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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Ind.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
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MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
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SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
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STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 12, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Yes, on House business, Madam Speaker.

Could you please canvass the House to see if there's leave to proceed directly to second reading of Bill 232, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to move directly to Bill 232, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Is there leave to—*[interjection]*

Does the House wish to begin, then, with Bill 218, The Red Tape Reduction Day Act?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Does the House agree to move, then, to Bill 215, The Civil Service Amendment Act (Employment Preference for Reservists with Active Service)?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Is there the will of the House, then, to move to Bill 200, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act? *[Agreed]*

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

**Bill 200—The Human Rights Code
Amendment Act**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas

(Mrs. Smith), that Bill 200, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act; Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, this bill would put, under the Human Rights Code, the dimensions of physical size and weight. The Human Rights Code now includes discrimination which is based on race and ethnicity, on disability, but it doesn't encompass physical size and weight. And so that people who present to the Human Rights Commission with a concern that they have been discriminated against based on their size—they may be little people who are—have dwarfism; they may be people who have large bodies; they may be people who are very tall. But where there is discrimination based on physical size and weight, what this bill would do would be—allow the inclusion of these concerns under the Human Rights Code so that discrimination would be prohibited.

But when a person is subject to discrimination based on these—physical size and weight, that this complaint can be taken to the Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Commissioner and the staff at the Human Rights Commission can then look into this complaint of discrimination and they can help provide a resolution.

Very often what the Human Rights Commission does is to look at what's happened, talk to people on both sides of the issue and then, as a result, can mediate and bring about a sensible resolution.

It is not like there being somebody who is going to—has discriminated will be put in jail or something like that. It is that there is primarily a mechanism to address this issue, and I think this is a very reasonable approach to a situation and a concern which is much more prevalent.

Many of us had to—a chance, as did many of the MLAs in the Conservative and the NDP party and the independent MLAs, to meet with members of the Little People of Manitoba's association during the last session. And we heard from them that they face a

variety of discriminatory actions during the course of their everyday lives.

I had a chance, quite recently, to meet with people who are in the Little People's association and we had a really nice event and a gathering, and the kids were having a lot of fun, but I was able, also, to hear the stories and the concerns that people have raised and will raise and will continue to raise until we have a bill like this. They are very strongly supportive of this bill.

I have, on the other hand, been working with individuals who have large bodies. One individual in particular was in a personal care home and, because of his large body and because there wasn't the quick accommodation with a wheel chair that fit for him, with a lift that worked, that he was essentially only able to stay in his bed for six months. He was unable to get out of bed.

*(10:10)

This, clearly, is not fair treatment. This was an individual in a personal care home that was in the constituency of the Speaker, and I raised this and the Speaker was very helpful in trying to address this. But it took six months and, clearly, we should have a process that can address things more quickly, can provide fairness and make sure that people who have large bodies are able to be accommodated.

It is surprisingly often, Madam Speaker, that there is discrimination within the one place that you would not expect it, and that is within the health-care system. And so this Chamber could today send a very positive message by passing this on to committee, so we can have hearings and make sure that this bill moves forward, that we give it the consideration and the opportunity for people to bring forward their individual concerns.

Madam Speaker, we have, as a Chamber, made significant accommodation recently, and it's now time for us to reach out and take the next step, and do the next step in terms of accommodating and making sure that people who have whatever size and weight, that they will not be discriminated against.

It is important to add that discrimination against adolescents on the basis of physical size and weight is an issue and it can be a concern, because discrimination, in particular based on body size, can be a factor in boys or girls developing eating disorders—that people don't feel comfortable in their own body because they have a body size or weight, which is, say, a large body, for example, and they

feel that they are not respected as much, that they are discriminated against, they feel that they are less empowered. They feel that they are essentially made to feel uncomfortable with a—their current body size and weight. And what we will do is to send a very important message by passing this legislation, that we want people of all body sizes and weight to feel comfortable in their own body.

This is not to say that we don't want people to be healthy; we want people to be active. We want to recognize that, interestingly enough, from work that has been done, whether you are physically active or not is probably more important than precisely what your body size and weight is, in terms of your risks of heart disease and cancer and other conditions.

And so, yes, we should be promoting physical activity, but we shouldn't be discriminating against the people based on body size and weight.

Indeed, what has been found is that people who are of large body, who are discriminated against, who are shamed or who are—people approach to try and shame them because of their body size and weight, that they are less likely to be able to, in fact, reduce their weight if they would like to do so. And so there is a positive health benefit to people of all body sizes and weight, if we can do this.

I believe it will also send an important message in our schools. We have—I think a—as MLAs, we do not want to see bullying in the schools. We may take slightly different approaches to it, but what we have to recognize is that one of the major reasons for bullying in schools is bullying based on body size and weight. And, if we can pass this bill, then we will send an important message to people in schools around our province, to students and teachers and principals, that we stand solidly in this Chamber against discrimination on the basis of body size and weight. And in doing so, we stand against bullying based on body size and weight. And we are putting a stake in the ground to say that we want to decrease bullying; we want to end the problems of bullying in our school.

We can make a big difference. I ask all MLAs to join me in moving this legislation forward today to committee stage and moving on with a full discussion and, hopefully, passing this this session.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the

following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I would like to ask the member for River Heights, how is physical size and weight being considered in this act—physical appearance, as a disability, as a physical health condition?

Miigwech.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Okay, I thank the member for her question.

First of all, it's important to note that disability is a protected area under this act. But it's also important to note that many people with physical size and weight differences are not considered to have a disability, so they don't fall under the current Manitoba Human Rights Code. So it's important to include this.

It would not include all variations in appearance or discrimination against all appearances, but it will include a large proportion of those areas where there's major concern. That is, differences in physical size and weight and 'discrimination' against people who have dwarfism, who are little people—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I believe in the speech that was just given by the member on this topic, he talked about a few cases where there were issues that he hopes this bill would address, that were addressed using current mechanisms. And he stated that he thought, you know, this would allow—this law would allow things to be addressed more quickly.

In my experience, human rights tribunals aren't generally quick. Courts aren't generally quick. Can you respond to that, please?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, because of the flexible way that the Human Rights Commission works, conditions can in fact be addressed in some circumstances quite quickly, not in every case and there are clearly some that drag on, but it is a positive option.

And, in sending this signal, we are sending a signal that we no longer will accept the kind of discrimination that has occurred. And yes, it got addressed after six months and after a huge effort by many people, including myself and the Speaker—we got this addressed. But it shouldn't have

taken six months. It should have been a general realization. People should have been proactive.

Thank you.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I'd like to thank the member for bringing this bill forward.

I'd like him to comment on enforcement but also on a specific issue around medical equipment. I found, after my accident, that the—even for tall people—I'm six-four—the medical hospital beds were too short, intubation tubes were too short for people with long torsos.

So does it—would it include the entire spectrum, from shorter people to very tall people?

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. And yes, most definitely it will include very tall people as well as very short people. I think it will be a spur to our health-care system and other areas in Manitoba to be more sensitive to differences in height and in weight. And it is important that we make these changes so that the member and others who are tall, that there will be a better—a system which can better adjust and have beds and be able to have equipment which is—works for people who are very tall as well as very short.

In the long run, this is a benefit to all of us, because it improves the situation for everybody and, therefore, improves our health care and improves our society.

*(10:20)

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): It's important to ask the member for River Heights that, in terms of this, will this have any effect on, say, if a workplace does not hire someone because of a size that does not allow them to perform their duties? Like, say a first responder, where if that person was not adequate size to save someone's life, it could cause a hazard. Is that discrimination in the eyes of the spirit of this legislation, or is that something prudent where we need people who can pull someone out of a burning vehicle to be physically capable to do that?

Mr. Gerrard: My reply to you is based on the knowledge that I have and the experience that I have, and my understanding of the current situation is that where there is a requirement for a specific sized person or a specific weight person that, you know, that requirement for the job is still there. It's not discrimination because—it is not discrimination, right, if the job requires a certain size or weight of person, okay. All right?

If you have a job which doesn't require a certain size or weight of person, then it is important that you consider people based on their—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for bringing this forward. I've spoken to him about this bill a number of times and, you know, I think there's some important issues he's raising here.

I also know that I've attended a rally on the subject with him, and so I'd like to hear from him who are some of the community organizations that he's consulted with on this bill and could he share with us some of the messages that they've shared with him.

Mr. Gerrard: What I would say is that I have talked extensively with the Little People of Manitoba who I've already talked about. I have consulted, as an example, with a variety of people in the health area including, for example, the women's health centre or institute. They have recognized, interestingly, for some time, how important it is to change the language about how we deal in the health-care system with people of large bodies, and they are making a lot of progress. They are getting better health care as a result of this recognition of the importance of not discrimination against people based on body size and weight, of not using language which would be discriminatory—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Dauphin—or, sorry, Riding Mountain.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Good morning, Madam Speaker.

Can the member tell us if any other jurisdictions in Canada have similar legislation and, if so, what have their experiences been in terms of complaints and enforcement?

Mr. Gerrard: There is a move in a number of other provinces to bring forward similar legislation. None have done so, so far. It's my understanding that in Michigan they have provisions like this for the workplace and that there haven't been major issues.

To follow up on the point earlier on, if—if your job requires that you have a certain size and weight, there is not a problem. It is not discriminatory to hire somebody based on those provisions, okay.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): Yes, I just have a quick question for the member.

What sort of consequences would individuals face if they were to inadvertently discriminate and who would determine the intent?

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the member for her question.

In fact, this is the beauty of the Human Rights Code and the Human Rights Commission, is that it's not a question of intent. It's a question of helping people to understand the situation.

And, yes, a lot of us, you know—and probably myself, inadvertently—do things that—and perhaps have in the past, right, more so even than now because we're less conscious. But this is a way of bringing the issue forward in a soft way that can educate, help people to understand and help people to find some solutions going forward. It is much less this whole process about accusations or, you know, what the fault is. It is about, you know, how do we—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

I would note that the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) seems to want to ask another question. According to the rules, independent members are only ask—allowed to ask one question in this question period.

Mr. Teitsma: Personally, I think when we make changes to law—and especially to Human Rights Code, we should do so carefully and with a great deal of thought and consideration. There can often be unintended effects of hastily crafted legislation.

And I think about some of the other amendments that have been made to the Human Rights Code. There's been a lot of supporting, clarifying text, further explanation of what the changes are and how they should be interpreted by the courts.

Is there a reason that that kind of information hasn't been provided this—at this time?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, we consulted, had legal advice on this issue and talked with many people. And the advice that we got was to keep it as simple as possible. And that is why the way it is the way it is.

I think it's also important to know that one of the reasons we have a committee hearing is that we can get additional advice before we make a final decision to proceed.

And that's one of the reasons why I think we should send it to committee and get that additional advice.

Thank you.

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

Debate

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I want to thank the member for bringing this matter forward, and I look forward for the—the opportunity to have a healthy and vigorous debate on this topic.

Certainly, not necessarily what we expected as a team—I think we want this House to be functioning as smoothly as possible, and I think that that requires co-operation of all the members. I'm glad to see that, certainly on this side of the House, we have a united team that is able to stand up to whatever is thrown our way.

Now, before I get into the crux of my remarks, I do want to take a few moments to share some of my own personal experiences with discrimination, with the Human Rights Code and how I've been—your know, I don't want to say on both sides, but—

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order. I believe the House Leader for the Official Opposition is rising on a point of order. The honourable member—honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I apologize to the member for interrupting.

Madam Speaker, a point of order.

Madam Speaker, what we have seen today is a violation of the long-standing traditions in this House. Under many different Speakers and in many different Houses, it has been the tradition and practice of this House to consider the bill designated by the official opposition during private members' hours on Thursdays. Indeed, this is comparable to the situation envisioned by rule 33(8) of the rules of this House.

This is a serious breach of our practices and is a matter that must be dealt with immediately, respectfully.

Consequently, I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) that the House consider the time to be 11 a.m., move—and move to the consideration of private members' resolutions and

refer this breach of the rules to the rules committee for immediate consideration and resolution.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: I would indicate at this time that a point of order cannot be moved on—a motion cannot be moved on a point of order. I will hear a—comments from the member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, there's been a long-standing tradition that—withstanding the rules—that there can be unanimous consent to proceed with—in certain directions. And earlier on, there was a motion to move to this bill. There was unanimous consent given. There was no noes. And so I would recommend that we proceed and continue 'til 11 o'clock on this bill.

Thank you.

* (10:30)

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Assiniboia, on the same point of order.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Yes, on the same point of order.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. There is no motion on a point of order; you've correctly pointed that out. And the rules are the rules and they ask for consent to introduce various bills. That consent was not provided, but it was provided for the bill that we're talking about. So it's a bit rich to complain about the rules that the government has complete control over. The rules are the rules, and that's what we're following.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Does the member for Rossmere—is he rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): For the member from Assiniboia to assert that the rules are the rules is hardly an advanced step in logic. I'd like to point out the ceiling is the ceiling and the doors are the doors.

Madam Speaker, this kind of nonsensical non-argument is not befitting of this House. I would, however, like to compliment the Official Opposition House Leader. Rule 1, if I am not mistaken, does assert that where there is ambiguity, the traditions of this House should be taken into consideration. I think she is on point, and we would certainly welcome

your consideration of the point that she raises.
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

On the point of order, I would indicate to the member that the rules do not allow us to move a motion on a point order. I would also indicate that it is the tradition for caucuses to determine which bills will be debated during private members' business. We do also, though, have a practice where unanimous consent is asked for and provided and required, and, if members want this practice changed, then we are going to have to have that request moved forward to the Rules Committee.

The—while the member can't make a motion to have—move a motion on a point of order, she can ask for leave to proceed to 11 o'clock, if she so wishes. But the member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech, Madam Speaker, for that clarification.

I would ask for leave to call it 11 a.m. and proceed to our private members' resolution.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to call it 11 a.m. and move to the resolution?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied. So we will resume debate on the bill that is currently before us, Bill 200, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act.

Mr. Teitsma: Despite that interruption, my train of thought has not derailed, but I do want to go back to something I referenced in the first 59 seconds of my speech, which is that in many ways, although some members may like to think otherwise, politics is a team sport. And I think we've seen examples of what—when teams fall apart what happens. It's not healthy for our province. It's not healthy for democracy, and when you have rogue individuals trying to control the agenda, I don't think that's healthy for democracy either.

So I do really very much appreciate the point that was raised by the member of the official opposition, and I thank her for doing that, and

perhaps it will lead to an appropriate adjustment of the rules.

In any case, speaking to this bill in particular that we're debating now, I was going to share with the House a couple of examples of discrimination that I personally faced as a—first, as a young man, I was in university—second year university applying for a job as a computer programmer at a plastics factory, ironically. They needed some tech assistance, not programming per se, necessarily, but technical support. And being able to use the skills that I was acquiring during my education at the University of Manitoba in the faculty of computer science—put some of those skills to work.

I certainly had an excellent reference going into that job since my brother had worked there and continued to work there and had done some excellent mechanical drawings for the company, so they had a personal reference that they could trust, that would suggest that I would be an excellent applicant for the position.

And—applied for the position; I received an interview. I was informed by the interviewer who the other applicants were. And then when I was called back in to—for a second meeting, I guess, to discuss the results of the interview process, it—that's when I—it became apparent to me, at least, that I was a victim of sexual discrimination.

The hiring manager seemed to prefer the other candidate because of her gender and perhaps her appearance as well; I hope not, but in the realm of what's in the news today, that may be—not be that surprising. And what I was told—just so you know how I came to this conclusion, what I was told was that since I had forklift experience on my resume—and this being a plastics company, they do have forklift operators working at the company—they were prepared to offer me a job working in the backyard on a forklift.

And—but the purpose of that—having me around would be that if the candidate that accepted the position, the female candidate that they were making the offer to, couldn't figure something out, I would be able to do it for her. And this clearly indicated to me that in the eyes of the interviewer, at least, I had a superior skill set. I was best qualified for the position, and yet, because of my physical appearance, gender, whatever you want to assume, I didn't receive that position, and instead I was sent out to the yard to drive a forklift, which I was happy to do.

And I certainly gained some more skills that summer driving forklifts out in the yard, and then at the end of that summer, I ended up landing a job as a computer programmer, and everything went very well from there.

Now, another interesting experience that I had with an—I think it would be an accusation of sexual discrimination against me. And this was very—it was difficult for me to wrap my head around. I was a hiring manager. I interviewed hundreds and hundreds—over 1,000 actually—individuals. And over my career, I've made offers and hired hundreds of individuals. I've done—I've given promotions to dozens of people who served on my team. I ended up having a team of about 100 people underneath me at the software development company where I worked.

And as the chief development officer, it's my job to ensure that within my department, people are being treated with respect, that the Human Rights Code is being respected, that discrimination is not occurring, that people are not subject to harassment, or complaints, or anything along those lines.

Now, Madam Speaker, as I finished my work as chief development officer at that company and moved on to become a chief architect, the person who took over my role told me that he thought I was sexist. And I was concerned about that because as a hiring manager, I'd always been very much aware in the STEM industry and in information technology, the number of women in those industries, as you know, is far lower than we would like it to be.

* (10:40)

We were dealing with applicants. We would have 100 applicants for a job and only 10 of them would be women. Thirteen of them would be named Mike. You know, and that was my graduating class. We had more Michaels than women in our graduating class.

And so, in any case, I was always aware of the potential for race and sexual discrimination, racial discrimination within our hiring practices, and I made sure that there was measures in place to catch that, to see if that was happening. And I'm proud to say that it wasn't happening.

But the accusation lodged against me was that I'd somehow treated the female employees under my authority differently than I had treated the male employees. And I considered it to be a serious accusation. In my own experience, I deal with each person individually and I treat everybody with

respect. But, in the eyes of this other manager who took over from me, he believed that I was too soft in dealing with some of the female employees relative to how I treated the men, that I may be avoiding positions of management leadership for those—for the women rather than for men.

We had two tracks; we had a technical track and a management track. And, for whatever reason, the women on my team were more often choosing a technical track to achieve their career goals.

But I believed in listening to what people wanted, and that's what I did as a hiring manager. And it was very interesting for me to watch what happened next, because when the new manager took over, he started treating everybody the same. And he started being rude to everybody in equal proportion.

He started, basically, treating and pushing in a sense some of the female employees to accept positions that they weren't interested in accepting. And I had one former employee of mine—female employee of mine after the other come to my office and say: You know, why can't you still be the manager? I prefer to work for you. You treated me with respect. He's treating me like I'm just one of the guys. I don't like that. And the net result was that we lost about two thirds of our female team members, which is a significant, significant drop over the next 16 or 18 months.

So I'm convinced that I wasn't discriminatory but that I did treat people with respect. And I think that's what we want to see too.

Now, when I look at this bill specifically, you know, I do have concerns. I have concerns because of the fluid and dynamic definitions of body size. These are not the same kinds of things that are typically protected in Human Rights Code. When you look at Human Rights Code, we're talking about discrimination on the basis of religion, on the basis gender, on the basis of age. These are quantifiable things that are easily able to be, I guess, shown to be discriminatory.

I think when I heard the member talking, he's talking about the perception, right, the perception of the individual and how they feel about themselves rather than perhaps how they're being treated in an objective way. And that would be a concern for me. We wouldn't—I don't think we'd want to see a law that's subjective. Laws need to be able to be objectively applied by the courts.

And so—in any case, I see my time has come to an end. I thank the member, and I just want everybody to remember what Dr. Seuss says: A person's a person, no matter how small or big. Thank you.

Point of Order

An Honourable Member: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

With a point of order—

Madam Speaker: Sorry, I believe my mic was turned off.

The honourable member for Brandon West, on a point of order.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): With a point of order, it is important that the matter be raised at the earliest opportunity. The matter I am concerned about arises from statements made by the MLA for River Heights on Wednesday, October 11.

I was not in the House while the member was speaking at the end of the afternoon, but was told of his comments by colleagues after the House had recessed for the day.

I checked Hansard at the earliest opportunity, and this is the earliest opportunity I have to bring it to your attention.

Madam Speaker, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) attributed remarks to me that are abhorrent and degrading of women. I'm not sure that I can even repeat those remarks, as they are not words that I would use nor did I use them in this Chamber or outside of this Chamber.

The remarks he attributed to me are found on page 2931 of the Hansard published by this Chamber on October 11th, 2017.

Madam Speaker, I submit that this is the earliest opportunity I could bring this matter to your attention, having had a chance to review Hansard just earlier this morning.

According to the second edition of House of Commons Procedure and Practice, the proceedings of House—of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order and any member who feels aggrieved by a remark or allegation may also bring the matter to the attention

of the Speaker. I would reference a May 29th, 1996, Speaker's ruling, where Speaker Dacquay advised in finding language that I won't repeat in this House to be unparliamentary, that language used in the House should be temperate and worthy of the place in which it is spoken, and a word which causes disorder can be ruled unparliamentary.

Madam Speaker, I would submit that the words used by the member for River Heights are anything but temperate, and are indeed unparliamentary and now unworthy of the respect of this House, that this House should be afforded. They are derogatory to women and should not be used in this House.

Madam Speaker, the member who uttered these words has been elected several times to this House and accorded the respect of an elected member. People pay attention to the words that he speaks. He has also been a member of the Crown in the Parliament of Canada and is accordingly addressed as honourable.

Madam Speaker, to say that I spoke about women in this way will have an effect on my reputation as a member of this Legislature. I have worked very hard on my reputation, and it should not be destroyed nor diminished by something attributed to me that I clearly did not say. We need to be aware of what might be derogatory language. We need to be aware of labelling and cautious of characterizing people.

I know this is a question you will review, Madam Speaker. You are the second Speaker I have had the privilege to serve under and the first female Speaker that I have served under and I have great faith in your judgments and how you approach matters of this type.

You have ruled very well, from what I have seen, very consistently and with compassion. So it is in this regard that I submit this point of order to you for your judgment. It is a sad state that I have to rise in this House to speak about this. Therefore, I ask that an apology be offered at the earliest possible opportunity.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Madam Speaker, I apologize unreservedly to the member. I am sorry for the words that I used yesterday and I will completely withdraw those words and recognize the comments that the member has made just now and apologize and say I'm sorry.

Madam Speaker: That resolves the matter. Thank you.

House Business

Madam Speaker: The honourable member—the honourable leader—honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, on House business.

Madam Speaker: On House business.

Ms. Fontaine: Pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger). The title of the resolution is Action Against Industrial Pollution in St. Boniface.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Pursuant to rule 33(8), it has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for St. Boniface. The title of the resolution is Action Against Industrial Pollution in St. Boniface.

* * *

Madam Speaker: We will now move back into debate on the bill that is currently before us, Bill 200, The Human Rights Code Amendment Act.

* (10:50)

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): This is a very interesting topic, although I don't have any speech writers so I won't be able to say everything properly. I apologize before that.

But I gone through this situation many times, I had quite a good experience and I'm thinking to write a book later on and I promise I will tell every truth. I won't hide in it. I may not make money but I won't hide anything. I will tell the truth.

And what happens, like sometime discrimination further—caused discrimination. When I was working in the government services, at that time we were lumped with the women, and the visible minorities, and when chance come to get jobs, then women will get job and we were left out. And anyway, that used to—discrimination because most women will put on the major conservative.

Similarly when we came in the Cabinet and the caucus, and we were not part of the women, although I sort of consider me in the part of the women too, then promotion was given to the woman. So again, we were left out. So I suffered through that process.

But it's a very interesting—does not matter how you want to hide it, how you want to portray it, and sometimes how you feel that makes a difference. I was working as a chief engineer and a guy who was from the Arabian country whose religion was Islam, and he came to me and he says—he was in India—he said, I changed my name. I said, why, and what's your new name? He said, my new name is John Smith. Actually he gave me that copy of the name change certificate. I said, why you are doing this because people will see anyway, they will look at your colour, they will look at your accent, they will find any way. He said at least when I send application at least they will call me on interview. After that they might find out I am not the person they really looking for. So this kind of situation many time occurs.

I think it's very important we keep balance of that. Just don't go one side and don't go the other side because men and women both are time to time get discriminated. Because first there should be kind of training at work places and training everywhere when—so that people can understand where we stand, what can be—similarly in the House. In the House, as an independent, I don't have that much time to put my point of my view, of my constituents' point of view forward. Maybe we can describe this discrimination or just the process, or just the procedure. So is very hard to understand what is discrimination, what is not discrimination.

And there could—many examples—but those are not coming to me at this point because I am quite sure when I will be writing book I have some photocopies—when I had to go through that, the process of when I have to go to human rights.

But main thing, when I entered the government services, got a job, I had to go through human rights because I had third class power engineering licence, other guy had fourth class power engineering licence. Fourth is lower than third in that category. But I was not called on the interview. So I took my case to the human rights and through that I—actually when they said why you are not giving me job, why are giving the job to the other guy. They said, you know, we asked you question if you move to The Pas what your wife will do over there? And that's why

we did not give you job; we give other guy job. I said, that's none of your business what my wife will do or not. And, after that, I asked them to remove from the application that—what your wife will be doing, what your spouse will be doing. That has nothing to do with that.

And other time, co-ordinator of equal opportunity, he said—identify people who are from the targeted group. So I said I am one of the member of the targeted group, and being targeted again and again. And he thought maybe—he talk to other poor people, he thought, maybe, he's such a shit disturber—sorry about that using word. And so he would not give me appointment. And I said okay, give me appointment. Oh, well, I don't have time. Maybe next week? No. Next month? No. Next year? No. I said can we have—I have appointment in next life? He said well, hell with that, that we have appointment.

So after that, I was able to convince him I'm being discriminated, and I proved him by showing some examples. And at the end, I forced them to take me to the power house where I wanted to work. Otherwise, I will be bypassed.

So it's not only your side, there are many things that come into play. Your colour, your religion. And unless we are educated properly about other cultures, sometimes there is difference in culture. We have arranged marriage. When arranged marriage—when the middle man—he have to ask so many questions. In this culture, that could be kind of harassment, that could be kind of discrimination.

So we have to have cultural understanding. We maybe have to—there should be some kind of training in the schools where different cultures are taught, and then they are kind of—make aware of those cultures. And that way we will be better society. I've again—as I said, I don't have any speech writer. Therefore I can—may not put everything in the proper words, but I try my best.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): I'm very excited to speak to this motion this morning, and I'm most grateful for the opportunity to speak to a matter on things like discrimination, especially coming from the North End of Winnipeg. I'm a very proud resident of Garden City, and the people of Kildonan are some of the most diverse people in all of Manitoba.

We have the newest Canadians—some who are Syrian refugees. We have many Canadians who arrived in the 1940s and '50s who were refugees from the communist regime of Joseph Stalin, fleeing for their lives. And the discrimination many people felt was something that permeates to this day. My own family, when they came to Canada in the 1920s—my Polish family—they were able to get along well in a small farming community. But when they moved to Winnipeg, unfortunately the discrimination about Polish-sounding names and the Polish language, Polish culture was one that they decided that, instead of adopting their Polish heritage, instead they decided to adopt Anglicized names, something that no person should ever have to do. No one should ever have to change the way they speak, the way they identify with their names. And it's unfortunate.

With my grandfather—and he is now a proud great grandfather of many great grandchildren—and with my daughter, we asked, you know, say some things to her in Polish, maybe she can hear the tongue. And my grandfather said I don't have it any more. He was raised with the language, but because of discrimination, he does not have the ability to speak to his own great granddaughter in his born language. And this is something that's very important. It's important to understand that the diversity that we have in Winnipeg is the strongest part that makes our community one of the best communities in the world.

Whenever I'm able to travel outside of Manitoba, albeit briefly, I'm able to talk about the wonders that we have in Manitoba with the various families, and cultures, and languages. I have to say—for a local plug—our Save-On-Foods has international aisles where you can get foodstuffs from around the world, and it's always full. It's something that we pride ourselves, not just on things like language and names, but also on food. We have wonderful restaurants across the city of Winnipeg that offer a wide variety. And, in a world where you have discrimination against those kinds of cultures, you can't have that kind of diversity of food—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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

* (11:00)

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 22—Protecting Low Income Manitobans

Madam Speaker: The hour's now 11 a.m. and time for private member's resolution. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Protecting Low Income Manitobans, and this resolution is brought forward by the honourable member for Point Douglas.

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

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has announced cuts to the Rent Assist benefit, which would increase rent for over 7000 families, some by as much as \$1200 a year; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government increased rent for Manitoba Housing residents by as much as \$720 a year and changed its policy to eliminate options for families choosing an appropriate unit; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government broke its promise to create a comprehensive strategy to bring Manitobans out of poverty and failed to comply with legislation by not releasing an update in June; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government refused to raise the minimum wage for two years and locked it in at an arbitrarily low rate; and

WHEREAS in the last provincial budget the Provincial Government hiked tuition fees for thousands of students, presenting a barrier for many students to access education, training and good jobs; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government refused to renew funding for the North Point Douglas Women's Centre and other women's centres, which provided supports and counselling for some of Winnipeg's most vulnerable women; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government froze Neighborhoods Alive and Community Places for a year, cutting services and causing unnecessary uncertainty for thousands of Manitobans who rely on these programs; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has broken its promise to protect low income, vulnerable, hardworking families and seniors and has instead cut their supports and cancelled funding for programs.

THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to commit to presenting a real, comprehensive strategy to fight poverty and to protect low-income families and seniors by reversing their damaging cuts to services, lowering fees and ensuring all Manitobans have access to good jobs.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Point Douglas, seconded by the honourable member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin),

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to commit to presenting a real, comprehensive strategy to fight poverty and to protect low-income families and seniors by reversing their damaging cuts to services, lowering fees and ensuring all Manitobans have access to good jobs.

Mrs. Smith: I'm please to rise today in this House to bring this bill forward.

We recognize that too many families in Manitoba are struggling. We know that seniors in Manitoba and all Manitobans are living below the poverty line, especially in my constituency.

We know that the cuts by this Premier (Mr. Pallister) support—that aren't supporting these vital assistance that our community members need, are really hurting our Manitobans. Strong social services are important to support low-income families, vulnerable families, and having those essential services stripped away does immense damage.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Shelters and community organizations and food banks are needed to help low-income Manitobans get out of dangerous situations, find housing and be supported. In fact, last week I met with one of my constituents who shared with me that she has to exploit her body on the streets to pay for food for her family because she's putting so much extra money into paying for her rent. She's a mother of three small children who has to also visit the food bank. You know, she's putting herself at risk by being on the streets, but this is what she's had to do to support her family and keep her kids at home.

This is a shame and—you know, I shared, you know, my deepest regret with this family that, you know, unfortunately, where we're in a time where this government is out of touch with Manitobans, that they're not listening to the needs of the families.

So, we, as the New Democratic Party, are committed to, you know, lifting and working with low-income families and lifting them out of poverty. In fact, I am one of those members. I attended a program that the New Democratic Party started called the Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. Before that I was a single parent with two small children also having to visit food banks and, at times, borrowing money from family, whoever I could to pay rent, to keep my lights on and feed my kids.

So this opportunity to go to this program helped me out of poverty. My kids are actually living a more privileged life than I had because of this opportunity.

So these are the kinds of supports that our families need. We don't need cuts to tuition like this government is doing right now that's going to further put families into poverty.

Housing is a basic right and all families and seniors in Manitoba should have access to accessible, safe, quality housing. We just saw a report come out from Lord Selkirk Housing that showed the impact that it had on the community and the investments made: neighbours talking to one another, helping one another. Someone doesn't have sugar; the neighbour's giving them sugar. You know, they're creating—they're making gardens, you know, to feed the community. The school is walking their kids from there to Turtle Island for a lunch program because many of the families don't have enough money to even send, you know, lunch to school with their kids. They're providing breakfast programs. So we need to make investments like that into, you know, our communities.

We are also committed to making life easier for hard, low-income families who are struggling to afford basic life necessities. There must be access to affordable housing and education as well as good jobs and supports that they need to get out of poverty.

So, when we're looking at these cuts that are happening right now, you know, access to education—as I've shared my story, that was my way out of poverty. You know, 5 per cent plus, you know, inflation. How many other—how out of reach is that going to be for people in my constituency?

You know, we are going to have more people in poverty, more people living off of EIA than you do now because of this. You're going to have kids that

have no hope. We need to give them hope. We need to ensure that kids that are in high school know that they can go to post-secondary, that that is something they can do. But many families can't even put food on their table. We're making it harder for these families to be able to have hope to be able to get out of poverty.

This government should have a comprehensive poverty reduction. You know, we just saw that June 1st deadline go by. Yesterday, it was delivered—you know, their poverty reduction strategy, which was very thin, I might add. And this Premier (Mr. Pallister) has failed to put forward, you know, a comprehensive strategy that's going to actually pull people out of poverty. You know, we're—people aren't asking for a handout; they're asking for a hand up. And that's what we need to give Manitobans. Manitobans deserve that. They voted for this government. They didn't vote for what this government is doing.

So he's frozen wages. You know, he's given Manitobans three nickels. That's six dollars a week—six dollars a week. That's not—that can't even feed you one meal let alone if you have three children in your house and you're a single parent—shame.

He's froze and cut community and front-line services which provide essential assistance to families and seniors. When we look at the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, they lost councillors; they lost front-line workers that are providing support to families—vital support—support that families need to get to a place where they can actually realize that they can go to post-secondary, that they can actually realize that they can get out of poverty, that they can give their children hope that their children can realize that they can go to post-secondary.

He's made it harder for struggling Manitobans to afford housing. He's increased it by 3 per cent. So it went from 25 per cent of your income to now 28 per cent. Manitobans are already having a hard time. That's why they're living in social housing, because it's lower rents.

And then you take—you decrease the amount of Rent Assist that families are receiving—shame. You know, families are struggling as it is, and this government is just making it harder and harder and harder. You know, we have people who had hope that are now going to a place of darkness, that don't feel like they have hope because this government is just continuing to take away, take away, take away,

cut, cut, cut. But they're not giving anything back, especially in my constituency.

I visited a school a couple of weeks ago, William Whyte School. That school is having to go to Winnipeg Harvest every single day to feed kids, to make sure that they have breakfast, to make sure that they have lunch. And you know what some of their breakfast is?—chili, because they don't have the money to be able to feed kids. And that's a reality. That's a reality of my constituency and many others.

People don't have the money to be able to put food on their table, because this government is making it harder for Manitobans to afford the services. And now they're going to add a health premium on? That's going to even make it harder for Manitobans—shame.

Meanwhile, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet gave themselves a 20 per cent raise. You know, that 20 per cent raise could have kept those councillors and those staff members in their jobs in North Point Douglas Women's Centre. That could have made a difference for many families.

* (11:10)

When that—when their jobs were lost, you saw an increase in crime in that community. You saw someone was murdered in a rooming house just down the street, a block from Norquay School. You saw garages being set on fire. You saw people—more people going onto the streets to do crime to get money to be able to pay to put food on their table, to feed their children, and that's what this is—this government has done. They've reduced families to having to put themselves in danger and at risk to be able to feed their families, put food on their table, to keep their lights on and to keep shelter for their children.

We urge the Premier to commit to protecting the low-income families and seniors and present a real, comprehensive strategy in fighting poverty by reversing the damaging cuts to services, lowering fees and ensuring all Manitobans have access to good jobs.

Right now, we're seeing that people are losing jobs. You know, he's cut nurses, doctors are losing their jobs, front-line workers are losing their jobs. That's putting a strain on our economy. Where are they going? They're going on to EIA. Who is paying for that? Our government's paying for that. But yet, is there a strategy to create more jobs for these people that have lost their jobs? I don't see anything.

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

Questions

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

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I'd like to thank the member opposite for her resolution today.

The member opposite claims to represent openness and transparency. However, it was her government that misled Manitobans about their tax increases. Increases like the PST and expanding the PST were detrimental to low-income Manitobans, and I would like to ask the member how this has improved life for low-income Manitobans.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Miigwech for that question.

I want to let the member opposite know that when our government was in power we had more people out of poverty than we do now. I've been meeting with my constituents all summer who have been telling me that these cuts have drastically lowered their income, have forced them to go out onto the street to exploit their bodies to put food on their table. It's making it harder for families to be able to live, to pay rent.

You know, raising the 'mimumum' wage by 15 cents—many families have had to go and get two or three jobs, often leaving their kids at home with their 14-year-old daughter—

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

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): My question is: How does an increase in Manitoba housing prices hurt working families who are trying to pull themselves out of poverty?

Mrs. Smith: Thank you for that question.

Well, we see that these increases are making it harder for Manitobans to afford to pay rent. In fact, my own aunt had to move out of her apartment and move into a rooming house because she lost her

roommate. They were living in a two-bedroom apartment, she couldn't afford the rent. They were in social housing, but because she lost her roommate she had to move out.

You know, we don't have 3 extra per cent to be putting towards rent. It's hard enough to be putting food on the table, paying bills as it is.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Can the member please explain why under the NDP they cut funding to the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative and why under the NDP Manitoba's university graduation rates were the lowest in Canada?

Mrs. Smith: As someone who worked in the education field, I can tell you that the graduation rates have increased. I worked for a program called Wayfinders. We graduated 70 kids every year that normally wouldn't graduate because of barriers—you know, low-income families living in social housing, residential school effects. So I can tell you that we have done a really good job, in terms of making sure kids are graduating that normally wouldn't graduate. And, you know, this government needs to stand up and do the same.

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Can the member explain why, after 17 years of reckless spending by the NDP, Manitoba children still have the highest food bank usage in Canada?

Does the member find this acceptable?

Mrs. Smith: Children are still visiting food banks. In fact, I just shared an example of a whole school having to visit food banks. I can tell you two years ago that this school was not visiting food banks. They didn't have to bring in Winnipeg Harvest to feed their children.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I think what the member needs to ask is why are we in the state that we are in as a province? I mean, we've got debt piling up, deficit after deficit, mismanagement by the NDP. That's what's killing the economy, that's what's causing these harmful effects.

The—we're having huge rate increases coming out of Manitoba Hydro. Why? Because of mismanagement. So can the member explain how that kind of government—a government that ignores its children, that ignores its grandchildren—is supposedly helping low-income Manitobans when it clearly isn't.

Mrs. Smith: I can tell you that when we look at where we're at today, that Manitobans are far further back than they were two years ago.

Our kids have less hope because this government has cut the tuition rebate, they've increased tuition, they've forced schools to go to food banks, they've cut—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —and cut and cut to the point where families are having to put their life at risk to support their families.

Ms. Lathlin: How has the Premier (Mr. Pallister) failed to address issues of poverty and job loss in the North?

Mrs. Smith: Well, you just have to look at Churchill.

Churchill—this government has failed to help the people of Churchill. There's still a rail line that's derailed. They're still waiting for their propane to come. And yet this government is silent on this.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Cox: A lack of action by the NDP resulted in over a half a billion dollars in deferred maintenance within 35,000 units of Manitoba Housing stock. Their—this mismanagement caused bedbug and rodent infestations.

Can the member please explain how this helped low-income Manitobans find safe and affordable housing here in Manitoba?

Mrs. Smith: This summer, I had the privilege of attending the summer games. And, I tell you, what an amazing event it was. I had the privilege of getting to know so many of our youth, they came here to the city to attend those games. I had an opportunity to speak to a lot of the coaches, and many of students that I've had the privilege of talking to.

So, miigwech.

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: Low-income Manitobans had money taken out of their pockets when the NDP increased the—oh, sorry, when they increased the PST.

Can the member opposite please explain how this helped low-income Manitobans feed their families?

Mrs. Smith: Well, this government ran on decreasing that PST by 1 per cent, and it still hasn't happened.

Mrs. Cox: A lack of action by the NDP resulted in half a billion dollars in deferred maintenance within over 35,000 units of Manitoba Housing stock. Their mismanagement caused bedbug and rodent infestations.

I'd like to ask the member to explain how this helped low-income Manitobans find safe and affordable housing in Manitoba.

* (11:20)

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech, Deputy Speaker.

Well, there was just an article in the paper last week about the bedbug-, cockroach-, and mice-infested apartment building at 400 Langside. So I would ask the member opposite: What are they doing to address that problem? They've been living in that squalor for quite a bit of time.

Miigwech, Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Teitsma: Thank you for the opportunity to ask another question of the member.

You know, I heard some of her responses on things like education, and I look at the NDP record which shows first of all, that they're cutting—they cut scholarship and bursary. The MSBI, the Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, they cut that. And what was the result? The result was that tuition—or, sorry, that graduation rates especially among low-income Manitobans actually declined under their leadership.

What did we do? We 'quintipled', 'quintipled', five times, 500 per cent increase that number of scholarships that we are offering, including ones to low-income Manitobans. That's how we can get Manitobans—

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

Mrs. Smith: I can tell you someone in high school who had a low GPA wouldn't have qualified for those scholarships. That income tax rebate would have benefitted me more than any scholarship that this government is offering.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): I have a question for the member. After 17 years in power her previous government saw child poverty rates actually increase. And what actions, and what confidence should Manitobans have right now in your party to show that you would do otherwise?

Mrs. Smith: Well we certainly wouldn't be raising tuition rates, we wouldn't be making these cuts that this current government is making. We wouldn't increase rental by three per cent, we wouldn't be cutting rent assist, and that definitely would help families put food on their table and keep their lights on.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired. The debate is open. Any speakers?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the House today to speak to the member from Point Douglas' private member resolution in the Chamber. But first I would like to congratulate the member on her recent victory and wish her well as she embarks on her new journey in her career. I know she will do her best to serve the families and residents of Point Douglas as her passion for the community is apparent by her actions.

During the recent by-election I had the opportunity to visit with many residents of Point Douglas while going door-to-door. I met many enthusiastic new moms holding their babies and boasting about their close-knit community. They all had dreams and aspirations, and what really remained with me was their obvious pride in their family and their community.

We often discussed their future, which included employment opportunities or furthering their education. And many of them, Mr. Speaker, weren't aware of the Taking Charge program, a provincial program that assists single parents and women to achieve self sufficiency by taking charge of their lives.

I'd like to thank the former Minister of Family Services, Bonnie Mitchelson, and our Progressive Conservative government back in 1999 who had the vision to provide a hand up to women. This very successful program still exists today and has assisted hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals move off of assistance into well paying jobs.

Participants are partnered with prospective employers, or offered training and educational opportunities, all offered in an environment that fosters success and helps them achieve their goals. Even onsite day care is available thanks to our former Conservative government's foresight in seeing the potential in these moms and giving them the opportunity to see their dreams to fruition.

And speaking of education, I would like to remind the member opposite of the significant increase our Progressive Conservative government has made through its Scholarship and Bursary Initiative. Our government has quadrupled its support for scholarships and bursaries this upcoming school year. I am proud to report that there is now over \$20 million of non-repayable scholarships, bursaries, and grants available for Manitoba students attending post-secondary schools here in Manitoba.

Statistics have proven time after time that the best way of moving from a life of poverty is through education. And I'd like to congratulate our government for providing this important opportunity to those seeking to improve their lives through post-secondary education.

Of course, Madam Speaker—or Mr. Speaker, child care is an important and necessary component when lifting individuals out of poverty and into the workforce. And during 17 years of NDP government, Manitobans witnessed the largest wait times in history. While the member opposite talks about protecting low-income Manitobans, they failed miserably to provide much-needed child care to Manitoba families. Our government knows the best form of assistance is a job, and that's why we are investing a record \$170 million in child care, the most ever in Manitoba.

While our government is doing its part to care for our children, I would also like to highlight the efforts of the many hard-working Manitobans who are dedicated to helping families and communities. I'm proud to bring to the members' attention and the members' attention in the Chamber the important work done of Jubilee Mennonite Church. It's a church that's located in my community of River East. Although it's a small congregation, it has a big heart, and it has a mission to empower to women and provide them the opportunity to overcome a life of challenges, to moving on to a life of opportunity.

No the-knowing the importance of healthy families, Jubilee church's compassion is evident in its actions each and every day. Anna Marie has worked

relentlessly—she's the community pasture—pastor—and tirelessly to ensure that children and youth get off to the very best start in life. They offer programs such as the J Club, a drop-in centre that provides children a safe, fun and caring environment that meets the needs of the entire and whole child.

Jubilee knows the importance of community. They offer so many community programs such as the community 'kitching,' which offers young moms and moms the opportunity to learn how to prepare and cook nutritious meals. They offer the Come Grow With Us community garden, which I have advocated for and ensured that they have the compost and other items like that to ensure that that garden can grow and, you know, be a very successful part of feeding that community.

They also offer a bicycle repair shop and also the annual block party and the clothing drive, which is coming up very soon, and I would encourage all the members in the Chamber to take a look at the Jubilee church website, and hopefully they can go through their closets and provide some clothing for those individuals.

Unfortunately, Jubilee church and its congregation faces challenges thanks to the former NDP government, and, while the member opposite speaks of low-income Manitobans, they need to be reminded of the damage and impact their unilateral tax increases had on all Manitoba families. Mr. Speaker, they broke their promise to Manitobans when they raised the PST by an additional 1 per cent and expanded the application of the PST to include house insurance, premiums—house insurance premiums, group life insurance and health-care premiums. These taxes had significant and huge implications, especially on those living in challenging financial circumstances. No referendum, no consultations, they just forced the increases upon Manitoba families.

They disregarded low-income, hard-working families by failing to increase the basic personal exemption, Mr. Speaker. Disappointing, that under the former NDP government, Manitoba had the lowest basic personal exemption west of Quebec. They had 17 years to help low-income Manitobans by removing them from the tax roll, but they did nothing. Had they had the foresight to increase the basic personal exemption, like our government did within the very first year in government, tens of thousands of low-income Manitobans would've been devoid of paying taxes.

So I am certainly thankful for what our government is doing and the direction that they are taking to ensure that Manitoba's low-income families have the opportunities to seek, you know, good jobs and get an education and move themselves out of that life of poverty into a life of healthy families and giving them the opportunity to be employed and to see the difference that they can make within their families by having good jobs and having an education.

So thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill—this resolution today.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): It's an honour to put a few words on the—my colleague's, member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), private member resolution, Protecting Low Income Manitobans.

* (11:30)

Deputy Speaker, Manitoba needs immediate and real action to address a growing need for accessible and affordable housing. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has cut the Rent Assist benefit and increased the rates of Manitoba Housing residents. He cut the Rent Assist benefit for over 7,000 families, reducing benefits by up to \$1,200 a year for some. These cuts will put affordable housing further out of reach for low-income renters in Manitoba.

He then hiked rental costs for some low-income earners living in Manitoba Housing that could see tenants paying an extra \$720 a year. These came with policy changes which give tenants fewer options of where to live. As of November 1st, 2017, the Premier's cuts to Manitoba Housing will hit tenants who are signing lease renewals. This means the majority of Manitoba Housing tenants will see more of their income go towards paying rent with less left over for groceries and basic necessities.

The Premier cut 510,000 community housing improvement project, which provided more than 200 grants to homeowners and landlords to renovate homes. Anti-poverty advocates have warned that higher housing costs means families and seniors living below the poverty line will have to scrounge on basic life necessities, increasing the problems for low-income workers have faced after the 'minimum' wage freezes.

We are committed to lifting working and low-income families out of poverty. Manitoba needs safe, high-quality, affordable housing that helps working families afford the things they need.

Other essential needs that vulnerable Manitobans rely on are shelters, community organizations, and front-line services. We know strong social services are essential to support low-income families and seniors. The Premier has broken his promise to protect front-line services for all Manitobans. He has made cuts to shelters that supported low-income families and women experiencing domestic violence and homelessness. He cut \$120,000 from the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, which provided crisis support for women in dangerous situations. He cut \$30,000 from the North End women's resource centre, which help low-income women access basic necessities for life.

The Premier doesn't understand the challenges families living in poverty face. We believe that shelters, community organizations, and food banks are needed to help low-income Manitobans get out of dangerous situations, find housing, and be supported. For example, in my community, the Oscar's Place homeless shelter faced a closure—a permanent closure as of September 30th. And to—I'm absolutely honoured to be part of the community who came together and held an emergency meeting at University College of the North, which consisted of community members, local leadership, from both sides of the river.

We held this meeting to develop a strategy and a plan to keep the shelter open beyond September 30th. It was great to see our community come together and show the love and respect for our community's most vulnerable. We held a fundraiser at the University College of the North, and local musicians came together and performed for our community. We even had donations for silent auctions and it was great to see our community come together—our families and members from our homeless community, as well, were with us, and children coming out to support our cause.

And we also had a sleep-out to support and raise money—and collected pledges, which I want to thank—for the pledges that were given and to support my efforts. Thank goodness it was plus 17 that day, and it was a warm night. And it was an excellent opportunity to sit with our members from our homeless community and talk about strategies. We were there from 9 p.m. until 6 a.m. And it was also an excellent opportunity to create bonds and relationships with our people that came out and supported our cause.

So, with that, with regards to the North, workers are being hit particularly hard in northern Manitoba as they face massive job losses over the next two years due to mine closures. Up to 1,500 job losses are projected by the end of 2017, representing a significant portion of the northern workforce.

Communities such as The Pas, Churchill, Flin Flon and Thompson are all under considerable strain, and the Premier has ignored the requests of people like Mike Spence, the mayor of Churchill, when they ask for concrete, long-term solutions.

In regards to the paper mill closure in my own community, local leadership and I have personally asked the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to come and visit our community when we were under that strain. I asked him to come to meet with our local leadership, and he said he would come during Trappers' Festival, and I remember saying, maybe it's good to come during a time of crisis rather than a time of celebration.

According to a government briefing note obtained through FIPPA, the next two to three years may see job losses in the North representing a loss of \$100 million in annual income and \$300 million per loss to the 'economy.'

Manitoba families and seniors don't know what this government is going to do to grow our northern economy, and the Premier doesn't have any answers for them. The Premier continues to look north, while the people of Manitoba need him to build our north.

For example, as a northern Manitoban, I find it quite odd how it took three attempts, three strategies, to figure out northern Manitoba. The first one was called Northern Lights, and the second attempt was Yes! North, and a third attempt is Look North.

An Honourable Member: How is that plan coming?

Ms. Lathlin: I've yet to see.

The problem I have with the current strategy that's on the table right now is that it's working backwards in terms of having full participation into northern 'economy.' When we northern First Nations are struggling with just having drinking water, access to health care, access to education, roads, infrastructure—so, when you want us to be full participants in building our economy, I believe those issues should be addressed to build healthy and educated communities in order for us to be full participants in this so-called Look North strategy.

So, with that, we believe in providing jobs and services to the families and seniors of northern Manitoba communities. And, with that, it was an honour to put a few words on this PMR today.

Thank you.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): It is with honour that I rise in the House this morning to speak to the private member's resolution protecting low-income Manitobans.

I agree that poverty has been an issue for some of the people who live in this great province we call home. I want to first start by defining what poverty encompasses. I found the following definition of poverty online, and it states: Poverty is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials to enjoy a minimum standard of life and well-being that's considered acceptable in society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe some of the basic needs that are being referenced are food, shelter and education, which all impact one's quality of life.

As I present my argument to support how our government has put measures in place to support individuals who are living in poverty, as defined by the previous definition, I will highlight how, after years of erosion to our basic support system, Manitoba now faces many challenges to assist individuals who have been living in poverty.

Financial struggles are one of the primary indicators of poverty. Families living on limited or fixed incomes do not have the financial flexibility to be able to afford the unexpected or extra costs of daily living.

However, over the last 17 years, Manitobans faced many new financial challenges. Individuals living on a fixed income have struggled with many financial decisions. There has been a myriad of additional costs which have impacted the bottom line on what individuals have for spending power. These costs have mostly come in the form of additional income and consumption taxes individuals have paid.

* (11:40)

Manitobans lived through an additional \$1 billion in new taxes over a five-year span between 2011 and 2016. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 1 per cent of anything may not seem significant, but, when one looks at what a 1 per cent in PST costs an individual or a family, the loss of extra income impacts choices

and purchases that might have been made. According to an article published by the Frasier Institute, a 1 per cent increase adds an additional \$874 in taxes paid by a family annually.

I would like to quote the Leader of the Opposition party. How does raising the PST help grow the economy? How is a tax which takes a proportionally bigger slice of poorer people's income fair?

People pay their income taxes according to the provincial tax guidelines. Manitobans have paid their fair share of taxes and then some. How is it possible to live in a province where the income tax paid by a family averages \$4,000 more than what families in the neighbouring province pay annually? How does keeping the basic tax exemption, on average \$2,000 lower than the rest of Canada, support the argument that our previous government was protecting those most vulnerable and financially struggling to maintain a minimum standard of living?

Deputy Speaker, I find it hard to believe that the best interests of the most vulnerable were being supported. It would appear to me that the most vulnerable were being penalized, not supported nor defended. As every person living in Manitoba knows, there are some expenses that cannot be avoided. One of these expenses is the need for warm clothing as the winter season approaches. However, not all families will be able to afford the necessary winter clothing needed to keep everyone warm.

How does a family afford the cost of necessary clothes when they have to pay additional taxes on basic necessities?

Deputy Speaker, to these points I can say that our government has begun to index tax brackets to inflation and increase the personal exemption. This means that more than 2,000 taxpayers in this province will be removed from the tax roll.

Further, our government continues to support families and their needs. Our government is providing over \$85 million to further support employment income and rental assistance programming in 2017-2018. Our government believes in supporting those families or individuals in need and that starts with a hand up, not a hand out.

The ripple effect of financial limitations goes far beyond the ability to purchase extras for the home. How does a family afford the additional costs that are accrued to basic living? How does a family that

is financially struggling deal with an increase in rent?

In the previous years, the previous government did not offer as high a rent assistance benefit as our government currently offers households needing the rent subsidy program.

Our government is committed to helping families through one of the most generous Rent Assist programs in Canada. In fact, Deputy Speaker, eligible families on EIA saw an increase in shelter benefits. Parents with children and low-income individuals receiving EIA saw an increase in these benefits in July of 2017. Our government has invested \$12.8 million helping to improve the supply and quality of affordable housing through our province for projects through the Social Innovation Fund.

Deputy Speaker, education is key in keeping individuals from a world of poverty. Education empowers individuals and opens doors to many jobs and future options. Yet the previous government was unable to empower individuals, and after reckless spending by the previous government our students in this province had the lowest scores in science, math and reading, and our university grads were ranked the lowest in the country for numeracy skills. Compared to other provinces the students were one year behind in reading and science, and more than a half year behind in math. Our investment in our future to our students was failing. How does an individual help themselves to get out of this cycle?

Deputy Speaker, our government has taken a serious stand on education. We are dedicated, and are learning through listening what is needed to improve our education outcomes for all Manitoba students. Also, we will listen to educators and parents.

Our government believes that being able to offer students the supports when they are most needed will ensure that those taking a post-secondary education will graduate.

Our government has invested more than \$35 million in direct support to Manitoba students through the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, Manitoba Bursary Program and other government grants. This government believes in investing in our students.

Students are our future, and by investing in programs as they are in post-secondary institutes, we'll assist those who most need the money to guarantee their future education aspirations.

Deputy Speaker, in closing I would like to state that I agree that, as a government, we need to protect the low-income Manitobans. I will also say that I am proud of this government and how it has taken what it inherited and has started to rebuild. Families deserve to live without the financial worry of how they will cover their basic needs. Families should enjoy a standard of life and well-being that's considered acceptable in society. Our government is doing that by listening to the taxpayers, youth and seniors and offering supports to fit the needs of the individuals.

Deputy Speaker, good governments make the difficult decisions necessary to ensure the protection of sustainable, quality services for their citizens. That is our government.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My colleague, the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), has talked of how there are so many people who are forced to struggle to live, to make ends meet, but sadly it fell on deaf ears on the other side of the Chamber.

We have to recognize that the results that we have today are, in part, the results of what happened in the last 20 years. So the NDP could have done better, but let's talk about where we are now and what we can do now.

I could go down the list of things that this current government is doing, primarily focusing on protecting the wealthy and doing relatively little to help people who are on low incomes. Raising the personal exemption to Manitoba's inflation rate saves about \$15 a year for people. That's hardly a solution. Cutting back on the tuition rebate and helping many low-income students, that is hardly a solution because it takes away from opportunities that many students and recent graduates would have.

The government is talking about how it might impose a new tax on Manitobans, a health care premium. The Premier (Mr. Pallister), of course, ran on a campaign to reduce taxes for Manitobans, and his approach now to impose a health care premium, you know, look—sounds a little bit more like what the NDP did, which was to run on not raising taxes and then did it.

There are a lot of issues that I could go on and on about, concerns with what the Tories are doing. But let me rather focus on some of the things that I think that we as a combined group of MLAs should be doing.

First of all, one of the basic steps that we need to take to help people who are on low incomes or in poverty is to end homelessness. Having a home is really a solid starting point for anybody to enable them to be in a better position to lift themselves out of poverty. There has yet to be a solid proposal, plan, or even ideas from this government about ending homelessness. There are places in Manitoba like—or, in Canada—Medicine Hat, for example, where they have developed and implemented a plan and been very successful.

It can be done here.

There are some efforts being done by the City of Winnipeg. Let's take note of that and give them some credit because there's some positive things happening, but at the provincial level—not yet. And I have yet to see what we need, which is a really focused plan which is going to be effective in getting us to the objective of ending hopelessness.

*(11:50)

Poverty, of course, is about income and we should be talking about basic income supports. I would say that the measures that the federal government have been taken with regard to better support for children, and for families with children, has actually been remarkably positive.

The—my two colleagues, from Burrows and from Kewatinook, you know, knocked on a lot of doors in Point Douglas and one of the things that we found is that people, the grassroots, were finding significant benefit from that federal measure.

And I think that when the analysis is completed that we will see some level of a drop in the poverty rate in Manitoba as a result because it's helping the people who are on the low end of the income scale and families and children in particular. And the feedback I've got is that it's helpful in communities in the North, like St. Theresa Point, as well. So let's give the federal government some credit for having done something that is very positive for kids and for families and for reducing poverty.

Thank you for the applause coming from the benches across the way.

Let's ask the question who is poor, and why are people poor, because I think that is also helpful in terms of us having an understanding of where we can use resources to better address poverty.

First of all, there are surprising number of people who are poor who have learning disabilities. This is not something which is new information; this has been known for many years. And yet there has not been that focussed effort which we need to address learning disabilities, to make sure that children with learning disabilities are diagnosed and identified very early on, that they are helped.

Under the previous government, and indeed today, there are long waiting lists for children for assessments and for help with learning disabilities. This should not be the case. Our position is that we should put psychologists giving psychological therapy or assessments for children under Medicare like we do with doctors so that, in fact, we can address this problem of children with learning disabilities much more quickly, much more easily. We can get the people who can make a difference, the psychologists in this circumstance, to address the problem.

But what's happening now is that the very people who often who need this who have learning disabilities or families which are poor are not getting that help because they can't afford the psychologists. And they have to wait in long lines to get the assessments and the help. In fact, under the previous government, children with learning disorders, like autism, were sometimes having to age out before they even got any treatment. And that was a very sad state of affairs because when you don't treat and help children in this area, what happens is that you have a problem which lasts a lifetime, instead of something which you can address and help and make a difference for a child which lasts a lifetime.

Second, the current former government and the current government is not covering the costs of critical programs for children with learning disabilities, like the Arrowsmith Program. And again, people who need it are often not able to get it. This needs to be turned around.

People with brain and mental health conditions, people with mental illness and with addictions are all too often poor. We've seen this, we know this. It is around us if we open our eyes and look at it. We need to have a much better and effective plan for helping those with mental illnesses and with addictions. The current government said it's

interested, but we're still waiting for the consultant's report, which isn't due until the end of this year.

So it is a waiting game with this government, instead of an action game. It's too bad. It's clear that we need to do much better in this area. And, indeed, as been brought up in this Chamber, there is a real crisis with respect to methamphetamine, crystal meth in Winnipeg, at the moment. And we're not addressing it in any way that is effective and making that critical difference.

People from central Winnipeg, people in northern Manitoba—areas like St. Theresa Point, Wasagamack—you know how much difference we could make if we made changes and let people have access to the resources in the North? Empower people. My colleague from—the MLA for Kewatinook and I put a lot of effort into providing some ideas for employing youth to protect communities from fires. If the money had been spent there, if we had saved the problems of the big fire in St. Theresa Point, think how much dollars we would have saved, but we would have also done something very positive for that community, and those communities—empowering their—to look after and prevent the fires that are happening and protect their own communities.

Thank you.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Before I get into the heart of my remarks, I do want to bring the attention of all the members present to the gallery, where my wife is seated with my little one-year-old, Mark. Hi, Mark. All right. He gets to watch his daddy debate, I think, for the first time. So—I don't think it will be too riveting, though, but I'll do my best.

In any case, you know, I do appreciate that the member has brought forward this resolution. I think poverty is a significant issue in our province. There's no denying that. And many members on all sides of the House take seriously this issue and the need to take steps as government to address it and to work together with the communities and with our community partners to help alleviate some of the struggles that members face.

I know, for myself, I grew up poor. I grew up just across the street from the Transcona yards on Pandora Avenue. I was the sixth of six kids. We lived in a small house, we had one bathroom to share with all eight of us, and we did what we could. There wasn't a lot of money to go around; I certainly had to

pay for my entire university education myself, and I was happy to be able to do so and to have the opportunities—the employment opportunities that I needed to allow me to do that.

I think, also, the member herself—when she brought forward this resolution and she spoke to it, she talked about interactions with the child and family services system—the kids in care and how bad is also often co-complicit with some of the poverty issues that we're experiencing not just here in Winnipeg, but throughout the province and northern Manitoba, as well. And so I'm very proud—I know some of us have been in the House all morning, so we may not have even noticed, but I've been keeping an eye on Twitter and on the news, and I can tell you I'm very proud to relay to the members of this House that our government just this morning announced a major plan to end the crisis in our child-welfare system, to create better outcomes for children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Premier (Mr. Pallister) was at that announcement, the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) was there, and the Premier himself said that we know we can do better for our children,

and we must do better for our children. Also on the file of poverty.

And I think there's a lot of promise in what I see here. What we've seen is a legacy of lip service on the part of the NDP, of inaction or of ineffective action. And you can measure that—outcomes by their results. Just simply look at the results of the number of children in care. The number of children in care doubled over the past decade. There's thousands of children now who are in foster care that weren't there before the NDP came in and—or, were running the system, rather.

And I think that's shameful, that we need to—we obviously need to protect these children. We need to provide a safe place for them, but—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) will have six minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 12, 2017

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