoba, and that's really important to people.

As a former educator, I understood quite acutely that representation matters in school systems. Kids need to see themselves reflected in classrooms, through curricula, through the people teaching them, through their peers. That's where the greatest understanding and learning comes from, when we work with those who are different from us.

Could you imagine a world where we're all the same, where we all have the same beliefs, where we all look the same, where we all dress the same? It'd be quite a boring world, quite a boring Manitoba.

And so Asian communities have called Manitoba home for a very long time. We, as human beings, have so many common values, and often we forget that. We're so busy looking at differences, we forget to look at our commonalities: what brings us together as humans. We're all living, having a shared experience

on this earth. And so we need to recognize the importance of people's diversity and we need to care for them.

By recognizing May as Asian Heritage Month in Manitoba, it will provide an opportunity for everyone to learn about their—the diverse culture and long history of Asian communities in Manitoba and Canada.

Mr. Robert Loiselle, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Like my colleague before me, who spoke about learning opportunities, not just within structural systems but within communities, within citizens, within neighbours, within relationships between colleagues, you know, the importance of understanding one another, it couldn't be—I couldn't stress it more strongly.

Asian Heritage Month will provide all Manitobans the opportunity to acknowledge the achievements and contributions made by Asian people in Manitoba. It will reflect the rich culture of Asian folks in our province and celebrate our ethnic diversity and our multiculturalism.

When we talk about multiculturalism, it's a word that's thrown around and used quite often, but we truly are not a multicultural society, and the reason for that is we still do not acknowledge everyone as equals. We do not embrace diversity, and until we do that and understand truth and speak truth, we will never truly be multicultural. We have a lot of work to do and this is one step in doing that work.

Our government wants to build on the work of Asian communities who uplift their citizens through culture and heritage. May 2024 was proclaimed Asian Heritage Month by the government of Manitoba earlier this month. Those who celebrate Asian Heritage Month include, but are not limited to Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Indochinese, Korean, Filipino, Syrian, Singaporean and Malaysians, just to name a few of the Asian communities in Manitoba.

Asian Heritage Month has been celebrated in Canada since the '90s. In December 2001, the Canadian 'sentet'—Senate adopted a motion by Senator Vivienne Poy to recognize May as Asian Heritage Month in Canada. The following year, the Government of Canada followed suit and officially signed a declaration announcing May as Asian Heritage Month.

This year's theme is preserving the past, embracing the future and amplifying Asian-Canadian legacy. It's a powerful reminder that by celebrate and learning

about rich heritage and Asian communities in Canada, we can all work together for a more inclusive future.

Asian Heritage Manitoba was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2002 to celebrate, preserve and promote the rich cultural tapestry of Asian communities across Manitoba. Because of the tireless efforts of Asian Heritage Manitoba and other community organizations across the province, the government of Manitoba recognized May as Asian Heritage Month in 2017.

This bill will represent another important step forward for all Asian Manitobans and their—and the communities across the province. Asian history Manitoba has representation from Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Indochinese, Korean, Filipino, Syrian, Singaporean and Malaysian organizations. Asian history Manitoba seeks to make connections between Asian communities while also fostering a cultural identity among all Asian Canadians, especially youth.

Asian Heritage Manitoba has also forged a deep relationship with Indigenous communities and has made reconciliation a central tenant of their organization as central-settler people. And I think that's really profound, that more and more communities across the province are working towards reconciliation, working towards a better understanding.

I was recently approached by a member of the Sikh community asking if I would work alongside them to help further reconciliation efforts through their community, something that I found profoundly moving. It's important that as human beings we understand and embrace one another's cultural differences and respect each other in a meaningful way. And this is just one way we can all respect the Asian folks here in Manitoba.

Asian Heritage Manitoba also works really, really hard to combat anti-Asian racism by promoting awareness and understanding among all Manitobans. And with the help of this bill, I think that will further the work that they've been doing.

On May 1, 2024 many of us gathered at the bottom of the Grand Staircase for the commencement of this very special month. I want to especially thank Fortunato Lim, president of the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba, MC Sharan Tappia, president of the Asian Women of Winnipeg, Elder Barb Nepinak and the City of Winnipeg mayor, Scott Gillingham, who all spoke at the event alongside many members in this Chamber.

I also want to thank Red Lotus Korean Dance Group and Rhythm Dance Academy for their outstanding performances that day.

Asian Heritage Manitoba has put on some incredible events for Asian Heritage Month in 2024, with more on the way. A Japanese cooking demonstration took place earlier in May, reminding everyone that food can carry incredible cultural significance.

I can't think of a better way of bringing people together. When we feast together, we can share our stories, we can share our experiences. We share a little bit of ourselves when we get together and, you know, eat and socialize. There is nothing more important as an Indigenous person. That is something that we believe in. We feast at all of our events because it's just a chance to bring folks together.

Thank you, Honourable Assistant Deputy Speaker, for giving me a few minutes to put some words on the record in support of my colleague's very important bill.

Thank you.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I am pleased to rise today to put a few words on the record as it relates to Bill 212, Asian Heritage Month.

Bill 212 is commemorating the month of May as Asian Heritage Month, and the theme for Asian Heritage Month of 2024 is Preserving the Past, Embracing the Future: Amplifying Asian Canadian Legacy. This theme celebrates the rich heritage and contributions of people of Asian origin in Canada, while also looking forward to the future with optimism and hopefulness.

The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba has been organizing Asian Heritage Month of May since 2002, but Asian Heritage Month as a whole has been celebrated since the 1990s.

The senate of—

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): Order.

* (11:00)

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 14—Affordability in the North

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolutions.

The resolution before us this morning is resolution No. 19–14, pardon me, on Affordability in the North, brought forward by the honourable member for Thompson.

MLA Eric Redhead (Thompson): I move, seconded by the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak,

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has undertaken real affordability measures for families in the North after years of freezes and cuts by the previous PC Provincial Government; and

WHEREAS the previous PC Provincial Government severely cut northern infrastructure and turned its back on northern Manitoba by cutting programs that invested in northern communities, such as by suspending the CEDF business loans; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has cut the gas tax, relieving families across the province, but especially in northern Manitoba where many people rely on their vehicles for their businesses and day-to-day travel; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is investing in northern healthcare so families can access help when and where they need it without facing inaccessibility costs; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is expanding critical infrastructure like roads and railways so remote northern communities can maintain year-round surface transportation access; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is improving job accessibility in the North by creating good jobs within the critical minerals field, ensuring economic prosperity and reconciliation; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government is investing in building a new airport in Wasagamack for northern families.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to continue providing supports that are making life more affordable for all who contribute, live and work in northern Manitoba.

Motion presented.

MLA Redhead: I am honoured to put this PMR forward in supporting affordability in the North. You know, just a few months ago, our government, or our team, ran on a platform to make life more affordable for all Manitobans, including northern Manitoba.

On January 1, our government cut the provincial gas tax, saving families 14 cents a litre every time they filled up at the pump. This made an even bigger difference for Manitobans in the North, who most often drive longer distances to get groceries, go to school, get to work, than people in the south have to do for the most part.

We saw the difference it was making for northern communities, so in Budget 2024 we extended that gas tax cut by another three months. And that gas tax cut is making a huge difference when it comes to the cost of goods, especially in the North. Northern families in Manitoba spend a higher percentage of their income on goods that are readily available and cheaper, typically, in southern Manitoba.

Our NDP government is continuing to help families have lower costs when they pay their bill at the pump and their bills in general, because gas is cheaper. You know, and our approach is working, as Manitoba has had the lowest inflation rate in Canada three months in a row.

In January 2024, inflation was at 0.8 compared to the national average of 2.9 per cent. In February, it was 0.9 per cent here in Manitoba and again, the national average in Canada was 2.8 per cent. March of 2024, again, 0.8 per cent compared to the national average of 2.9 per cent.

So, our efforts are making a real difference for the lives of Manitobans and affordability across the province. The gas tax cut has helped reduce inflationary pressures on goods by reducing transportation costs. I mean, that's common sense. If a business finds that a—trucks are less expensive to fuel up, then those savings can be passed on to the consumer.

And we know when we're shipping goods, you know, from Winnipeg to Brandon, you know, that's about 200-ish kilometres. But when we're talking the North, we're going to Thompson, we're going to Gillam, that's over 1,000 kilometres. So, those costs are much, much higher when we're shipping the exact same goods to northern Manitoba, so we welcome those changes up in the North.

Many northern communities are difficult to reach via highways if proper maintenance is not conducted, and complications on the road can actually drive up

costs. Some remote communities in northern Manitoba are completely unreachable by vehicle and require goods to be flown in at a significantly, significantly higher cost.

Budget 2024 is investing half a billion dollars in capital funding to repair and rebuild Manitoba highways and public infrastructure. Budget 2024 also includes \$1 million for new winter roads to remote northern communities and thousands more for winter road maintenance.

You know, I think I might be the only member in this Chamber who actually comes from an isolated, remote northern community. And so, I know the effects that not having access to an all-season road can have on people living in those communities and the costs of goods.

You know, I was chief during the pandemic when the PCs were in power, and we had opportunities to extend the life of our winter roads, but there was never any money to do that, even though weather conditions did call for it. But this budget—2024 budget allocates more money for winter road maintenance which could possibly extend life of our winter roads to these northern isolated communities which brings down costs, because when we ship goods up through the ice roads, that savings is definitely passed on to the consumer, right.

So, most of the time, we're flying in goods at huge costs to people. And so, I'm very proud that our government realizes that and is investing in northern isolated communities, and, you know, I really appreciate our Minister of Infrastructure for prioritizing northern communities, so thank you for that.

Budget 2024 also includes \$3.3-million increase in capital grants to municipalities and northern affairs communities to address cost pressures on infrastructure projects and allow municipalities and northern communities to continue with important infrastructure projects in Manitoba communities.

You know, just a few months ago, I was in Churchill with our Premier (Mr. Kinew), with our minister of municipalities, northern affairs and our Minister of Natural Resources and some federal ministers to announce a \$30-million investment in the Port of Churchill and the rail line.

You know, and that's coupled with the \$30 million that our federal counterparts are also investing in that rail line. So it's a total of \$60-million investment to that vital piece of infrastructure to the Arctic gateway, right? And when we invest in that, we're making sure

that the Bay Line communities have access to affordable goods, whether that be groceries, medication—even accessing essential health services.

That rail line we know was shut down, I believe it was in 2017, and it devastated the Bay Line communities. So I am super, super proud of our team, our government, for making sure that we invest in the North, invest in that rail line, because those communities need that rail line to access essential services. So again, that was—back in February we were there.

Overall, we're expanding critical infrastructure like roads, railways, so northern remote communities can maintain year-round surface transportation access, and that was part of our announcement back in February, which was just amazing. And the feedback that we got from the communities along the Bay Line was just phenomenal. And so I'm really proud of our team for, again, prioritizing the North, making sure that, you know, we invest in the North. You know, the North does exist outside of the Perimeter, and I'm glad our team recognizes that.

This will allow more goods to get to more communities at a lower cost in northern communities across Manitoba, reducing northern communities' reliance on costly transportation methods like airports. But again, airports are essential in northern Manitoba, right? And so that's why our government recognizes and is building an airport for Wasagamack, a community that does not have access to airports. And when it comes to medical services in an emergency, it can be life-threatening, right?

* (11:10)

So our government is investing in Wasagamack's airport, which I commend our government. This will also allow more goods to get to the North faster and cheaper, and make travel cheaper and easier for northern Manitobans.

When we take a proactive approach to improve our infrastructure and transportation routes, we can help lower costs right now and keep them lower for the future.

You know, before my time is up, I just want to talk a little bit about our tremendous, tremendous universal nutrition program that our NDP government is implementing, right? We know that success and good opportunities start in—with education. We're going to give kids from all backgrounds a good start by helping them achieve the fullest potential in school, and this means ensuring they don't have to learn on an empty stomach.

This is a huge, historic investment, the first, I believe, in the country. And the federal government looked at Manitoba and said, wow, if they can do it, we should do it across the country. So we did it first. We see our federal counterparts looking at how well our program is going to work, and they're mirroring that, right?

And so Budget 2024 invests in kids by starting the universal nutrition program, the first of its kind in Canada. By doing this—okay. This is an incredible program, particularly for northern communities, where we know costs of goods are much more expensive than anywhere else in the province.

I know firsthand as coming from an isolated community, you know, where a jug of milk can cost 14, 16 dollars, where in Winnipeg it can cost three bucks, right? And so we want to make sure that—

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): Order. The member's time is expired.

Questions

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

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to ask a question.

I thank the member for Thompson for bringing this resolution forward. And I would like to ask him, as I understand that his constituents must be concerned about the prospect of the gas tax, the gas tax jumping 14 cents in a matter of months now. Can he assuage his constituents' concerns about the 14-cent increase in gas prices?

Is he lobbying his government, the Premier (Mr. Kinew), the Finance Minister, to make the gas tax permanent and—or what are his efforts—

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): Order. The member's time is expired.

MLA Eric Redhead (Thompson): I welcome the question. I appreciate the question.

You know, what I can say about that is Thompson and my constituents are very, very happy with what our government has done in giving them a break at the pumps for that 14 cents a litre.

And I believe our team is doing well making sure that, you know, we're assessing that, and it—we'll see what happens after September, but right now, I know they're very, very happy with us implementing that gas tax holiday.

Thanks.

MLA Mike Moyes (Riel): Manitobans elected a government that's going to reinvest in them, no matter where they live in our province. After seven long years, northern communities have a partner again that'll make them a priority.

My question to my colleague is: What is something you look forward to seeing in your community from Budget 2024 for the North?

MLA Redhead: I thank my colleague for the question.

There are many things to be proud of and excited about Budget 2024. It lays out our plan to rebuild health care across Manitoba, lowers costs for families. But what I like about our NDP budget is that it—what it does for local communities.

In my constituency, our budget has put forward a pool for Thompson. This is something that, as MLA, I have fought for since day one. We heard nothing from members opposite. This was a campaign promise in the by-election. Our government is delivering.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Manitoba has the highest personal income tax rate west of Quebec and higher than the Maritimes.

My question to this member is: Does that impact attracting people to the North with these very high personal income tax rates?

MLA Redhead: I thank members opposite for that question.

What I will say is, you know, our budget has so many mechanisms in place to save Manitobans money, and this includes northern Manitobans. You know, 14 cents a litre at the gas pump and a nutrition program that's going to be implemented across the province and including the North is going to make a huge difference in attracting professionals and people in the North.

You know, people who live in the North love the North, that's why they're in the North. And we want people to come to the North, experience the North because when you come, we know you're going to love it and you're going to stick around.

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): The member from Borderland—oh, sorry, I apologize. The member for Riel (MLA Moyes).

MLA Moyes: Budget 2024 is lowering costs for families across our great province. We're taking concrete steps, like a broad middle-class tax cut and helping those who need it most.

Can you describe how our government's affordability measures are helping northern Manitobans?

MLA Redhead: Thank you for that question.

Our NDP government has taken some bold steps with Budget 2024 by doing all the things my colleague has mentioned and more.

Our first major cost-saving measure was cutting the gas tax. That saved all Manitobans across the province 14 cents a litre when they fill up at the pump, resulting in direct savings for them and their families. Second is reinvesting in our public services. For seven years, municipalities in northern communities were underfunded.

Our NDP government is reinvesting in northern Manitoba through predictable and sustainable funding, and I thank Minister for Northern Relations for implementing that.

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): *[inaudible]* I apologize. The member for Lakeside.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Thanks for the opportunity to ask a question for the member opposite.

We all realize how expensive things are in the North and we're very understanding of that.

My question to the member opposite that has brought this resolution forward: Can he tell me if the aviation fuel is exempt from the fuel tax holiday?

MLA Redhead: You know, I appreciate the question that the member has brought forward. You know, what I will say is, northern Manitoba relies heavily, heavily on aircraft, and this is a vital link to northern communities across the North.

I know; I come from an isolated community that is only accessible by air 10 months of the year—10 months of the year. I'm the only one who's lived in these communities and understands the struggles that people go through in an isolated community. So I know the impacts that prices have when it comes to shipping goods to the North.

Unlike members opposite, I don't believe any of them have even stepped foot in an isolated community. *[interjection]* I don't think you have. Prove it.

Thank you.

MLA Moyes: Northern Manitoba is home to many Indigenous communities. They work hard for their families and, despite the many difficulties, they endure, they persevere.

My question for my colleague is: How are we going to advance economic reconciliation in northern Manitoba?

MLA Redhead: Thank you for that question, and I'm so happy you asked that question because our NDP government is making advancements in reconciliation by ensuring Indigenous people and communities have the same opportunity afforded to everybody who lives in Manitoba, no matter where they live.

In Budget 2024, we are promoting economic reconciliation by investing in Indigenous economic development fund to support Indigenous business owners and entrepreneurs. We're also working on bringing economic development to the region by repairing and upgrading the Port of Churchill, as I mentioned earlier.

* (11:20)

Mr. Guenter: I can't help but think of the hard-working folks of Thompson who voted for the member for Thompson (MLA Redhead) understanding that the NDP had promised not to raise Manitoba Hydro rates beyond 2 per cent.

We now know in their very first budget that they will be doubling—they'll be breaking that promise and doubling hydro rates to 4 per cent or higher.

Can the member for Thompson tell us: What impact will breaking this promise and raising these hydro rates have on his constituency?

MLA Redhead: We know that Manitoba has some of the lowest hydro rates in the country; the lowest in the country. And northern Manitoba contributes significantly to Manitoba Hydro's bottom line.

But anyway, so, yes, I thank the member for the question and, you know what, our government has implemented so many cost savings initiatives across the board in Budget 2024, including cutting the gas tax, investing in the Port of Churchill, investing in hungry kids. Unlike the members opposite—never did.

MLA Moyes: Part of our plan helps Manitobans raise healthier families by making sure schools and kids are properly funded across Manitoba. This means giving kids from all backgrounds a good start by helping them achieve their fullest potential in school.

My question to the member for Thompson (MLA Redhead) is: How are we ensuring that more healthy food gets to kids in northern Manitoba?

MLA Redhead: Thank you so much for that question. That's a great question. Ensuring kids in the North get healthy food is a high priority of our NDP government.

We know that access to fresh nutritious food can be difficult for northern Manitobans due to the high price. One way we're helping is lowering transportation costs with our gas tax, passing direct savings on to families. We're also ensuring there's food in every school so no kid goes to school hungry—

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): Order. *[interjection]*

Order. Order. Order.

The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record this morning on the resolution put forward by the member for Thompson. I thank the member for Thompson for putting this forward.

Affordability for Manitobans and investment in the North, and it's something that our PC government took seriously in our time in government and delivered—not only for northern Manitobans, I mean especially for northern Manitobans, but for all Manitobans.

And I think there are concerns that we're seeing. In just seven months since being elected, this NDP government doing things like allowing school divisions to raise taxes significantly on constituents, on all Manitobans. We're seeing the largest property tax increase of \$148 million this year which is incredibly substantial.

So Manitobans heard one message during the campaign and are now seeing the NDP government act in a very, very different manner than advertised. And that's a concern.

And you know, I did ask the member about what he's doing to lobby his colleagues, his NDP colleagues, in particular the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the Finance Minister with regard to the gas tax. I do think there is concern about a 14-cent jump at the pumps in October.

And when the—when this current government applies the gas tax—14—raises gas prices 14 cents, and so, of course, that's going to have an impact. So when that happens, you know, what will the NDP government have to lay claim to in terms of affordability? Well there's nothing.

They are raising property taxes. We're seeing there the—as I said, the largest property tax increase in Manitoba history. And so, on the affordability side, I really don't think that there is any credibility to this resolution.

You know, and it's interesting that everything old is new again. And, you know, under—in their previous 17 years, under Greg Selinger, Manitoba had the highest effective personal income tax rates west of Quebec; higher than the Maritimes.

We had a payroll tax that most other provinces in Canada don't have; it's a tax on job creation. And we had high education property taxes, and at the same time, some of the worst results in education during the NDP years. And so for 17 years, they didn't care about affordability.

Well now, again, under the NDP, we see how, as I just laid out, that they are repeating some of these measures. You know, as we saw in 17 years, there was never a tax that they didn't hike and that they didn't like, and they're giving into those same impulses in their seven months now in government, where we're seeing school property taxes increase by north of 17—up to 17 per cent. So that's substantial.

So I have to wonder about how, you know, how serious the current government is when it comes to affordability, in particular for northern Manitobans. And I do know that it was under our PC government that we cut income taxes substantially and we cut the PST and we cut property taxes and we created an environment of affordability for Manitoba families in really challenging times.

And this not only benefited Manitoba families but it strengthened our economy and we've had business investment looking to come to Manitoba and actually setting up shop. The first potash mine opened. It was a six-year effort. We—it was the PC government that did that. We really boosted the mining sector up north which is very important to northern Manitobans. And

I wish the member for Thompson (MLA Redhead) would've talked about that a little bit more.

And I will just say while we're talking about mining in northern Manitoba and how important that sector is to our province, you know, there's two things we do in Manitoba really well: mining and agriculture. And I just don't understand why we haven't. I think it's really unfortunate that we have an NDP government now that fails to grasp the significance of these sectors, and to help to create—foster an environment of investment and really celebrate our success and our potential in these sectors. So that's unfortunate.

But I do want to say, you know, I had the opportunity to travel to the North. I've been to Churchill before and seen the beauty of northern Manitoba, and I also had the opportunity to travel to Thompson last year for a bunch of consultations. And the member for Thompson was there and it was good to see him there, but I travelled with my colleague for Riding Mountain and we visited Vale's T-3 mine and we went almost a mile underground and saw the great work going on there.

And, you know, it's incredible when you've got Tesla and a lot of these major car manufacturers knocking on the door wanting to invest in northern Manitoba. That is good news for northern Manitobans and that is good news for Manitoba.

And any outside investment that we can take to help develop these industries provides jobs and creates wealth, and helps to create an environment of affordability where Manitobans can pay down their mortgages and put their kids through school and, you know, put some money aside and create a better life for themselves, for their children and pursue their dreams, I think, most importantly.

And so that is so important. But, you know, and in—on that visit we visited the weather testing station which is another neat endeavour there, on the part of some individuals there in Thompson.

* (11:30)

And just the opportunity, again, when you have car manufacturers Ford and Chevy GMC and others wanting to do their weather testing up there, so there's a lot of potential in northern Manitoba.

It's an exciting place and I will say, the member for Thompson is, I will say, is lucky to represent that area and, you know, we're all blessed to be here as MLAs to represent our constituents. I'm proud to come from southern Manitoba. I represent a little piece, a

rectangular shape right along the US border, which I think is God's country, but I will say the member for Thompson represents a wonderful area in northern Manitoba. It's an area of a lot of potential, and that's why it's so important that we have a government that stands up for northern Manitobans.

And while I understand the member for Thompson put this resolution forward, I really think it strains credibility. And I think it's unfortunate that for all the good words that what meant [*inaudible*] is an NDP government that is making life less affordable, that is raising taxes at a time when they can ill afford to pay more taxes, and so that's a concern, and I think this government is failing to grasp the opportunities that are before them.

So—and I think, as well, the member for Thompson talks a little bit about infrastructure, and, you know, having served on Treasury Board during the time of the—our PC government, we made significant investments in northern Manitoba. I think of the Arctic Gateway Group that received nearly \$150 million in a federal-provincial partnership to support national interests in northern Manitoba.

We worked to develop new mining opportunities to revive northern towns such as Lynn Lake with projects like Alamos Gold mining development and various other critical minerals, such as lithium and others. And so we've invested, as well, in repaving and improving airports and runways in the North. Thompson airport: \$15 million for that and—or not \$15 million, sorry, I'm looking at the wrong number here, but we invested in the Thompson Airport and the Thompson pool aquatic centre for—

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): Order. The member's time is expired.

House Business

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): The honourable Minister responsible for Families, Accessibility and Gender Equity, on House business.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin). The title of the resolution is Better Access to Health Care in the North.

Miigwech.

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): It has been announced that pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin). The title of the resolution is Better Access to Health Care in the North.

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Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): It gives me great privilege to stand up here and talk about northern affordability and the work that our government is doing to help alleviate some of that affordability issues that the North has.

And it's interesting that the first speaker that comes up from members opposite is the member from Borderland, one of the southernmost constituencies in Manitoba. I know full well, I mean, he kind of had a difficult time reaching his quota of saying the word northern in his preamble many, many times, including referencing his one trip to northern Manitoba because prior to him saying that, I thought his seat here in the Chamber is the furthest north he's ever been in Manitoba.

But it gives me great pleasure to stand up here and speak to northern affordability from a lived experience, being the MLA for Keewatinook, which is geographically the largest constituency in Manitoba, the entire northeast corner of Manitoba, goes right up to Hudson Bay; 16 communities, 11 fly-in communities, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

So knowing first-hand and seeing and hearing first-hand—and they're not stories; they're lived experiences from the communities as to what they struggle with, with affordability in the North and what they've seen and what they've asked for many years. The last seven-plus years under the previous government, they've asked for affordability measures to be in place to help alleviate some of the concerns that were just kind of left unheard.

I had the honour and the pleasure to be in Wasagamack within the last two weeks to talk about our affordability measures and help alleviate some of the cost pressures for the people of Wasagamack, and that was the airport. So we talk about the phased approach to the airport, building the road to the airport, the airport itself and a connection to another—a neighbouring island community in St. Theresa Point.

And while we were there, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I had the opportunity to witness something

that I never thought I would see and was just unrealistic for me. We were standing in the community in Wasagamack, and this is during breakup season, so the winter road season is done. So there's freeze-up and they have no airport, so they have no access.

The only access to—and for me to get to Wasagamack, also, I was not able to fly to Wasagamack. Flew to St. Theresa Point, took a helicopter over. So \$1,000 plane ride, \$400 helicopter ride—that's just to get to the community. So you can imagine the challenges that people in the community face just to come out, for example, and to go back home.

But while I was there, we were standing in the parking lot at one of the local stores—the community centre and a helicopter came in to sling in groceries. There was—a helicopter came, we could hear for a ways away, and it had a sling that had a net full of groceries. It lowered it down. A community member went out, unhooked it, and the groceries went out to the community going to the store. And I thought, jeez, I wonder how much that cost. I wonder how much that costs and how much whatever was in those boxes to go on the shelves to sell in the store was going to cost.

So, we went into the store: \$7 for a loaf of bread; in excess of \$10 for a jug of milk. And albeit, I mean, I'm not here to encourage pop drinking and sugars and things like that, but there was a 12-pack of drinks there: \$35 for that 12-pack of drinks. And that same cost over here, in a retailer down here in southern Manitoba, is four or five dollars. So you can imagine what that cost is now, and it's just basic goods.

So what are we doing to help alleviate that from our perspective in northern affordability, is to now build that airport for the people of Wasagamack and to commit to something that's been long-standing and long-owed to them. And that's just one measure.

As critic and opposition, there was a program under the previous government, and it still exists today: the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, traditionally underspent under the previous government. And why? Is that not a common-sense approach to say, Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, why not spend it all? Why not, not only spend it all but enhance that budget to help alleviate that cost for northern families? But no. Day in, day out, year after year, underspent by the previous government.

So we had that opportunity now to do things in a constructive way to work together, to work in collaboration with—so now, Honourable Deputy Speaker, what are we doing then? We're not only going to the

communities and saying, what's your needs, what do you need, how can we help?

So we can help by first off expending the money that we have for the community and have for the projects in the healthy foods initiative. But how do we work together in collaboration with northern communities as well?

So again, when we talk about education and we talk about feeding children in school, we have that program, as well, to make sure every kid in school has something to eat. And that's something common sense, a common-sense approach, a logical approach. But again, it's something that we take priority in. When we talk about northern affordability and the cost of goods in northern Manitoba—in southern Manitoba, some folks just don't get it. And the previous government just did not get the challenges that exist.

When you go up there—and I was in Gillam as well, I was in Churchill as well. And our investments that we wanted—that we're doing in Gillam, the investments that we're doing in Fox Lake Cree Nation, the investments that we're doing in Churchill will also help alleviate this.

So our \$30-million commitment to the Churchill port in conjunction with the federal government, in partnership with—in partnership with—local communities. We're not here to pick fights with different levels of government. We're here to work in collaboration and to see what works—what works—for northern Manitoba.

And we're representatives here as a government to govern for all. And that's how a government should have that approach: to govern for all, no matter where you live in this great province, north, south, east, west, all directions and all corners of the province. We should be able to govern for all, including northern Manitoba. And northern Manitoba has long been neglected under previous government.

* (11:40)

So we bring forth now those initiatives to say, this is what we're going to do. We're going to give you predictability, we're going to give you supports. We're going to then to invest in northern Manitoba as well.

And we do that in collaboration, Honourable Deputy Speaker. We don't have the top-down paternalistic approach to say, this is what you have, deal with it; or this is what you don't have, deal with it. Rather we say what's the needs, what's the challenges, how can we help, how can we assist? And that's what

a responsible government should do. And that's what we do as well.

So we do cost savings for communities. We do investments in communities. Because we invest in the people of Manitoba. We don't them for granted. And that's something previous government did day in, day out in northern Manitoba. Just because they didn't represent them in terms of members in this Chamber, they ignored them. And that's not the way to govern. That's not what a responsible government should do.

Have that investment, have the collaboration, talk about what the needs are, talk about what the challenges are and talk about how we could help, how can we invest.

So when we talk about affordability, we talk about the fuel tax, we talk about the savings that means for communities in the North as well. Because it's significant for families all over.

So I know there's a real disconnect between the needs of northern Manitoba and the needs of southern Manitoba. You take that, that one bag of groceries and you go to a supermarket here in downtown Winnipeg or any area of Winnipeg and you can maybe stretch that into being two or three bags of groceries. But on the affordability side, that two or three bags now translates to maybe half a bag of groceries in the North. Just on the cost of what that is.

And there's not significant other income in the North in terms of higher salaries that are really disproportionately going to alleviate that cost. No, it's not there. It's just you get less. So how can we help? How can we alleviate that? Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. Lowering the cost of transportation. Those are how we can help in the government as well.

But we can also help by investing in northern Manitoba as well. We can invest in infrastructure in northern Manitoba. We can invest in the roads in northern Manitoba. We can invest in the airport, invest in winter roads, invest in mining, so we can help now create good jobs in northern Manitoba to help alleviate the affordability challenges that members in northern Manitoba face each and every day.

So our government is also developing the Critical Mineral Strategy that will help alleviate those costs, that will help give back to communities in the North. Jobs in northern Manitoba for northern Manitobans. That's a priority of our government as well. So they can then invest, they can raise their families. So the recruitment and retention challenges that exist for

remote areas of northern Manitoba will help be alleviated because that investment that we want to be able to give on a mining strategy, on an infrastructure strategy, on something that we want to be able to invest in communities.

Because sometimes recruitment and retention challenges can be alleviated because those are community people, as well, community folks that know that that's where they want to live. That's where they want to raise their families. And they should know that they should be able to afford to raise their families, raise their children in those environments, in those communities in northern Manitoba. Because that's where we are, that's who are as Manitobans, that's where Manitobans want to live.

I've heard folks in the past say, if you don't like the cost there, then move. That's home. How would you feel if somebody went to you anywhere in the country or anywhere in Manitoba and said: You don't like it here, it's too expensive? Move. That's my home. Why would I want to move? This is where I love to live.

But how can we as a government support? How can government support us? We can support by investing in infrastructure, investing in programs that help alleviate the cost of goods sold, and help alleviate that challenge that they have.

So our investment in northern Manitoba is vibrant and will continue to go. We've just got started, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Thank you for the opportunity to stand in the House today and make some comments on the resolution brought forward by member opposite and talk a little bit about affordability in the North.

I look at the—this resolution and many of the whereases here. Some of them we couldn't agree with more, and some of them are already happening and have already been worked on by the PC government.

But before I get into that, I just want to tell the members opposite that think that I have never left the farm and went north, that I got some great memories of the North. I got some great experiences up there.

Four boys. Every one of them, we've been to the Munn Cup in Thompson, for the Munn Cup up there, that hockey tournament. So we've made some great memories up there in Thompson.

One of my boys was drafted to the OCN Blizzards in his draft year, so we got to watch him play a bit of

hockey up there before he went off to the Western Hockey League. So I do have many memories and many experiences in the North. So I just wanted to make that point, as the members opposite sit there and tell me that I've never toured the North, which I have. And it's a beautiful country, really is a beautiful country.

And yes, when in the North, we realized that things are much more expensive there than they are here in the South. And we couldn't agree more that things need to be done to make life more affordable for the people of the North.

So as I pick apart this resolution, which is something I like to do is pick apart bills and resolutions. So the first whereas is whereas the provincial government has undertaken real affordably—affordability measures for families in the North after years of freezes and cuts. Well, that's false already because the PC government made some significant investments in the North, which I'll get to shortly.

And whereas the previous P-V-C provincial government severely cut northern infrastructure and turned its back on northern Manitoba, which couldn't be further from the truth. When I get to some of the investments that we—our previous government did make.

And so the provincial government has cut the gas tax relieving families across the province—some families, not all. I think that's—it is making life more affordable for everybody that drives a car or has a business that they have to burn fuel. But those—just as there is in the south, there's many families and people in the North that don't even drive a vehicle or don't even have to fill up at a gas station, so, are they benefiting from that 14-cent gas tax cut? Not a bit. And is it making groceries more affordable? No, it's not.

So we'll go to the next whereas. The provincial government is investing in northern health care so families can access help when and where they need it. While we couldn't agree more that that has to happen, and the PC government was certainly on their way to doing that, as well, making investments in health care.

Provincial government improving job accessibility in the North by creating good jobs within the critical minerals field, ensuring economic prosperity and reconciliation. Well, that's something we definitely need to continue doing and that's something that the Progressive Conservative government made some great progress on as well. And I'll mention some of those points in a bit.

Whereas the provincial government is investing in building a new airport in Wasagamack for northern families. We all realize that access to the North is quite often by air. The member opposite couldn't tell me earlier whether or not that aviation fuel was exempt from the 14-cent tax. I'll answer it for him: it's not. So maybe that's something our NDP government could look at is taking that 14-cent tax off of the aviation fuel to make it more affordable to make access to the North.

So those are some of the things in the whereases of that resolution that I was—I looked closely at and wanted to go through. But some of the investments that the PC government did make as the members opposite tell us that we ignored the North, which we didn't.

The Arctic Gateway Group received up to \$147 million through federal-provincial partnership, through the PC government. To support national interest in northern Manitoba, the PC ministers were the first to sign revenue-sharing agreements for creating—for the first forestry stumpage fees revenue-sharing agreements with many First Nations to ensure their participation in the forestry sector.

So right there. It's talking about some huge things that the PC government did.

The work to develop new mining opportunities to revive northern towns, such as Lynn Lake; projects like the Alamos Gold mining development and various other critical minerals, such as lithium; the silica sands projects; the Canadian Premium Sand in Hollow Water. Invested in repaving and improving airports and runways in the North.

* (11:50)

And, you know, I think about our gateways. I happen to live on the—one of the gateways to the North, just—I'm a mile off of No. 6 Highway. The PC government made some significant investments in making that highway safer.

I drive it every day to come here to work, and No. 6 has made—is some—been some huge improvements over the last eight years making that highway safer for the people that drive it. Because we know there's a number of people that travel to the North on No. 6 Highway, because it's one of the major and only routes to get there from Winnipeg.

Invested in tourism attraction in the North and in Churchill. Invested in the town centres in Leaf Rapids

and Churchill, roof repairs, energy efficiency in the buildings.

And we want to talk about some of the community organizations in the North, too, that benefited from our Building Sustainable Communities funds. Probably our Green Team applicants, as well, which are not going to happen, apparently, moving forward with this government.

Invested in the Thompson airport; Thompson pool aquatic centre, 1 million bucks; Thompson sobering centre; and the new jail in Thompson.

So I'm finding a few things that we did do, many things, that they're telling us in this resolution that we didn't, so—Northern Healthy Foods Initiative supports local and regional projects that contribute to the development of culturally relevant healthy food systems while improving health and well-being. Programmings to increase access to food by working with communities and co-ordinating efforts in line with the program's goals and objectives.

Some fantastic stuff here that we've done—that our previous government has done for the northern communities.

The NHFI provides \$1.3 million annually to provincial partners and projects working towards food security in northern Manitoba. So, yes, I could go on and on about that.

Flin Flon Arts Council, \$25,000 they 'benetted' from the BSC investment, which is gone. Flin Flon Public Library board, building repairs of \$213,000 from the previous government. The Pas Arts Council for art workshops and mural, 25 grand. Lido Theatre heritage and artistic program, \$25,000. Tribe tow sports foundation, safety and accessibility investment for \$25,000. The Thompson Public Library, \$25,000. Heritage northern museum, \$25,000. Church creative collective unity arts and cultural co-operative, \$25,000. Churchill Arts Council, \$25,000. Communities Economic Development Fund, \$22,000.

And many, many, many more Building Sustainable Communities projects that were funded by the previous PC government that the NDP government has cut from this year's budget.

An Honourable Member: That's irrelevant.

Mr. King: How is that not relevant? I mean, we're talking affordability here and sustainability of our northern communities, and those are all significant investments that were made by the previous PC government.

So I'm glad to see in this resolution that we're talking about many things that our previous government did, and I—we certainly support many of the things that we're talking about here.

That's all I have to say for now, Honourable Deputy Speaker. Thank you for—

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): The member for The Pas-Kameesak.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): As usual, it's always an absolute honour to stand here as the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak and to put on record real true experiences of the challenges that we face as a northerner. That's why affordability is such an important issue where I come from.

Manitobans, no matter where they live, should have the same access to benefits that everyone has in our province. An example of that is health care, something that I'll always be talking about, especially coming from northern Manitoba.

I was pleased to see in our budget of 2024 to improve air services by building a new airport in Wasagamack for northern families. I applaud this very much because we need this vital link in order to save lives and to have healthier lives as well.

So, again, I want to reiterate this fact that happened the day after the Pallister government had privatized Lifeflight. The very next day, we had an OCN man suffer a heart attack at 10 a.m. He wasn't flown out until 10 p.m. In fact, I heard the plane fly over my home where I live, near the airport.

And this is what I forgot to add in the last time I was talking about this tragic story, was I attended this man's funeral in OCN. And at the same time, Pallister and his team were in town, in my constituency, making some announcement, just taking place across the river, directly from the church.

I can just see them, you know, standing outside the church, so I, after the funeral service, I went over there and went to go greet visitors in my constituency. And I asked Pallister if I can have a word with him, and I asked that the family wants an inquiry.

This could have been preventable if Lifeflight was not privatized. This man could have lived; he could have seen his grandchildren much longer than he did, at the early age of 51. So he said he would consider an inquiry, but guess what? He didn't. Things that he did many, many times by letting us down.

And I'm saying, when it comes to affordability issues, the North suffers the most. We suffer income loss when we have medical appointments here in Winnipeg. For example, I have relatives who stay at my apartment so they can afford to come to their appointment, because when you leave home, when you do get a little bit of funding, you've got to make sure there's groceries at home for the rest of the family, you have gas and everything else to—incidental costs that you may have while attending your appointment.

And guess what? A lot of these appointments are only 10 minutes, you know. We can work with Telehealth. I remember when we were in government, we did an announcement for Telehealth and TeleStroke. We need to start utilizing facilities such as that, so we can have access to health care and not suffer income loss and then having—especially for those living paycheque to paycheque, in fact, our people fundraise in order to attend medical appointments.

So, anyway, in terms of education, I just want to say that, when we were in government, the—when my dad was minister, UCN came into creation and the point of that was to have education closer to home. Things that we're working on as an NDP government, as well, to bring health care closer to home.

Same thing with education. Education is power. My dad's advice to me all the time, when he was telling me to graduate—I was starting to slack off in grade 12—he would say, Amanda, please, just get your grade 12, okay, and after that I will leave you alone.

And he said, your grade 12 diploma is your weapon against poverty and unemployment. And when you get your grade 12, you've won half that battle. So, that's my advice I give to our high school graduations all the time.

And hope that, when a community is educated, more healthier choices are made, and education does, in fact, prevent from poverty and unemployment, and affordable issues can be solved by that.

Ekosi.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): If you were to walk out of this building and look at the front of the building, you'd notice that the Golden Boy actually faces north.

Those who were the first elected officials of this great province knew then already, when they designed this building, that the wealth creation in the future of this province lies in northern Manitoba.

Which is surprising that this NDP Premier (Mr. Kinew) signed the Leap Manifesto, which basically says, leave all of our natural resources in the ground.

The question is—*[interjection]* The member heckling, who does nothing, doesn't work in a department but heckles, I wonder if she also signed it. This is the political party, the NDP, who votes, who signs the Leap Manifesto: leave all natural resources in the ground.

And then we have a member getting up and starting to talk about how we need—

The Acting Speaker (Robert Loiselle): Order. *[interjection]* Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler) will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 o'clock, this House is in recess and stands in recess until 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 14, 2024

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